ECONOMIC IMPACT

A Cornerstone of the Community

Enhancing Lives and Boosting the Local Economy of Chicago



September 2025

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATION

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

Foreword

Every dollar invested in Chicago Public Library returns three dollars to the people of our city.

That's not just a headline—it's a measure of impact. This report confirms what so many Chicagoans already understand: our libraries are not only critical institutions of learning and equity—they are among the city's smartest and most effective investments.

In 2024, CPL generated an estimated $440 million in economic impact, reaching more than 5 million visitors across all 77 neighborhoods. The numbers speak for themselves:

- Over 11 million books and materials checked out
- Nearly 1 million hours logged on library computers
- More than 500,000 attendees at free public programs—ranging from Story Time and job coaching to writing workshops and citizenship classes
- 4 million+ Wi-Fi sessions delivered
- 10,000 Narcan kits distributed to prevent overdose and save lives
- Critical legal, housing, and health services provided through CPL Cares

Public funding makes it possible. Donor support takes it further.

Thanks to the Chicago Public Library Foundation and its donors, more than 14,000 donor-funded programs each year build on City investment—expanding access, deepening impact, and fueling innovation. From Summer at CPL, which keeps youth reading, to one-on-one tutoring, essential digital literacy support, and nationally recognized YOUmedia youth spaces, donor-powered programs ensure that public investment reaches further—delivering greater opportunity for all Chicagoans.

Each of our 81 branch libraries contributed an average of over $5.4 million to their local communities. That's impact at the neighborhood level—where it matters most.

This report calculates how those services translate into economic return and community value. It documents how public dollars flow into neighborhoods through local jobs and vendor contracts. It estimates the replacement cost of resources like tutoring, workspace, broadband, and digital tools that CPL provides for free—every single day.

These numbers reflect a deeper truth: CPL is a place where lives change.

The result is clear: libraries are not a luxury. They are critical civic infrastructure. They expand opportunity. They promote public health. They support workforce readiness. And they stabilize communities.

From a child's first library card to a senior's first technology lesson, libraries are where Chicagoans come to thrive and move forward. This is where possibility begins.

And private support helps us go even further.

The Chicago Public Library Foundation plays a vital role in amplifying the Library's impact on the community, contributing to social and educational outcomes that extend far beyond what can be captured in a single number. Through its generous support, the Foundation enables programs that foster lifelong learning, creativity, and connection for Chicagoans of all ages.

"As a youth without internet or a computer, the library on 106th was my lifeline. CPL nurtured my love of reading and never let me down."

— Maria, CPL Patron, South Side of Chicago

In addition to public funding, the Foundation donates approximately $6.5M annually to support 36 programs that enrich the lives of residents citywide. These donor-powered initiatives include:

- 14,200+ programs offered for all age groups in 2024, a 14% increase from 2023
- 30,000+ individualized tutoring sessions provided during the 2023-24 school year
- 100,000+ children and family members served in the summer reading program
- 200,000+ young children and families supported through early learning programs in 2024
- 39,000 visits to YOUmedia's 30 teen-only library spaces, where teens explore artistic interests, experiment with technology, and build confidence

While the majority of this analysis focuses on the funding provided through the Mayor's Budget, the Foundation's contributions are essential to the Library's ability to deliver transformative social and educational benefits to the community—benefits that cannot be fully quantified but are deeply felt by the people of Chicago.

The Chicago Public Library Foundation is proud to have commissioned this comprehensive study, which quantifies the extraordinary value that Chicago Public Library delivers to our city and its residents. This economic impact study affirms what we have long known: that when we invest in our Library, we invest in the social and economic vitality of Chicago itself.

The Library Foundation believes that Chicago Public Library is an unparalleled hub of learning for every Chicagoan to learn, grow, and connect. We are proud to be the Library's fundraising partner in this important work. Through individual and institutional donations, we help supercharge the Library's reach and impact. These contributions support programs that equip students to succeed in school, help Chicagoans enter and advance in the workforce, expand access to art, music, and creative opportunities, and connect people with one another and their communities.

As Chicago Public Library continues to be the engine of lifelong learning in Chicago, the Library Foundation is at the ready to invest in our 81 branches, in our communities, and in our city.

We invite you to explore this report—and to see Chicago Public Library not only as a trusted institution of learning, but as a force for growth, stability, and connection across every neighborhood we serve.



Chris Brown
Commissioner
Chicago Public Library



Brenda Langstraat Bui
President & CEO
Chicago Public Library Foundation

We would like to thank McKinsey & Company for providing data and analysis that supported our conclusions and recommendations in this report.

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Introduction

Chicago Public Library (CPL) is the public library system that serves all 77 community areas throughout the City of Chicago. CPL operates 81 distinct branches, including 3 large regional hubs and its flagship downtown location, Harold Washington Library Center. Each branch provides a vast array of services, programs, access to technology, and both physical and digital collections, all of which are available at no cost to residents of Chicago. The Library remains a trusted safe haven and, at times, a critical refuge for the local community. It functions as a vital hub, offering essential services, resources, and support to individuals of all ages and backgrounds across the City. As just one example, the Library is a critical resource for the ~15% of Chicago citizens living without internet access at home and another 8% without daily access to connected devices in their household[1]. The figures below provide a glimpse of CPL's breadth of services:

[1]Chicago Digital Equity Plan, January 2023

>11,000,000

books and other materials checked out or renewed annually that support the literacy of Chicago residents

>5,500,000

total annual visitors, who accessed a variety of services, programs, and events, in addition to checking out books and periodicals

>4,000,000

annual connections to library Wi-Fi, providing users at every Chicago neighborhood library with access to high-speed broadband internet service

>900,000

hours of computer usage annually, supporting Chicago residents' access to internet-connected computers at library branches across the city

>500,000

yearly program attendees, accessing 19 different types of free programs, including author events, Story Time for young readers, career workshops, and more

>29,000

linear feet of archived periodicals, photos and more supporting the research and preservation of Chicago neighborhoods' rich history

>10,000

Narcan kits distributed to the local community in partnership with the Chicago Department of Public Health

~50%

of Chicago's early voting locations, with 23 branches to help provide Chicagoans with access to the election process

Additionally, the Library connects residents to critical resources, including legal aid and social services, and coordinates food distribution in partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository through the CPL Cares initiative. The 81 Club grants all Chicago Public School students a library card, eliminating barriers to access such as the need for a parent's signature to obtain a library card. Each library branch across Chicago's 77 neighborhoods provides adults and children a safe place to learn, find entertainment and cultural enrichment, and build their communities.

To better serve Chicago and its communities, the Chicago Public Library Foundation conducted research to measure the community impact of CPL. While this report acknowledges there are different types of impact, including social and educational, the following analysis focuses on economic impact.

