

KEEPING AN OPEN MIND

Awareness, Use, and Perspectives of
Open Educational Resources (OER) in Public Libraries

Library Futures

LIBRARY FUTURES



Authors

Tova Gaster and Michelle Reed

Copyright 2024 by Library Futures

“Keeping an Open Mind: Awareness, Use, and Perspectives of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Public Libraries” is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Citation

Gaster, T., & Reed, M. (2024). Keeping an open mind: Awareness, use, and perspectives of open educational resources (OER) in public libraries. *Library Futures*. <https://www.libraryfutures.net/oer>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Key Findings	2
Introduction	3
Results	4
I. Awareness	4
II. Use	7
III. Creation	10
IV. Perceptions	11
V. Barriers	14
VI. Interest	15
Next Steps	16
Methods	17
References	19
About	21



New to Open Educational Resources?

Learn more about getting started in our OER 101 call-outs throughout the report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While open educational resources (OER) are a growing field in academic libraries, there has been little research about the state of OER in public libraries.

OER could be relevant to public libraries for several reasons. First, public libraries provide both in-house educational services and resources for patrons who are educators to bring to their teaching practice. Second, electronic collections, including those for educational purposes, comprise a growing proportion of public libraries' budgets, making open alternatives useful. Finally, the access and interactivity that OER provide

align with popular conceptions of public libraries' mission to provide accessible education and information. No research as far as we know has addressed public librarians' use, awareness, and perceptions of OER. This first-of-its-kind exploratory study begins to fill that gap. The report presents preliminary findings about OER in public libraries and suggests areas for future research and professional development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent are public librarians aware of OER?
- To what extent do public libraries use OER?
- To what extent (if any) do public libraries use the legal permissions facilitated by OER?
- How do public librarians perceive the quality of OER?

KEY FINDINGS

I. Awareness

Respondent awareness of OER is moderate, with 77% of respondents reporting at least some awareness of OER.

- Librarians at libraries that serve larger populations expressed more OER awareness.
- Librarians expressed more awareness of open license terms than of OER itself.

II. Adoption

Adoption of OER in public libraries is low, with only 16% of respondents stating that their library used OER.

- Public librarians use OER for multiple educational roles, including connecting patrons to existing curricula and references, supporting educators in library communities, and providing in-house educational programming.
- Respondents associate OER with traditional values of public librarianship, including information access, equity, and educational support.

III. Creation

18% of respondents have applied a Creative Commons license to their own work, with multiple respondents attributing their use and creation of open content to the importance of accessible education in public libraries.

IV. Perceptions

Librarian respondents who use OER are generally satisfied with them as valuable additions to the library's collections.

V. Barriers

Awareness and adequate professional support were the two greatest barriers to OER use.

VI. Interest

Respondents' interest in OER was extremely high, representing a rich area for further education, development, and research.

97% | **WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

INTRODUCTION

With the growing role of digital content both in education and in library collections, making educational materials accessible is both a challenge and an opportunity. Open educational resources (OER) are teaching and learning tools, including curricula and textbooks, that can be shared and modified. Rather than standard copyright, OER are available under open licenses (such as Creative Commons) that make them free for anyone to use, share, and revise. OER have grown in popularity as a tool to increase college affordability as the costs of education, from college tuition to textbook prices, have skyrocketed (Walsh, 2020; Bueno-de-la-Fuente et al., 2012). While much of the OER conversation focuses on higher education, public librarians also fill important roles as providers of both formal and informal learning experiences for people of varying ages. Public libraries provide important educational opportunities to their community and can consequently benefit from OER, particularly in “financially and infrastructurally low-resourced territories” (Salubi & Majavu, 2023). For example, public libraries host coding classes using open-source software, music jams with remixable songbooks, and children’s after-school programming using open-access lesson plans that librarians can customize to meet the needs of their patrons.

Despite these examples, OER for public libraries are underused and underexposed. Bay View Analytics has conducted annual surveys on OER in higher education since 2009 and has “tracked a considerable shift in higher education from the traditional print textbook towards digital materials,” per its 2023 publication (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Seaman & Seaman, 2023). While similar shifts from print toward digital are occurring in public libraries, and despite the growing role public libraries play in community education (Garmer, 2016), less is understood about libraries’ roles in providing accessible and affordable educational resources.

Maximizing the benefits of OER requires first understanding how librarians currently use and conceptualize OER, as well as what holds back their use (Bliss et al., 2013). How much time and money do OER save libraries and their patrons, and how do OER impact learning and engagement? To what extent do librarians and patrons use them? Can use of OER help to close equity gaps or support inclusion? These questions about OER’s utility have been explored by a growing international community of researchers and practitioners since the term was first coined by UNESCO in 2002. Library Futures expands this conversation by asking these questions of public librarians in the United States.



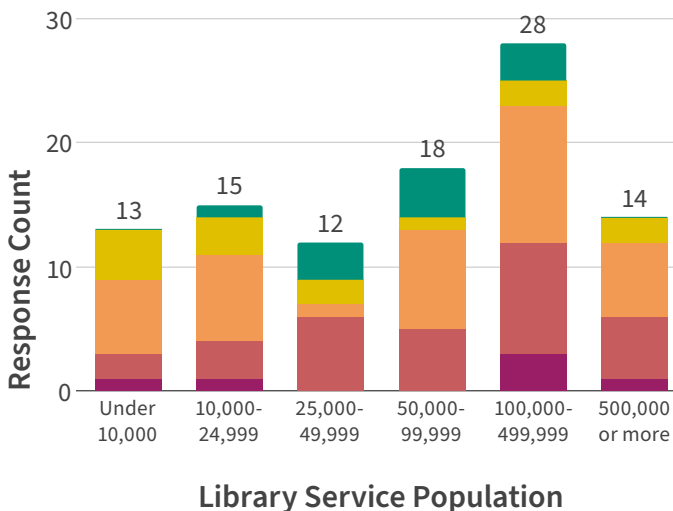
“I think that OER is an important subject matter. Public libraries, like other types of libraries, have the challenge of prioritizing their goals based on their user populations, stakeholder demands, and more. I would be curious to learn more about which public libraries are actually prioritizing OER.”

- Reference Librarian

RESULTS

I. AWARENESS

OER Awareness by Library Population Size



77% of respondents claimed at least some awareness of OER, while only 10% were not at all aware of OER. This could be a result of selection bias, as librarians with a basic familiarity with the term might be more likely to participate in a survey about it.

Librarians at the largest and smallest libraries were most likely to be aware of OER, while librarians at libraries with midsized (25,000-50,000) populations had lower rates of OER awareness.