This report was developed through a rigorous process that included interviews with key stakeholders, detailed analysis of internal data, and expert input from economists. **Figures shown throughout the report are estimates based on 2024 available data, which was found to be comparable to prior years, and are rounded to the nearest $5M.**

Executive Summary

Chicago Public Library creates an estimated $440M annually in total economic impact for the City of Chicago.[2] With a total annual budget of $145M, this means that for every $1 invested in CPL, the community receives $3 in benefits.

[2]Based on 2024 data



This total economic impact figure is the summation of three distinct categories: direct spending, indirect tangible benefits, and direct tangible benefits.

1. **Direct spending** represents the total financial investment from the City to fund the library system across all its branches and operations. Library funds that are spent locally have a direct economic impact on the City of Chicago. Local spending includes personnel and operations spend, while non-local spending includes spend on materials and capital projects.[3] Only local spending (spending that could be assumed to occur within the City of Chicago) was taken into consideration, totaling approximately

$120M in impact.

2. **Indirect tangible benefits** reflect the broader economic ripple effects created by the Library's direct spending. For example, when a librarian spends a portion of their wages locally, those funds are re-spent within the local economy, generating additional value for businesses and households. Applying this multiplier effect created an additional

$155M in impact.

3. **Direct tangible benefits** encompass the extensive array of services and resources the Library provides to the community, including access to its collections of books and other media, programs and events, reference services, computer and internet access, and work and study spaces. This category evaluates the services provided by comparing them to market rates for the same services offered privately. These offerings totaled approximately

$165M in impact.

[3]CPL employees are required to reside in Chicago; non-local spending may be unavoidable, given, for example, the location of publishers of books and other media

This analysis was also applied at the branch level. Five distinct branch "archetypes" emerged across the CPL branch network. While each neighborhood branch is unique, with librarians tailoring services to meet the specific needs of their communities, five branch archetypes were identified citywide:

- **Median Branches:** Branches providing relatively balanced benefit across all services
- **Reader's Retreats:** Branches with exceptionally high levels of circulation
- **Program Paradises:** Branches generating notable economic impact through robust programming
- **Computer Corners:** Branches with notable economic impact driven by computer usage
- **Common Centers:** Branches with high economic impact from shared spaces and Wi-Fi access

Although the focus of this document is to quantify the economic impact of CPL on the city, it is important to acknowledge that the library system's full value cannot be captured through financial analysis included in this report. For example, the long-term effect of possessing a library card on a child's future economic productivity cannot be easily measured. The same is true of a new immigrant attending a library branch's English-language-learning courses, or an unhoused person's use of job search services. These benefits and contributions are inextricably woven into the fabric and economy of the community it serves.

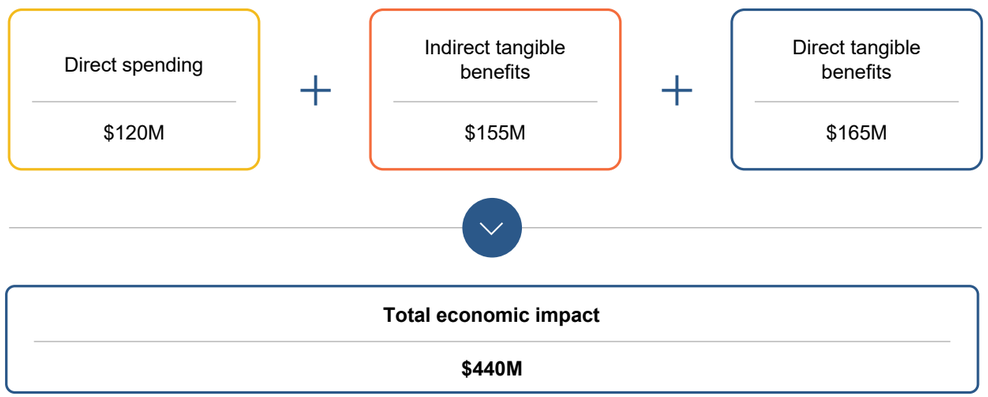
The Chicago Public Library Foundation also plays a vital role in amplifying the Library's impact on the community, contributing to social and educational outcomes that extend far beyond what can be captured in a set of numbers. Through its generous support, the Foundation enables programs that foster lifelong learning, creativity, and connection for Chicagoans of all ages.

In addition to public funding, the Foundation donates approximately $6.5M annually to support 36 programs that enrich the lives of residents citywide. These donor-powered initiatives include:

- 14,200+ programs offered for all age groups in 2024, a 14% increase from 2023
- 30,000+ individualized tutoring sessions provided during the 2023-24 school year
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- 200,000+ young children and families supported through early learning programs in 2024
- 39,000 visits to YOUmedia's 30 teen-only library spaces, where teens explore artistic interests, experiment with technology, and build confidence

The Foundation's contributions are essential to the Library's ability to deliver transformative social and educational benefits to the community—benefits that cannot be fully quantified but are deeply felt by the people of Chicago.

Total Economic Impact



Economic Impact Analysis

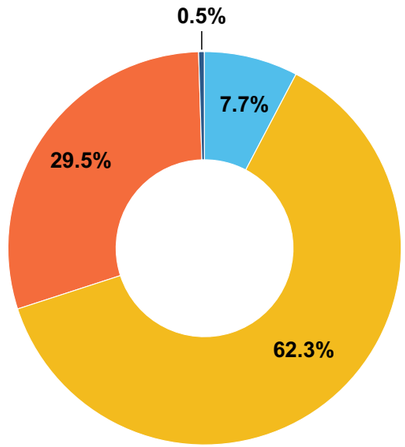
1. Direct Spending Impact

1.1. Overview

Direct spending refers to the funding allocated to CPL through the Mayor's budget.[4] The funding enables the Library to pay employee wages, all of whom live in Chicago, and to deliver its wide range of services, including the purchase of books, furniture, and security in its branches. Most of these funds are spent directly in Chicago, which stimulates the local economy, creating an immediate impact. Some portion of the budget is spent outside of Chicago, such as software licenses from companies based outside the city or publishers based outside of Chicago, which are excluded from the calculation of the direct spending impact.

Direct spending[5] impact

FY24 Direct Spend Baseline



Personnel spend	$90,222,351
Operational spend	$42,743,866
Capital spend	$680,972
Material spend	$11,175,811
Total spend	**$144,823,000**

[4]References 2024 Revised Mayor's Budget: 0346 Library Fund
[5]Excludes 3rd-party professional and technical services, software licensing and data circuits



1.2. Methodology & Findings

To estimate how CPL's funding directly impacts Chicago, the analysis examined the 2024 fiscal year (FY24) appropriations and categorized spending into four main areas: personnel, operations, capital, and materials. Personnel spending represents the largest portion of the budget and primarily covers employee wages. Operational spending includes items necessary for the Library's day-to-day activities, such as utilities and maintenance. Capital spending is allocated toward improving physical branches with fixtures and furniture, while material spending is largely dedicated to the purchasing of books. In total, $90M (62%) was allocated to personnel spending, $40M (30%) was allocated to operational spending, $10M (8%) was allocated to material spending, and $1M (<1%) was allocated to capital spending.[6]

Employees of CPL live in Chicago, so 100% of the $90M in personnel spending, which includes wages and benefits, is estimated to contribute directly to the local economy through the Library's own employees. In total, personnel spending contributed $90M in direct spending impact.

Operational spending required a more granular review. Most expenditures, including security and building maintenance, remain local. However, roughly a quarter of operational spending goes to vendors outside of Chicago, such as for software licensing or third-party professional services. Hence, these categories were excluded. **In total, operational spending contributed an estimated $30M in direct spending impact to the Chicago area .**[7]

This analysis excluded all expenditures tied to material and capital spending. While it is fair to assume that some books may be purchased from local Chicago publishers, this analysis is unable to separate how much of the material and capital budgets are spent locally versus outside of the City. To err on the conservative side, all material and capital spending is assumed to be spent outside of Chicago. In total, material and capital spending were not calculated in the direct spending impact.

Total direct spending impact in 2024 is estimated to be $120M through the direct investment of the Mayor's budget into the library system, library employees, and library services.

[6] All figures are rounded to nearest $5M
[7] Excludes third-party professional and technical services, software licensing, and data circuits

Direct spending (local only)

Personnel spending	+	Operational spending
$90M		$30M

Total direct spending impact

$120M



2. Indirect Tangible Benefits

2.1. Overview

The indirect tangible benefit is the ripple effect of public investment re-spent in the local Chicago economy. For example, the Library pays the salary of a staff member, who spends some of their income on local goods and services, such as purchasing flowers from a local florist. The florist, in turn, uses that revenue to buy a cup of coffee at a neighborhood café, and so on and so forth. In other words, the real economic impact of a dollar invested in the library system does not stop at library wages but also flows into the local economy. Money invested in operational spending will have similar secondary effects. If the Library pays for security services, the investment not only pays the security personnel but also ripples to the uniform supplier who manufactures and sells the uniform to the security service.

2.2. Methodology & Findings

To estimate the total indirect tangible impact, this analysis used an input-output multiplier commonly used in economic and policy analysis to measure how economic investments cascade throughout business sectors and geographical locations[8]

For personnel spending, a **1.26 multiplier** was applied to a base of $90M in initial investment[9]. For every $1.00 invested in library personnel, this multiplier suggests an additional $1.26 is generated and re-spent within the local economy. **When this multiplier is applied to the personnel spending total, the resulting economic impact is estimated at $115M.**

For operational spending, a **1.30 multiplier** was applied to a base of $30M in initial investment.[10] This multiplier suggests that for every $1.00 invested in library operations, $1.30 is generated and re-spent within the local economy. **Applying this multiplier to the operational spending total results in an estimated economic impact of $40M.**

The total indirect tangible benefit in 2024 is estimated to be $155M.

Indirect tangible benefits

Indirect personnel spending	+	Indirect operational spending
$115M		$40M

Total indirect tangible benefits

$155M

[8]This analysis used Leontief input-output multipliers. These are frequently updated in publicly available input-output tables published by organizations such as the Bureau of Economic Development or EMSI MR-SAM (Lightcast). This analysis leveraged 2024 EMSI MR-SAM output multipliers within the library and archive sector for the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin region
[9]EMSI MR-SAM Induced Sales multiplier, Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, Library and Archives, 2024
[10]EMSI MR-SAM Type II multiplier, which includes direct, indirect, and induced multipliers, Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, Library and Archives, 2024

3. Direct Tangible Benefits

3.1. Overview

The Chicago Public Library delivers significant value to the City of Chicago and its residents through the services it provides. These include the Library's expansive material circulation, thousands of free programs and events, research databases, accessible technology resources, and safe, welcoming spaces across the city.

Direct tangible benefits are divided into five categories:

A. **Collection Use:** The value of physical and digital materials circulated by the Library
B. **Programs and Events:** The value generated by library programs such as YOUmedia, which teaches teens valuable skills in digital media; Library events such as CPL's annual Poetry Fest; and library sponsored passes such as the Museum Pass, which allows Chicago residents to visit popular attractions for free
C. **Database and Research Use:** The value of free access to research databases and software
D. **Technology Access:** The value of free high-speed Wi-Fi and thousands of computers provided to patrons onsite
E. **Meeting and Study Space Use:** The value of free meeting and study room rentals, as well as the use of common Library spaces as community hubs

3.2. Methodology & Findings

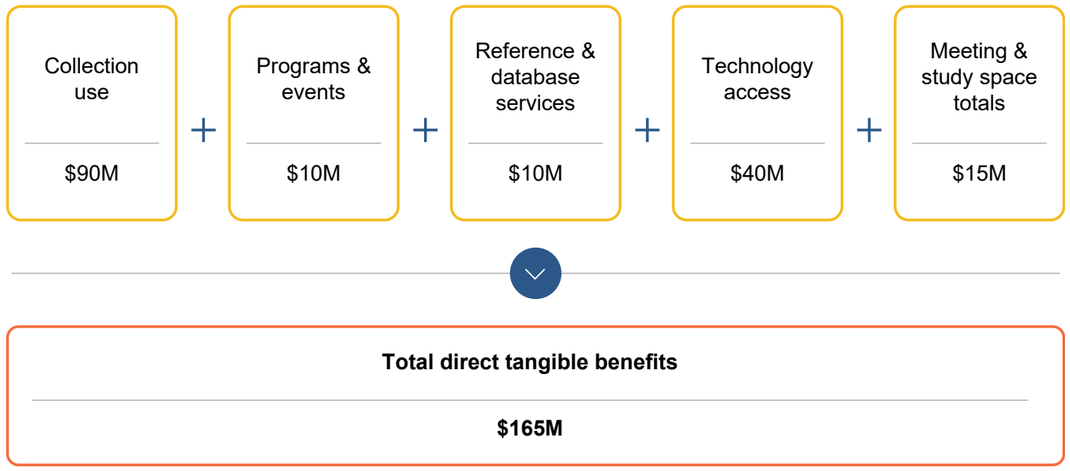
Direct tangible benefits are calculated by benchmarking library services against comparable private market alternatives. Specifically, the analysis considers the cost of replacing these services if they were not provided by the library system. For example, if someone could not borrow a book from the library, what would it cost to rent the same book? This approach matches similar analyses conducted by other library systems seeking to calculate the direct tangible benefits of library offerings[11]. It is important to note that this estimate is conservative, as it excludes certain benefits, such as the personalized assistance provided by librarians, and the broader societal impact of encouraging literacy and learning. Additionally, the analysis assumes that private market alternatives are equally accessible and available, which is often not the case.