Librarian Role and OER Awareness

Although few Youth Services librarians responded to the survey, those who did had a much greater awareness of OER than their colleagues in other specialties.

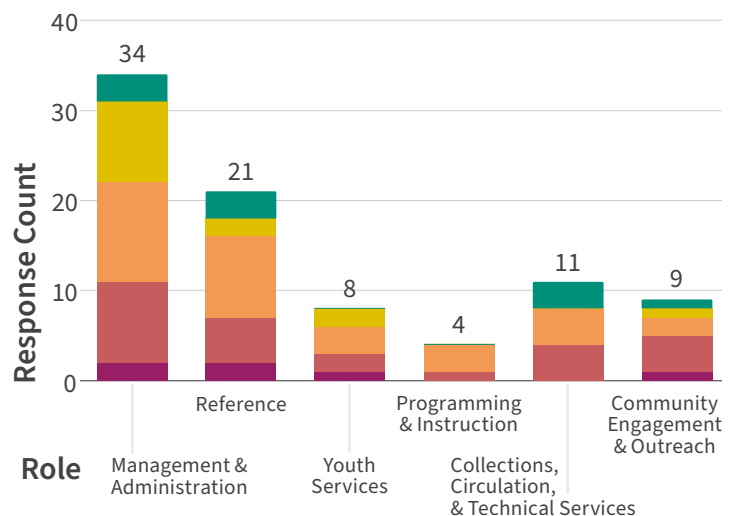
Several respondents mentioned that they used OER for youth programming. This aligns with popular perceptions of Youth Services librarians as education providers (Colvin, 2021)

AWARENESS LEGEND

- I am not aware of OER
- I have heard of OER, but don't know much about them
- I am somewhat aware of OER, but I am not sure how they can be used
- I am aware of OER and some of their use cases
- I am very aware of OER and know how they can be used

Librarians who identified primarily as Collections, Circulations, & Technical Services staff displayed the lowest OER awareness, with no respondents listing themselves as “very aware” of OER and three expressing no awareness. This could suggest a key tension in widespread OER uptake.

OER Awareness by Librarian Role



Public service librarians see the greatest need for OER, as they are on the frontlines of educating patrons. Meanwhile, collections librarians have responsibilities for building collections and budgeting for library resources, but they have the least awareness of how OER could improve educational programming (Shepard, 2020). Building awareness and interest in OER among this stakeholder group is essential to ensure open resources are integrated into library discovery systems where they can be found and used by both other librarians and patrons themselves.



“Historically, Open Education and OER have been the domain of the Public Services Librarian...But ask any librarian and they will tell you that a library is a system—a system that does not work without all of its parts. It is important that we open up the conversation around Open Education to our Systems and Collection Development/ Management/Acquisition colleagues.”
 - Elizabeth Shepard, 2020

Librarian Experience and OER Awareness

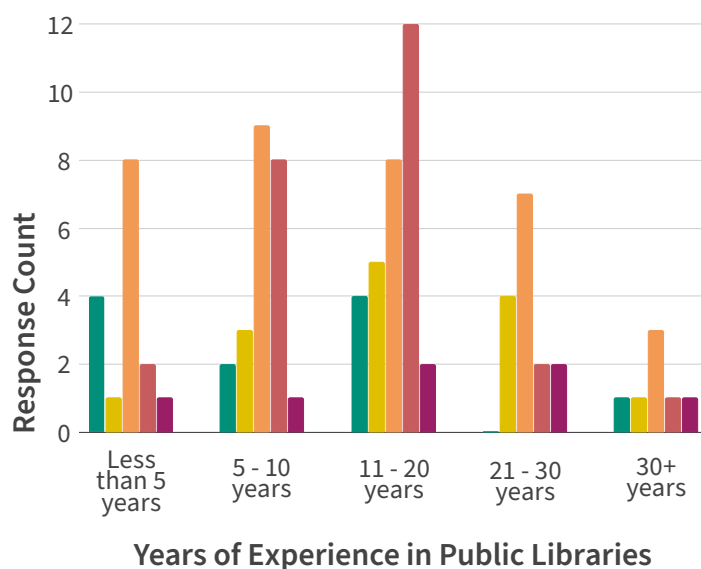
The survey also asked about librarians’ years in the profession to learn whether OER awareness might be a function of experience (i.e., learning about OER on the job) vs. education at Masters of Library and Information Science programs, which might increasingly emphasize OER in their curricula (Katz, 2020).

“I work at a large library so I’m not sure the extent to which [OER] has been incorporated into our systems. I recently graduated from a MLIS program which discussed copyright and open-access use. I run programs for youth at my library and frequently utilize creative commons or open access materials to share at programs.”

- Survey Participant

Our survey did not find a significant correlation between years in the field and OER awareness. The largest group of study respondents have 11 to 20 years of experience in the field, perhaps representing the group of librarians most likely to be responsive to the study recruitment format of the Public Library Association listserv. Of this group, 39% are aware of OER and some of their use cases, with an additional 2 out of 31 respondents “very aware of OER.” Meanwhile, 68% of librarians who had been working for less than 5 years were aware of OER, with 50% categorizing themselves as “somewhat aware of OER, but not sure how they can be used” and only one out of 16 respondents was “very aware of OER.”

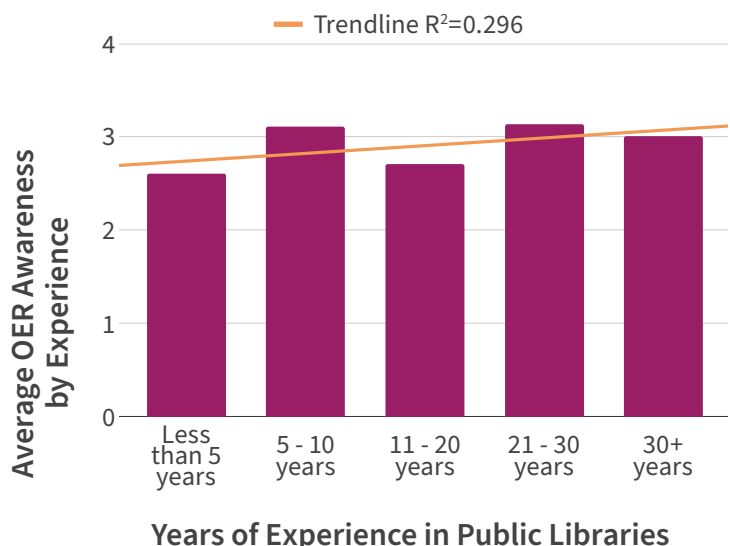
Librarian Awareness by Librarian Experience