The total direct tangible benefit is estimated to be $165M through the services CPL provides to Chicago including collection use ($90M), programs and events ($10M), database and research use ($10M), technology access ($40M), and meeting and study space use ($15M)[12].

[11]So Much More: The Economic Impact of the Toronto Public Library on the City of Toronto, The Martin Prosperity Institute, 2014; Santa Clara County Library District 2013 Return on Investment Report, Santa Clara County Library District, 2013
[12]Summation discrepancies are due to rounding errors, detailed values in appendix



Direct tangible benefits



Detailed methodologies and findings for the total direct tangible benefits follow:

3.3. Collection Use

CPL's physical and digital materials collection represent a cornerstone of its services to Chicago. **While the collection is available free of charge to Chicago residents, the repeated use of this collection is valued at an estimated $90M or 55% of all direct tangible benefits.** This value is derived from four key categories:

- **Material Use:** The value of physical materials loaned, including books, DVDs, and other media
- **Material Delivery:** The value of delivering physical materials between library locations to meet member needs
- **Media Use:** The value of digital media accessed through platforms like Libby, Hoopla, and Flipster
- **Archive Use:** The value of free access to public-facing archival services

3.3.1. Material Use

Material use is the most valuable direct service provided by CPL, with an estimated value of $45M. This category includes the loaning of physical materials such as books, DVDs, periodicals, and CDs.

In 2024, approximately 11M items were checked out and renewed across CPL's 81 branches. Of these, 4M were initial checkouts, and 7M were renewals, indicating that, on average, each title was renewed just under two times for every initial checkout. To estimate the value of these materials, titles were segmented by age group and genre, and a conservative price tag was assigned to each category based on external benchmarks. (See appendix 5.1) The price was then multiplied by the combined checkouts and renewals to calculate the material use impact.

To account for the fact that materials are loaned rather than owned, a borrowing discount was applied. This discount reflects the reduced value of having temporary access compared to full ownership. A methodology was developed to calculate this discount, balancing the need to reflect the value patrons derive from library materials while also avoiding overestimation.



Specifically, four distinct approaches were used to estimate how cardholders might value a book temporarily borrowed from a CPL branch:

- **The Benchmark:** Prior library analyses assumed that a loaned book is worth 60% of the full market value, which represents a midpoint between full purchase price (100%) and a deeply discounted rental (20%). This approach, however, lacks a clear private market proxy. Furthermore, this approach treats renewals as having the same value as initial checkouts, which may overstate the value of materials renewed multiple times. **The total impact of this approach resulted in $140M.**
- **The Content Enthusiast:** This approach assumes that cardholders value materials solely for their content, such as the words in a book or the video in a DVD, and not for ownership. Under this model, the first checkout is valued at 100% of the market price, and renewals yield no additional value. While this approach may reflect the behavior of some patrons, it does not account for those who value the ownership experience, even temporarily, or for the continued use of materials during renewals. **The total impact of this approach resulted in $60M.**
- **The Renter:** This approach compares library loans to media rentals, such as movies or TV shows rented on Amazon. Based on market research, rentals are typically valued at 30%–50% of the full market price. This analysis conservatively assumes that each three-week checkout is worth 30% of the market value. However, this approach does not account for excessive renewals, as a single title could theoretically be renewed up to 15 times, leading to an inflated valuation of 450% of the market price for one item. **The total impact of this approach resulted in $60M.**
- **The Borrower:** To address the limitations of the previous approaches, this model values initial checkouts at 30% of the market price and applies a lower value to renewals. This limits the potential to overstate the value of excessive renewals while still reflecting the continued utility of items during renewals. For example, if a book is renewed twice, the total value would be less than 90% of the market price, as each subsequent renewal is discounted further. **The total impact of this approach resulted in $45M.**

The Borrower was selected as the most conservative approach compared to the three other approaches. This approach balances the need to reflect the value users receive from library materials with the importance of avoiding overestimation. **Using this approach, the estimated value of material use is $45M.**



3.3.2. Material Delivery
The value of material delivery is estimated at $20M. The Chicago Public Library system operates a fleet of delivery vehicles to transport materials across the City, ensuring that patrons can access materials at their preferred locations. The market value of delivery was estimated using the USPS intracity delivery rate of approximately $4.60 per delivery.

3.3.3. Media Use
The value of media use, including e-books and audiobooks accessed through platforms such as Libby, Hoopla, and Flipster, is estimated at $20M. In 2024, approximately 4.4M digital titles were downloaded. To calculate this value, the total annual media circulation was combined with the estimated market value of digital media and a borrowing discount. E-books were valued at approximately $10 per copy, audiobooks at approximately $25 per copy, and other media types at approximately $18 per copy. (See appendix 5.2.)

3.3.4. Archive Use
The value of archive use is estimated at <$1M. CPL's archives, located at Sulzer Regional, Woodson Regional, and Harold Washington Special Collections, house millions of historical records. The direct benefit was calculated based on the total number of public access sessions and inquiries in 2024, using subscription services such as Ancestry.com as a proxy for market value. While the economic figure isn't substantial, the archives provide additional educational and social benefits. While the economic figure isn't substantial, the archives provide additional educational and social benefits.

3.4. Programs and Events

CPL generates significant value through its programs and events, which are offered through internal resources, partnerships with third-party organizations, and the Chicago Public Library Foundation. **The estimated value of these programs is $10M or 5% of all direct tangible benefits.**

This value is derived from two key categories:

- **Museum Pass Use:** The value of free passes provided for Chicago's most popular museums and attractions
- **Programs & Events:** The value generated by the free events programmed by library branches

3.4.1. Museum Pass Use
The value of museum pass use is estimated at <$1M. This program provides free admission to some of Chicago's most popular museums and attractions, including the Museum of Science and Industry, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Brookfield Zoo, and the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum. CPL collaborates with these organizations to offer an online pass reservation system, accessible to all cardholders at no cost. Public market prices for admission to these attractions were used to calculate the direct benefits generated by this initiative. (See appendix 5.3.) In 2024, more than 30,000 library members took advantage of the museum pass.

3.4.2. Programs and Events
The value of library programs and events is estimated at $10M. In 2024, CPL hosted over 300,000 programs and events across its 81 branches. These offerings spanned 20 distinct categories, including Story Time for young readers, writers' festivals for local communities, and mental health services for those in need; all provided free of charge.

The benefit of these programs and events was calculated by analyzing the number of attendees, the average duration of events, and the hourly market value of comparable offerings. In total, library events attracted over 500,000 attendees in 2024, with a weighted average event duration of 1.7 hours. Each event type was assigned a comparable hourly market value to estimate the total benefit. (See appendix 5.4.) Certain events, such as outreach programs, job fairs, and book sales, were excluded from the calculation, as these are typically free to attend in the private market.