AWARENESS LEGEND

- I am not aware of OER
- I have heard of OER, but don't know much about them
- I am somewhat aware of OER, but I am not sure how they can be used
- I am aware of OER and some of their use cases
- I am very aware of OER and know how they can be used

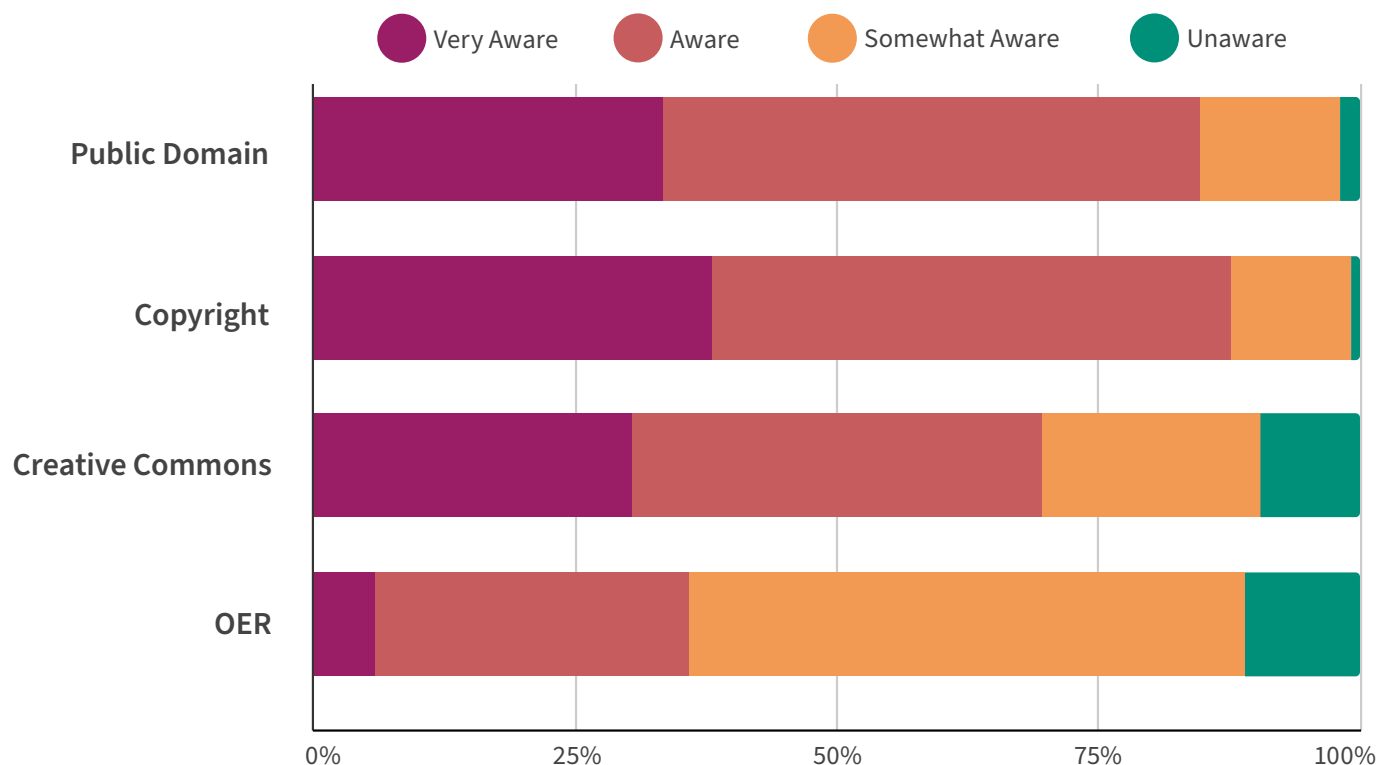
Years of Library Experience vs. OER Awareness



77%

REPORTED AT LEAST SOME FAMILIARITY WITH OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Intellectual Property Awareness



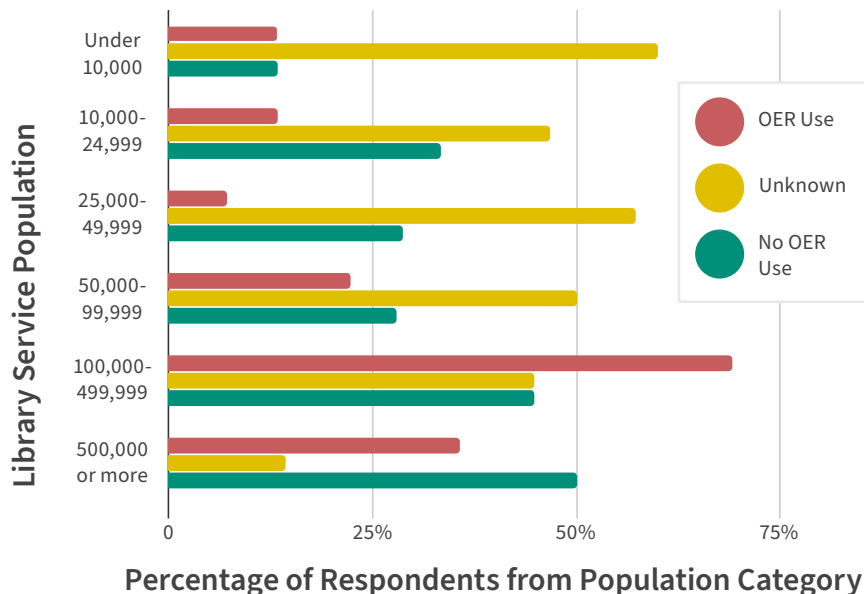
OER function through legal permissions and open licenses. Librarians surveyed expressed more awareness of some of the key intellectual property terms that comprise OER, like public domain, copyright, and Creative Commons, than they did of OER themselves. Over 75% of respondents were aware of public domain and copyright, with awareness dropping slightly for Creative Commons. Meanwhile, only 6 respondents were “very aware” of OER, with 11 unaware. This suggests that librarians may be using, creating, and promoting educational resources under open licenses without describing them as “OER.”

II. USE

Only 16% of librarians said their libraries have incorporated OER into their systems and programs. 48% said their libraries had not, while 36% didn't know. This small proportion of respondents with confirmed OER use means further data collection is needed to analyze trends and factors that contribute to OER adoption.

Though OER awareness is highest among mid-sized libraries, libraries with larger service populations are more likely to have incorporated OER into library operations than smaller libraries.

OER Adoption by Library Size



How Do Librarians Use and Conceptualize OER?

We asked librarians how their libraries use OER. These responses fell into four categories:

Resource Access (3 responses)

Librarians can direct patrons towards OER via links on websites or through reference services in a conventional role of librarians connecting patrons to resources.



“WE HAVE LINKS TO OER COMMONS AND SUNY GENESEO’S OER DATABASE ON OUR WEBSITE FOR PATRONS TO ACCESS.”

- Management & Administration Librarian

In the Public Needs for Library and Museum Services Survey (PNLMS), the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) asked 3,537 randomly-selected adults about their public library usage in the month prior. Though this IMLS dataset is from 2013, it's the most recent public dataset that collects national patron perceptions across library services. Its findings are supported by recent service-specific studies.

PNLMS reported that respondents rated e-book access as one of the most important services that public libraries provide. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being least and 10 being most important, respondents rated e-book access an average of 8.57. PNLMS respondents also rated reference help from trained librarians as a crucial service, with an average importance of 9.4 out of 10. OER in public libraries requires both discoverable open e-books and librarians who are trained and have time to connect them to patrons.

How Do Librarians Use and Conceptualize OER? (continued)

Tech programs (3 responses)

Libraries also run tech training and resource lending programs, such as makerspaces. Library 3D printers often run via open-source software and 3D print designs that are openly licensed.



“WE HAVE USED OER SOURCES FOR MANY OF OUR STEAM AND MAKER PROGRAMS.”

- Community Engagement & Outreach Librarian

Technology education and digital literacy is a major area where librarians can use open-access curricula and software to fill an important knowledge gap in the public, especially in programs for seniors, low-income communities, and migrants (Holappa et al., 2018; Oh & Mon, 2024). Per the PNLMS, 5% of respondents who visited a public library in the month prior attended a technology training.

Lesson plans (3 responses)

Instructional design and lesson plans are the most conventional use of OER, aligning with some librarians’ functions as teachers and managers of youth programs.



“WE REFER TO... OER COMMONS TO FIND LESSONS AND IDEAS FOR PROGRAMS.”

- Management & Administration Librarian

73.57% of PNLMS respondents rated children’s programming as a highly important service. Of non-library users, 44% said that they would use the library for education programs.

Our survey data show some public librarians have begun to incorporate OER into their lesson plans and tech programs, making this a possible growth area for OER in public libraries and an important area for further exploration.

Promotional materials (5 responses)

Five respondents to our survey said that they used openly licensed/Creative Commons images or music for library advertising, presentations, or displays. However, some uses could be categorized as marketing rather than educational and better described

as open content rather than OER. That the largest group of librarians who report OER use described non-educational use cases may suggest a conflation of OER and open content writ large.

How Do Librarians Use and Conceptualize OER? (continued)

These categories of growing user needs among public library goers are also supported by more recent research. For example, IMLS surveys libraries directly in its annual Public Libraries Survey. A 2024 research brief found usership of library electronic services has increased every year since 2018 (IMLS, 2024).

The Public Library Association's 2023 Public Library Technology Survey found that over 40% of public libraries have maker equipment and that 95% offer digital literacy training. Likewise, the 2022 Public Library Services for Strong Communities Report by the Public Library Association found that almost all public libraries (99%) offer summer reading programs. Other notable areas of program emphasis include services for job seekers (78%), GED/diploma students (59%), and English language learners (46%). Library respondents listed literacy and educational achievement (84.7%) and digital equity (66.6%) as the top two most pressing needs in their communities.

The categories and connections defined above reveal not only distinct uses of OER but also clarify the critical role of public libraries in education. Public librarians connect people to educational

resources for self-study, provide resources for teachers within the public library's community, and serve as educators themselves through in-house educational programming.

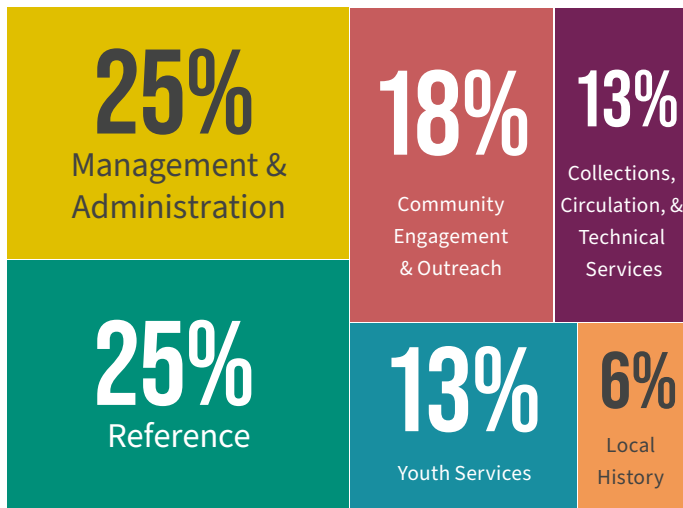
The nuances of public librarians' multifaceted approaches to educational resources are underexplored in existing research on OER, which focuses on open-access textbooks and curricula at colleges and universities. However, public libraries and colleges/universities have a lot in common—and potentially much to learn from each other. A recent project compared the resources offered by community college libraries and public libraries, including technology, financial literacy, and career services (Lopez et al., 2024). They found that community college libraries and public libraries share resources via access to online collections. Public libraries can also partner with academic libraries to disseminate research about important topics such as public health via educational programming (Swanberg et al., 2022). While both provide overlapping basic need resources tailored to their populations, the sample of public libraries on average publicized their offerings better—showing an area where community college librarians could learn from their public counterparts.

III. CREATION

Open licensing is foundational to OER. One way public librarians can utilize OER is through making and openly licensing materials themselves (Kleinman, 2008). Creation of new resources was not popular among respondents, with only 18% having applied an open license to their own work.

Of those who have, Management & Administration librarians and Reference librarians were the most frequent open content creators. Meanwhile, only two Youth Services librarians said they had applied an open license to their own work.

Open License and Librarian Role



Above: Participants who applied open licenses to their work by role.

Why Do Public Librarians Create Open Content?

For some public librarians, creating OER is already part of the job. While it may not be in the description, librarians may see it as a logical extension of their role or the needs of their patrons.

“I feel it is important to share resources especially in a public library environment. When developing a program and resources, I am already being paid through my employment. I therefore feel it is important to share my resources and program freely.”

- Community & Outreach Librarian

Respondents who said they have applied Creative Commons licenses to their own work also commonly justified their decision through discussing open education.

“[I applied a Creative Commons license] because it was created for educational purposes.”

- Local History Librarian

Respondents also shared that creating open content fit into the core vocational identity of librarianship — providing access and assisting patrons with information and education.

“I strongly believe that information should be freely and equitably accessible.”

- Collections, Circulation, & Technical Services Librarian



Creative Commons (CC) Licenses



CC provides flexible options for sharing copyrighted materials under open licenses.