3.5. Reference and Database Use

Reference and database use represent a key benefit provided by the Chicago Public Library through free access to research databases, which support both personal and academic research across the City. **The estimated value of reference and database use is $10M or 5% of all direct tangible benefits.**

Some of the most widely utilized reference services include databases such as ProQuest, Brainfuse tutoring, EBSCO, and JSTOR. In 2024, CPL recorded over 600,000 uses of these online services. The total benefit was calculated by multiplying the total number of uses by the comparable retail value of these digital services. (See appendix 5.5.)





3.6 Technology Access

CPL provides essential technology services, including free Wi-Fi, computer access, and printing. **The estimated value of these services is $40M, accounting for approximately 25% of all direct tangible benefits.**

This value is derived from three key categories:

- **Wi-Fi Usage:** The value of free, high-speed broadband provided in all 81 branches of the library system
- **Computer Access:** The value of free use of computers with internet access and office software (e.g., Word, PowerPoint, Excel)
- **Printer Usage:** The value of access to high-quality printing services available at all library branches

3.6.1. Wi-Fi Usage
The value of Wi-Fi usage is estimated to be $15M. In 2024, there were over 4M Wi-Fi sessions across all 81 branches of the library system. These sessions connected patrons to fast broadband, supporting activities such as applying to jobs, academic learning, and filing disability claims.

The benefit of this service was calculated by benchmarking against the private market replacement cost of Wi-Fi access typically available in cafés or restaurants, where patrons are assumed to spend approximately $3 to access similar services.

3.6.2. Computer Usage
The value of library computer usage is estimated to be $25M. In 2024, patrons logged over 900,000 hours on the computers available at library branches. These computers supported Chicago residents in carrying carrying out basic to complex digital tasks. The benefit of computer usage was calculated based on the total hours logged and the hourly market value of a personal computer. FedEx Office computers served as a replacement proxy, which cost approximately $0.45 per minute or $27 per hour.

3.6.3. Printer Usage
The value of library printer usage is estimated to be <$1M. In 2024, over 4.1M pages were printed at library branches. To calculate this value, a conservative retail price was used for printing services, based on similar offerings at other libraries and universities.

3.7 Meeting and Study Space Usage

CPL's physical spaces serve as vital community hubs, offering free meeting and study spaces. The estimated value of these spaces is $15M, accounting for 10% of all direct tangible benefits.

This value is derived from two key categories:

- Meeting & Event Space: The value of private meeting and study spaces available for free rental
- Common Space Usage: The value of shared common areas, open to all Chicago residents

3.7.1. Meeting and Event Space
The value of CPL's meeting and event spaces is estimated at <$5M. In 2024, over 170,000 hours of private meeting and event space were booked across library branches. These spaces were utilized for a variety of purposes, including small group study sessions and large community meetings with local leaders.

The benefit of meeting and event space usage was calculated by considering the total hours booked and the market value of a private rental room in Chicago. WeWork private workspaces were used as a replacement proxy, with a conservative estimated value of approximately $10 per hour.

3.7.2. Common Space Usage
The value of CPL's common space usage is estimated at $10M. Libraries function as community centers, providing open, welcoming spaces for patrons to learn, study, relax, and connect.

To calculate the value of these spaces, a qualitative assessment of library users was conducted to define common "personas" of library-goers and their typical use of the space. Senior library staff identified four primary personas, and the analysis estimated the average time spent in the library and the resources typically utilized.



Common space assumptions I Personas

Library user 'persona'	Adult 'regulars'	Young learners & caregivers	School-aged kids	In-and-out reader
Description of assumed common area use	Adult and senior users are common users of the same branch; these users can spend 3+ hours in a branch primarily using technology resources but also engaging with peers and library staff	Pre-school aged children that come to branches with a caregiver for programs like Story Time, but also stay for 30-60 min to check out books and play with other children	School-aged kids that come after school or over the summer for programming and safe space; these users can spend 30-120 min interfacing with friends and staff depending on the season and library hours	Readers of all ages who come to the library with a dedicated purpose of picking up a book on hold or checkout material they have in mind; these users spend little time in the space and heavily leverage digital offerings
Time spent using common space per visit	**~60 min**	**~30 min**	**~60 min**	**~5 min**
Estimated share of total users	**~40%**	**~35%**	**~10%**	**~10%**
Estimated 2024 visitors	**~2 million**	**~2 million**	**~800,000**	**~600,000**

13, 14

These personas represent a reasonable assumption across all 81 branches, though usage patterns may vary significantly by location. Each library branch is situated in a unique neighborhood with distinct population demographics, and the success of the CPL system lies in its ability to localize resources and offerings to meet the specific needs of its community.

The benefit of common space usage was calculated by multiplying three key variables for each persona: the total number of visitors, the average number of hours spent in the common space, and the market value of the space. To avoid double counting, the 500,000 visitors who attended programs and events at the Library were excluded from this calculation.

- For adult "regulars," a market value equivalent to the cost of sitting in a café (approximately $3 per hour) was assigned
- For young learners and school-aged children, a market value equivalent to unattended childcare in Chicago (approximately $4 per hour) was applied
- For in-and-out readers, no market value was assigned, as these users typically visit a branch briefly to pick up reserved materials

Based on this methodology, the total benefit of common space usage is estimated at $10M.

[13] Data was qualitatively collected through interviews with library staff
[14] 5% of visitors were excluded from analysis to account for any outlier personas not considered in the analysis

Branch Level Impact

Our 81 branch libraries contribute an average of $5.4 million.

As our Central Library, HWLC contributes $65.4 million a year in economic impact to the City of Chicago. Our three regional libraries contribute an average of $16.0 million in economic impact, and our 77 neighborhood branches contribute an average of $4.2million to their local communities.

Methodology

The total economic impact of $440M was also attributed across each of the 81 branches. For some categories, raw data was not available at the branch level (e.g., Libby usage which is not tracked by branch), in which case a proxy was used to distribute total values to each branch (e.g., branch circulation as a proxy for Libby usage).

To better understand each branch's relative impact within each community, branches were organized into archetypes to highlight which services are most prevalent.

Preliminary findings

Broadly speaking, branches with the highest number of employees typically drove the largest impact due to the direct personnel spend (e.g., wages paid to library staff). For example, Harold Washington Library Center, the flagship library for the CPL system and largest in terms of number of employees, generated approximately $65M in branch impact. Chicago's regional libraries with the next highest employee counts, Sulzer Regional, Woodson Regional, and Legler Regional, had the second ($20M), third ($15M), and fourth ($10M) highest contributions to total economic impact.