Requires Attribution



Implements Reshare Conditions



Prohibits Commercial Use

IV. PERCEPTIONS

Respondents who use OER are generally satisfied with them as “valuable additions to the library’s collections,” with none disagreeing with OER’s value.

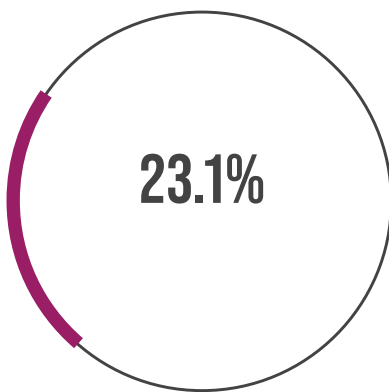
The 13 respondents whose libraries have incorporated OER noted they were generally effective, with the most effective being educational programs for patrons. Eight respondents said OER were easy to use, with 2 disagreeing and 3 neutral. OER effectiveness for instructor support showed the weakest support from respondents, with 6 respondents supporting, 4 noncommittal, 2 disagreeing, and 1 responding not applicable. OER for instructor support could be an area for further

research and support to maximize the potential of OER for open curriculum development in library communities.

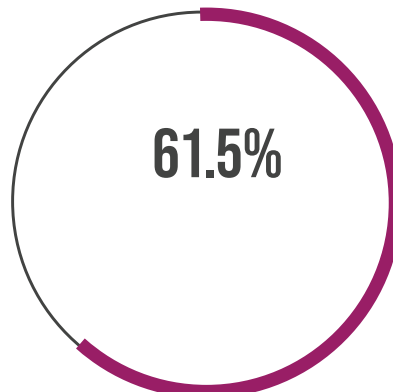
OER can save costs of collections but could require up-front costs for programming and staff training in navigating open options

One of the key benefits of OER is their low cost. Of the relatively small population of public librarians who use OER, most respondents were satisfied by their cost and utility. 84.6% of respondents described OER as a cost-effective alternative to buying copyrighted educational materials, and none disagreed.

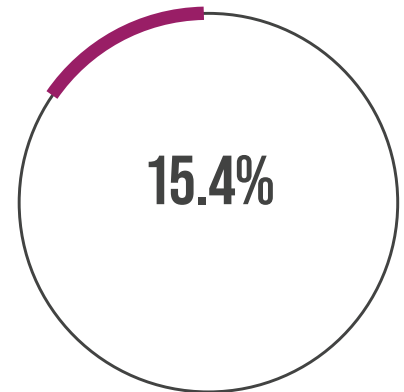
OER Are Cost Effective Alternatives to Proprietary Materials



Strongly Agree



Agree



Neither Agree
Nor Disagree

Agreement: “The OER used by my library’s systems and programs are cost-effective alternatives to proprietary materials.”

Satisfaction Results

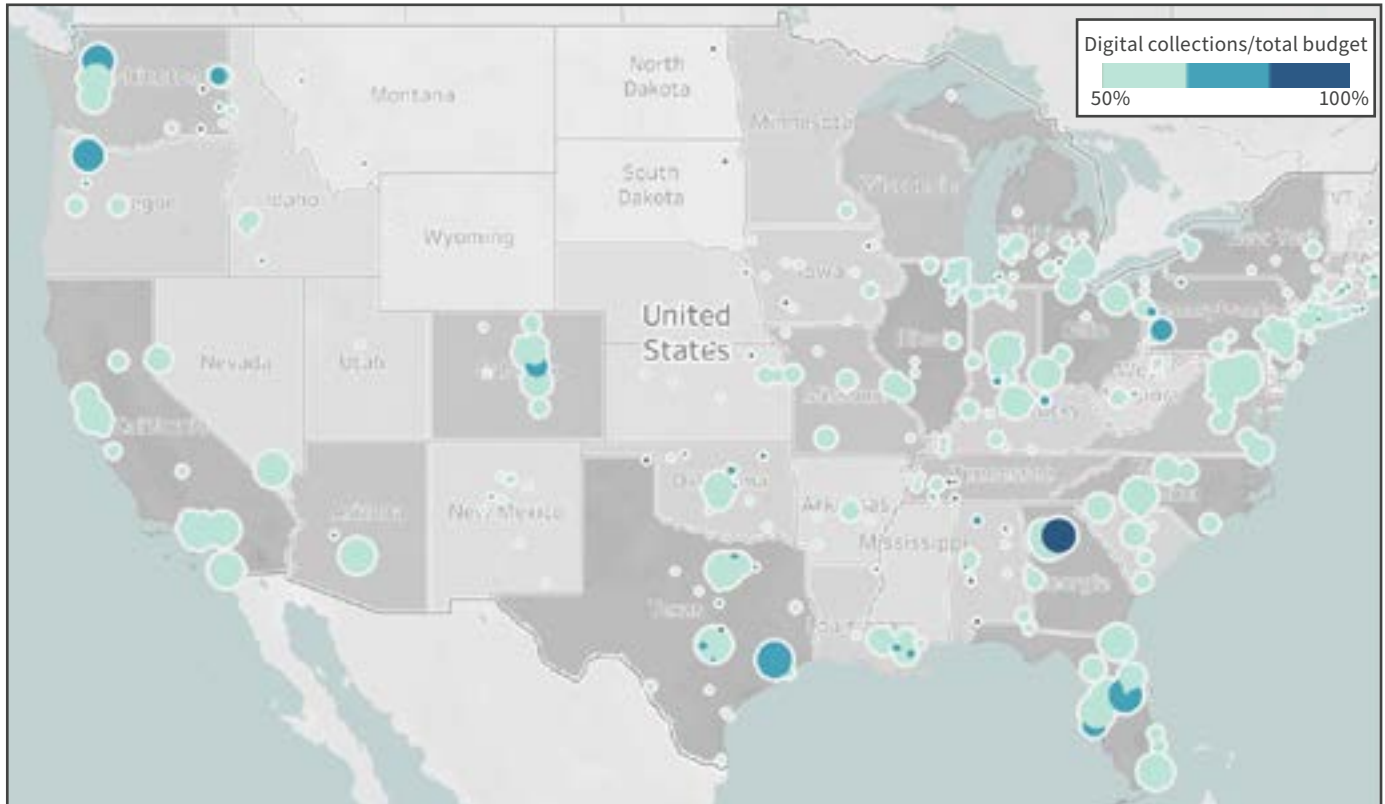
The OER used by my library’s systems and programs are	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
Easy to use	0	61.54%	23.08%	15.38%	0	0
Effective for patron use in trainings and programs	0	69.23%	30.77%	0	0	0
Provide effective instructor support	0	46.15%	30.77%	15.38%	0	7.7%
Cost-effective alternatives to proprietary materials	23.1%	61.5%	15.4%	0	0	0
Valuable additions to the library’s collection	7.7%	76.9%	15.4%	0	0	0

OER can be an especially powerful cost-saving intervention in cases where libraries are struggling with the costs of maintaining digital collections.

“Concern over money spent on collections includes (and is predominantly fueled by) our virtual collections.”

- Management & Administration Librarian

**Zip Code Hotspots of Digital Collections Spending
Contiguous United States**



Alaska



Hawaii



2018 Population

- 581,000 to 1,340,000
- 1,340,000 to 3,130,000
- 3,130,000 to 5,530,000
- 5,530,000 to 8,880,000
- 8,880,000 to 39,100,000

Library Service Population

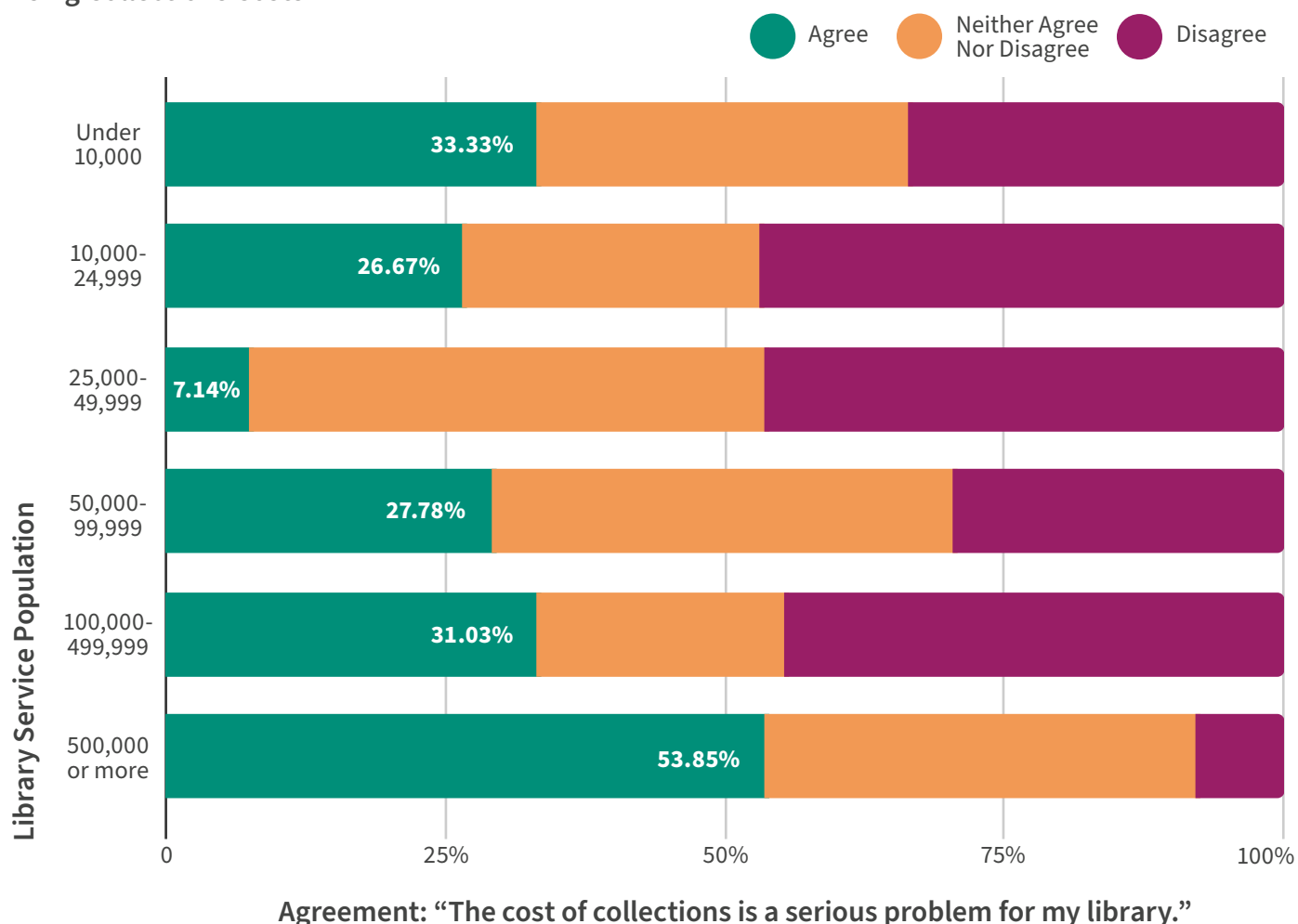
- 0
- 200,000
- 400,000
- 600,000
- 800,000
- ≥ 966,057

According to the 2022 IMLS Public Libraries Survey, electronic collections are a significant aspect of public library collections across the United States, although unevenly across libraries and regions. Library Futures created the above map using 2022 IMLS survey data to display zip codes where public libraries spent over 60% of their collections budgets on electronic collections.

Circle sizes are proportional to the population served by libraries within each zip code, showing areas where spending on electronic collections has the most significant impact in terms of number of patrons served. While most libraries spent less than 60% of their collections budgets on e-resources, digital collections represent a significant area of cost across the country- especially in Georgia, Texas, Florida, and Washington DC.

Survey responses also affirmed that cost of collections is an uneven problem across public libraries, shifting the utility of OER as cost-savers based on context. The cost of collections is a proportionally greater problem for larger libraries, with over half of respondents from libraries serving 500,000 patrons citing cost of collections as a serious problem.

Rising Collections Costs



These results demonstrate both geographic and topic areas where investment and further exploration of OER could represent an especially significant research and development opportunity to broader understandings of how local funding, policy, library management, and librarian experiences impact access to electronic collections.

V. BARRIERS

Awareness

Awareness issues were the biggest reasons respondents selected for not using OER. Over 60% of respondents selected awareness barriers as impediments, with “not aware of OER” receiving the most responses (35.7%) and “don’t know others using OER” receiving the second most (25%).

“The biggest barrier to these resources for me, personally, is just knowing about them. Many aren’t integrated into our collection, so they rely on staff sharing them with each other and then remembering to look for them in our personal saved reference materials.”
- Programming & Instruction Librarian

Support

Implementing a successful open education program requires a community to spread the word about OER, a culture that incentivizes the creation and distribution of OER, and workplace structures that compensate for OER creation and promotion (Gong, 2024).

If a library has a sufficient collections budget but insufficient staffing, it may be easier to purchase materials than to ask librarians to spend time developing OER collections or educating patrons about their use.