Deeper analysis focused only on the $165M impact from the services each branch provides, excluding direct spending and indirect tangible benefits. All branches deliver extensive benefits to their respective neighborhoods, but each branch also delivers economic benefits differently. Some branches deliver more economic benefit through book checkouts and digital downloads, whereas other branches might deliver economic benefit through access to library computers. This analysis identified five 'archetypes' of library branches and how they deliver economic benefit to their communities:

- **Median library:** These branches are the most common, which typically derive around 50% of their total direct tangible benefits from their circulation including material use, material delivery and media usage. The remaining 50% of benefits typically stems from equal parts visitors (Wi-Fi usage and common area usage), program attendance, and computer usage. **Thirty-four branches were considered median libraries**; some representative examples include Edgewater, Uptown, Beverly, and West Town
- **Reader's retreat:** Compared to their peers, there is a group of branches that provides a significantly higher proportion of direct tangible benefits from circulation. Libraries with more than 60%[15] of their direct tangible benefits from circulation were considered reader's retreats, meaning more than 60% of these libraries' economic impact on their respective neighborhood is through checked out books, downloaded digital titles, reserved museum passes and utilized database services. **Thirteen branches were considered reader's retreats,** including Logan Square, Lincoln Park, Merlo, and Austin-Irving

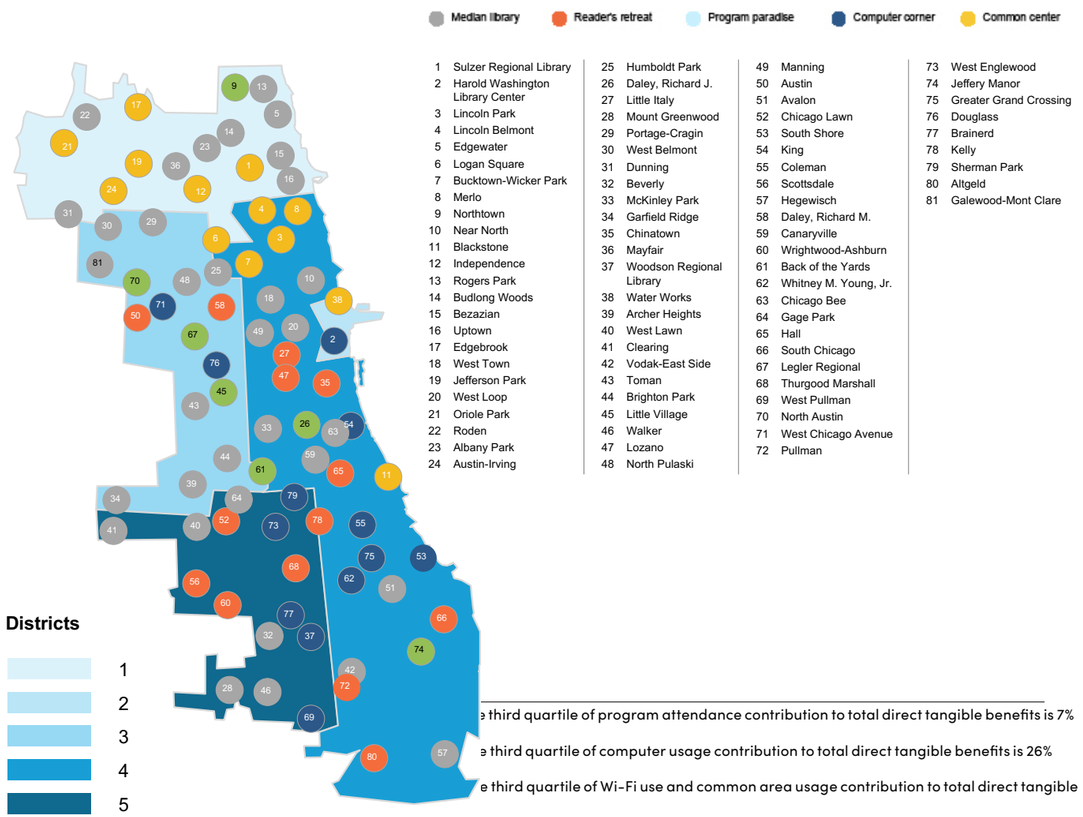
[15] 60% cutoff was calculated using a rounded quartile methodology. The third quartile of circulation contribution to total direct tangible benefits is 7% and was rounded up to 60

– **Program paradise:** These branches provide a significantly higher relative proportion of their direct tangible benefits from programs and events. Libraries with more than 10%[16] of their direct tangible benefits from program attendance were classified as program paradises. The median contribution from program attendance is approximately 5%, meaning that program paradises contribute more than double the benefit from programs relative to peers. **Seven branches were considered program paradises,** including North Austin, Legler Regional, Little Village, and Back of the Yards

– **Computer corner:** Branches providing a significantly higher relative proportion of their direct tangible benefits from computer usage were placed in this category. Libraries with more than 30% [17] of their direct tangible benefits from computer usage were classified as computer corners. While circulation is the largest contributor to direct tangible benefits for most other branches, computer corners' largest contributor is typically computer usage. **Ten (10) branches were considered computer corners**; some representative branches include Greater Grand Crossing, Woodson Regional, South Shore, and Sherman Park

– **Common center:** Some branches were found to have a significantly higher relative proportion of their direct tangible benefits derived from visitor services such as Wi-Fi usage and common area usage. Libraries with more than 20%[18] of their direct tangible benefits from visitor services were classified as common centers. In other words, more than 20% of the economic impact created by common centers is a result of the benefit they provide through their free Wi-Fi and the physical value of their space. **Seventeen branches were considered common centers;** some representative branches include Chinatown, Little Italy, Altgeld and Austin

Map of library branches by archetype

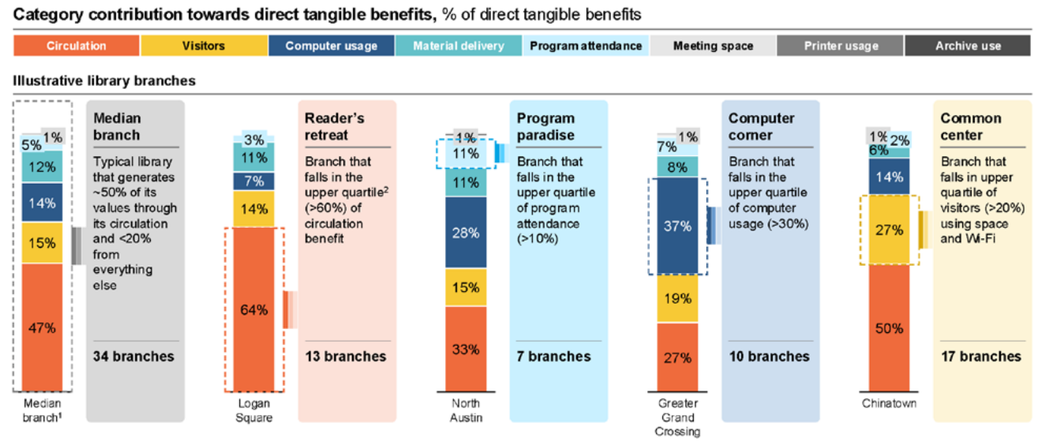


e third quartile of program attendance contribution to total direct tangible benefits is 7%

e third quartile of computer usage contribution to total direct tangible benefits is 26%

e third quartile of Wi-Fi use and common area usage contribution to total direct tangible