“It is easier with existing processes in place to purchase materials [than use OER]. Our library uses just a fraction of what could be done ... We have not done much to teach/provide programming about OER - this is where Public Libraries could help spread knowledge.”
- Collections, Circulation, & Technical Services Librarian

One Management & Administration respondent also noted “limited staff time to implement and train staff/public on use & benefits” as a barrier to OER adoption.

Barriers

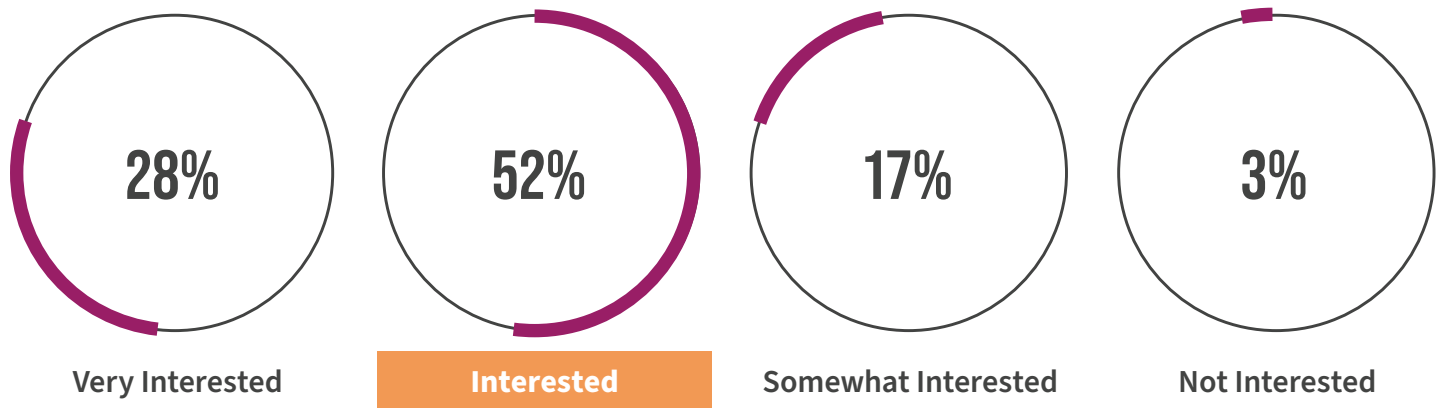


Unlocking the full potential of OER requires building a culture that empowers staff with the necessary knowledge to identify, access, and use them, including financial support and access to professional development opportunities that allow public librarians to connect with and learn from peers. The majority of faculty in higher education who know about OER heard about them from a colleague (Seaman & Seaman, 2023). Because OER activities are not often an explicit part of public librarians’ job descriptions, bringing OER from individual projects to institution-wide implementation requires extra work, education, and initiative.

VI. INTEREST

Respondents' interest in OER was extremely high with 97% of respondents noting some level of interest in learning more about OER. This represents a rich area for further education, development, and research. Interest levels also suggest a library landscape of high alignment with the values of OER but little personnel capacity or professional development opportunities to support implementation.

Interest in OER



Getting Started with OER

Check out our blog post, “Unlocking OER for Public Libraries” (Santamaria & Reed, 2023), for an introduction to open education and OER examples matching a variety of public library programs and services.

Where To Look for OER?

- The **Open Textbook Library** provides MARC bibliographic records for the open textbooks in its collection, which is also discoverable in WorldCat and through Ex Libris' Alma.
- **OER Commons** is another great place to start a journey into OER. In addition to keywords, it allows for searching by subject as well as education level and educational standards.
- **Project Gutenberg** is a library of over 70,000 out-of-copyright e-books.
- The **Library of Congress** provides rich digital collections of historical and primary source materials that are free to use and reuse.
- The **Pressbooks Directory** pulls together all the titles published across the Pressbooks network. It has become a popular publication platform for OER.
- Grand Valley State University's OER guide lists OER by subject. Search **OER and LibGuides** to find similar guides online.

NEXT STEPS

Public librarians are clearly interested in OER, and those who use them are satisfied to some extent by their capacity to expand access to open, modifiable learning programs. But, as our limited sample size shows, OER in public libraries are still in the early stages of awareness and implementation.

These findings are similar to the state of OER awareness and use in higher education only a decade ago. When the Babson Research Group began surveying faculty and academic leaders about online learning and OER in 2009, the term “OER” was barely in the lexicon. In 2015, Bay View Analytics (formerly the Babson Research Group) found only 5% of surveyed faculty were using OER (Seaman & Seaman, 2023). In the most recent 2023 report, OER use was at 29%, showing increases year-to-year (Seaman & Seaman, 2023). Awareness has similarly increased.

The geographic and contextual variability of responses also shows there are not one-size-fits-all OER programs for public libraries. There are, however, some areas that librarians, administrators, and educators can investigate further. OER awareness and use is fragmented, with several respondents unaware of whether OER is being used within their own libraries. Borrowing from lessons learned in community colleges (Schoppert, 2020), increasing awareness via professional development, OER steering committees, MLIS curricula, and public education campaigns—including sharing successful examples of OER—could all positively benefit OER in public libraries. To increase the discoverability and utility of OER, education

and conversations on the topic should extend beyond public services librarians to include collections and technology librarians.

Collecting more data on OER experiences in public libraries would also fill an important research gap, which this report begins to address. Current longitudinal assessments of public libraries, such as the IMLS questionnaire, do not ask about OER. However, as a 2015 Hewlett foundation-funded study on the state of OER research established, high quality and empirical OER research is needed to support OER use and “attain credibility in the broader policy and research communities” (Shear et al., 2015).

The limitations of this survey leave gaps for future research. Regions of the country, including the Northwest, were not represented by responses. However, surveys such as this one can also contribute to raising awareness and starting conversations about OER in public libraries.

Bay View Analytics conducts a survey on OER in higher education every year, enabling insight into how OER evolves over time. A similar recurring research program could be conducted for public libraries, to track emerging trends and capture useful guidance for library administrators and educators seeking models and peer support for OER integration into public library programs and systems. More comprehensive data could hold richer potential for analysis into how state policy, library associations, and collaboration with community colleges impact OER in public libraries.



“Until this survey I’d never come across the acronym OER or the term ‘Open Educational Resources.’ I look forward to learning more about this topic.”

- Study Participant

METHODS

Public library employees in the United States were recruited through a survey sent through the Public Library Association mailing list. The survey was approved by New York University's Institutional Review Board and remained open from January 22 to March 8, 2024, for a total of seven weeks. The survey included both multiple choice and open-ended questions. A raffle of four gift cards was offered as incentive.