Five archetypes of branches



While this analysis categorized branches into archetypes, it is important to emphasize the versatility and inclusivity of the CPL system. Every branch, regardless of its archetype, provides a full range of services to meet the diverse needs of its patrons. The distribution of direct tangible benefits reflects the unique characteristics and requirements of the neighborhoods each branch serves. This archetype analysis serves as a foundation for

[19]Calculated using median value for each contributing category
[20]All quartiles are rounded to nearest 10th

future research, with the potential to explore how branches can further tailor their services to maximize their impact on local communities.

Closing

The Chicago Public Library is a foundational institution for the City of Chicago and a cornerstone within each of its 77 neighborhoods. Contributing $440M of impact to the City and its residents, CPL is an important economic contributor to these neighborhoods.

Beyond the economic impact, CPL is a pillar of the community, offering critical resources, cultural enrichment, and community bonding. Many residents have come to rely on not just the physical space, but the vast services it provides. Regardless of age, class, or mother tongue, the Library offers help to everyone: young people looking to explore their interests, adults needing job search help, children learning to read, retirees looking for help with taxes or genealogical research, community organizers in need of meeting space, and so on. The Library ensures that every visitor feels seen and heard, fostering moments of connection and care that are both vital to the City and beyond measure.



Appendix

(All figures rounded)

1. Direct spending impact analyses

	Total
1A. Operational spending	$45M
1B. Annualized capital investments	$<1M
i. Annual capital budget	$<1M
ii. Annualized CIP capital investment	not included
1C. Personnel spending	**$90M**
i. Wages and salary	$75M
ii. Employee benefits	$15M
1D. Material spending	**$10M**
Total 2024 net spending	**$145M**

Local direct spending

1F. Local direct spending effects		**Total**
i. Direct operational spending effects	Operational spending	$45M
	Share of local spending	70%
	Direct operational spending initial impact	$30M
ii. Direct capital spending effects	Annualized capital spending	$0
	Share of local spending	n/a
	Direct capital spending initial impact	$0
iii. Direct personnel spend effects	Annualized capital spending	$90M
	Share of local spending	100%
	Direct capital spending initial impact	$90M
iv. Direct material spending effects	Annualized capital spending	$0
	Share of local spending	n/a
	Direct capital spending initial impact	$0
Total direct spending initial impact		**$120M**

2. Indirect benefit analyses

		Total
2A. Operation spending indirect/ induced effects	2024 Direct operation spending	$30M
	Indirect multiplier effects	1.3
	Indirect operational spending value	$40M
2B. Capital spending indirect/ induced effects	2024 Direct capital spending	$0
	Indirect multiplier effects	n/a
	Indirect capital spending value	$0
2C. Personnel spending indirect/ induced effects	2024 Direct personnel spending	$90M
	Indirect multiplier effects	1.3
	Indirect personnel spend value	$115M
2D. Material spending indirect/ induced effects	2024 Direct material spending	$0
	Indirect multiplier effects	n/a
	Indirect material spending value	$0
Indirect tangible benefits grand total		**$155M**

3. Direct tangible benefit analyses

3A. Collection Use		Total
i. Material use	Total non-renewal circulation	3,897,074
	Non-renewal borrowing discount	30%
	Average market price	$21
	Total renewal circulation	7,136,930
	Renewal borrowing discount	15%
	Average market price	$21
	Value of material use	$45M
ii. Material delivery	Total holds fulfilled 2024	4,661,016
	Average market value of delivery	$5
	Value of delivered materials	$20M
iii. Media use	Total 2024 Media circulation	4,419,764
	Combined media market value	$16
	Assumed borrowing discount	30%
	Value of media use	$20M
iv. Archive use	Total 2024 archive sessions	3,270
	Hourly value of archive session	$60
	Total 2024 archive inquiries	2,287
	Hourly value of archive session	$25
	Total value	<$1M
3A. Collection use subtotal		**$90M**

3B. Programs & events		Total
i. Museum pass	Total museum passes distributed 2024	30,587
	Average market value of museum passes	$26
	Value of museum pass program	<$1M
ii. Programming	Total 2024 attendees	529,570
	Average hours	1.7
	Average market value per hour	$9
	Value of programming	$10M
3B. Programs & events subtotal		**$10M**

3C. Reference & database use		Total
i. Database use	Total databases uses, 2024	603,309
	Average market value per database use	$20
	Value of database use	$10M
3C. Reference & database subtotal		**$10M**

3D. Technology access		Total
i. WiFi usage	Total 2024 branch connections	4,264,724
	Average hours spent connected	1
	Average market value of connected hour	$3
	Value of WiFi availability	$15M
ii. Computer usage	Total branch hours connected 2024	908,199
	Average market value of connected hour	$27
	Full year adjustment	1.1
	Value of computer availability	$25M
iii. Printer usage	Total single-sided pages printed 2024	3,622,218
	Market value of single-sided page	$0.10
	Total double-sided pages printed 2024	543,538
	Market value of double-sided page printed	$0.19
	Value of printer availability	<$1M
3D. Technology access subtotal		**$40M**

3E. Meeting & study space		Total
i. Meeting space bookings	Total branch hours booked 2024	171,336
	Average market value of private space	$10
	Value of meeting space	<$5M
ii. Common space usage	Total visitors by branch 2024	5,053,853
	Assumed average hours spent using common space	0.7
	Assumed hourly value	$3
	Value of meeting space	$10M
3E. Meeting & study space subtotal		**$15M**

4. Total impact summary

Direct spend impact	**$120M**
Operational spending effects	$30M
Capital spending effects	n/a
Personnel spending effects	$90M
Material spending effects	

Direct tangible benefits	**$165M**
Collection use	$90M
Programs & events	$10M
Reference & database	$10M
Technology access	$40M
Meeting & study space	$15M

Indirect tangible benefits	**$155M**
Operational spending effects	$40M
Capital spending effects	n/a
Personnel spending effects	$115M
Material spending effects	n/a
Total calculated economic impact	**$440M**[1]
Total economic return	**$3 per dollar invested**

[1] Rounded to nearest $5M

5. Market price assumptions

5.1 Material Use Price Assumptions

Physical circulation type	Market price, new	Market price, used	Source	2025 Share of total distribution	2024 Assumed distribution
Adult	**$26**	**$19**	-	**52.8%**	**5,827,382**
Adult fiction	$25	$19	SLJ Average library prices, 2023	20.5%	2,257,063
Adult non-fiction	$28	$21	SLJ Average library prices, 2023	22.9%	2,530,027
Adult multi-media	$25	$19	Consumer Affairs	9.2%	1,015,622
Adult periodical	$9	$8	The New Yorker	<1.0%	24,670
Early readers	**$15**	**$11**	-	**22.5%**	**2,485,066**
Early readers fiction	$15	$11	SLJ Average library prices, 2023	18.8%	2,070,706
Early readers non-fiction	$15	$11	SLJ Average library prices, 2023	3.7%	405,933
Early readers multi-media	$25	$19	Consumer Affairs	<1.0%	8,428
Early readers periodical	$8	$6	National Geographic	0%	0
Elementary	**$15**	**$12**	-	**19.3%**	**2,127,316**
Elementary fiction **Elementary fiction**	$15	$11	SLJ Average library prices, 2023	13.3%	1,463,679
Elementary non-fiction	$15	$11	SLJ Average library prices, 2023	4.3%	477,020
Elementary multi-media	$25	$19	Consumer Affairs	1.6%	173,213
Elementary periodical	$8	$6	National Geographic	<1.0%	13,405
Teen	**$18**	**$14**	-	**5.4%**	**593,938**
Teen fiction	$18	$13	SLJ Average library prices, 2023	4.9%	536,161
Teen non-fiction	$23	$17	SLJ Average library prices, 2023	<1.0%	56,057
Teen multi-media	$25	$19	Consumer Affairs	<1.0%	1,158
Teen periodical	$8	$6	People Magazine	<1.0%	563

Physical circulation type	Market price, new	Market price, used	Source	2025 Share of total distribution	2024 Assumed distribution
Other	**$23**	**$17**	**-**	**0.0%**	**302**
Other fiction	$18	$14	assumption: weighted average	<1.0%	84
Other non-fiction	$24	$18	assumption: weighted average	<1.0%	139
Other multi-media	$25	$19	assumption: weighted average	<1.0%	79
Other periodical	$9	$6	assumption: weighted average	0%	0
Total	**$21**	**$16**		**100%**	**11,034,004**

5.2 Media use price assumptions

Type	Average Price	Source
Average market value of an ebook	$10	Kindle unlimited pricing
Average market value of an audiobook	$25	Speechify report
Average market value of media	$18	-

5.3 Museum pass price assumptions

Museum	Total 2024 Passes	Adult pass cost	Source
Art Institute of Chicago / Chicago, IL	5,550	$32	Art Institute of Chicago
Griffin Museum of Science and Industry / Chicago, IL	5,399	$26	MSI
Brookfield Zoo Chicago / Brookfield, IL	4,337	$30	Brookfield Zoo pass
Chicago Academy of Sciences Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum / Chicago, IL	4,094	$15	Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum
Field Museum / Chicago, IL	4,082	$24	Field Museum
Other	7,125	n/a	-
Total	30,587	$26	-

5.4 Program & event price assumptions

Event type	Total 2024	Average event attendees duration hours	Hourly market rate	Source
Author events	9,096	2.5	$41	Society of Authors useful observed rates
Outreach	140,455	2.2	$0	assumption: CPL Chief Analyst, Outreach is typically tables to advertise
Crafts	120,328	1.7	$4	Chicago Parks Summer Camps hourly rate
Celebrations	15,576	2.4	$10	Conservative cost of food/entertainment
Writing and poetry	3,667	2.7	$41	Society of Authors useful observed rates
Health and science	27,257	2.0	$19	Covid at-home test
Book Sales	1,690	5.4	$0	Library charging market rate
Art	33,708	1.7	$4	Chicago Parks Summer Camps hourly rate
History and genealogy	2,017	1.3	$29	ZipRecruiter hourly lecturer salary
Workshops	9,978	1.4	$20	Conservative hourly computer tutoring
Jobs and careers	1,228	2.5	$0	Job fairs are typically free
DIY	14,536	1.2	$20	assumption: Hourly computer tutoring
Lectures	1,124	1.3	$29	ZipRecruiter hourly lecturer salary
Tours	9,865	1.4	$14	Illinois Department of Human Services
Story time	102,936	0.7	$14	Illinois Department of Human Services
Business	6,296	2.5	$75	Clio conservative hourly attorney cost
Continuing education and college	13,637	1.8	$36	AFCPE Money management works

Event type	Total 2024	Average event attendees duration hours	Hourly market rate	Source
Book clubs	9,400	1.1	$0	Book clubs are typically free
Computers and technology	6,776	2.3	$20	Hourly computer tutoring
Total	529,570	1.7	$9	-

5.5 Database & research use price assumptions

Database	2024 total uses	Value per use	Source
ProQuest	450,484	$20	ProQuest
Brainfuse	4,195	$20	Cerritos
EBSCO	70,247	$20	EBSCO
JSTOR	78,383	$20	JSTOR
Total	603,309	$20	-

6.0 Branch Level Methodology

The total economic impact of $440M was also attributed across each of the 81 branches. For benefit types including material use, material delivery, archive use, program use, programs & events, computer usage, printer usage, and meeting space usage, branch level data was available to calculate economic impact. However, the remaining data sources listed below were only available at a centralized level. For these sources a proxy strategy to translate these data sources into a branch level summary was used:

- Personnel and operational spending
- Media (Libby & Hoopla) use
- Museum passes
- Database use
- Wi-Fi use
- Common area use

For personnel and operational spending, this analysis uses each branch's number of employees or full-time equivalents as a proxy. Since exact personnel and operational spending was unavailable at a branch level, this analysis assumed that the proportion of branch personnel and operational spending to total system personnel and operational spending would reflect the proportion of branch employees to total system employees. Most branch spending is on employee wages, so the number of employees serves as a strong corollary for personnel and operation spending.

For media use, museum pass use, and database use, this analysis uses each branch's relative physical circulation as a proxy. In other words, this analysis assumes each branch's proportion of physical circulation to total system-wide physical circulation reflects each branch's proportion of media use, museum pass use, and database usage to total system-wide use. Media use, museum pass use, and database usage are all library services that function similarly to the physical circulation service each branch provides and therefore acts as a strong representative to specific branch behavior.

For Wi-Fi use and common area usage this analysis uses number of branch visitors as a proxy. Since Wi-Fi usage and common area usage are directly linked to the number of visitors at each branch, this analysis assumes that each branch's proportion of visitors to total system-wide visitors reflects each branch's proportion of Wi-Fi usage and common area usage to total system-wide use.