The survey was adapted from “Digital Established: Educational Resources in U.S. Higher Education, 2023” by Bay View Analytics (formerly known as Babson Research Group), which was released under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license. The organization, which is supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, began including OER in its survey in 2009. The Bay View Analytics survey was selected as a model because it was refined

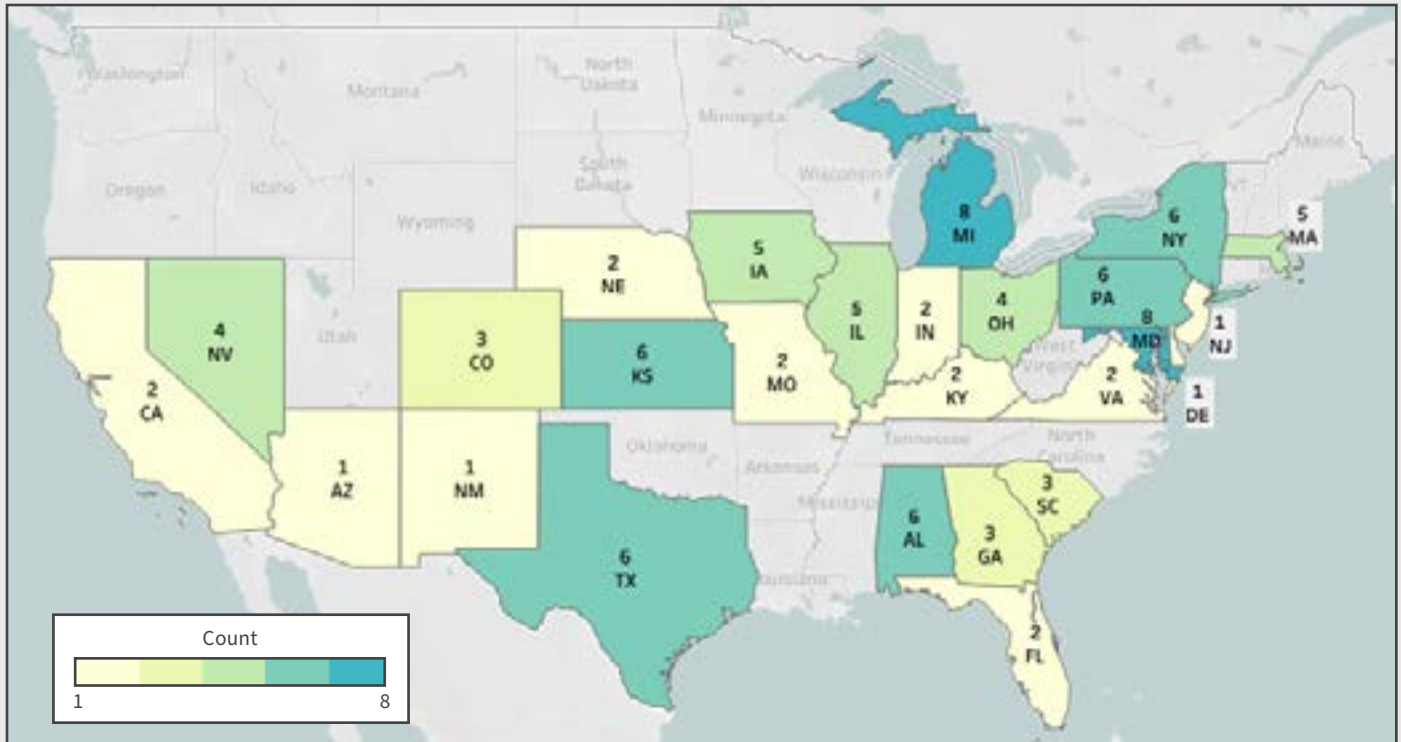
over time to measure “strict” OER awareness that accounts for inflated reporting. We found no significant difference in reported OER awareness when accounting for strict awareness.

Ours is the first study to date that examines OER awareness, interest, and perceptions among public librarians. As such, it provides a useful snapshot to identify emerging trends and future growth of OER in public libraries. Though the findings are not generalizable due to the sample size, the results are compelling and demonstrate a need for more research in this area.

To supplement the survey data, we also analyzed IMLS data to assess the role of digital materials in library collections budgets and ways in which patrons use the library for educational services (IMLS, 2022).

RESPONDENTS

Contiguous United States



Hawaii



Alaska



We received 107 usable responses during the survey’s active recruitment period. Respondents were from 18 states, with Maryland and Michigan most represented with 8 respondents each. The largest proportion of respondents identified their libraries as suburban (41%), while rural areas (25%), cities (29%), and towns (28%) were roughly evenly represented.

Thirty-one respondents had been working in libraries for 11-20 years (34.1%), 23 respondents for 5-10 years (25.3%), 16 respondents for less than 5 years (17.5%), 15 respondents from 21-30 years (16.5%), and 7 respondents for more than 30 years (6.6%).

The survey also asked about librarians’ primary and secondary job roles. The highest number of respondents were from Management & Administration (37.8%, 34 respondents); followed by Reference (23.3%, 21); Collections, Circulation, & Technical Services (12.2%, 11); Community Engagement & Outreach (10%, 9); Youth Services (8.9%, 8); and Programming & Instruction (4.4%, 4). Three respondents (3.3%) described their role as “other”: 1) “Systemwide programming for all ages, event and conference planning, special projects,” 2) “Reference/Collection/Tech Services,” and 3) “Local History.”

REFERENCES

- Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2014). *Opening the curriculum: Open educational resources in U.S. higher education, 2014*. Babson Survey Research Group. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED572730>
- Bliss, T. J., Robinson, T. J., Hilton, J., & Wiley, D. A. (2013). An OER COUP: College teacher and student perceptions of open educational Resources. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.5334/2013-04>
- Bueno-de-la-Fuente, G., Robertson, R. J., & Boon, S. (2012). *The roles of libraries and information professionals in Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives*. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/63306>
- Colvin, S., White, A. M., & Akiva, T. (2021). Learning in the library: A national study of youth services public library workers. *Journal of Community Psychology, 49*(6), 2040–2058. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22537>
- Garmer, A. K. (2016). Public libraries in the community. *I/S: A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society, 13*, 1. Knowledge Bank. <https://kb.osu.edu/items/f37de70c-6f43-5754-a408-71a623067f6d>
- Gong, R. (2024). Claiming our place in the center: Counterstories of women of color open educational resources (OER) librarians [Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University]. Digital USD. https://digital.sandiego.edu/library_facpub/23
- Holappa, H., Ylipulli, J., Rautiainen, S., Minyaev, I., Pouke, M., & Ojala, T. (2018). VR application for technology education in a public library. *Proceedings of the 17th International Conference on Mobile and Ubiquitous Multimedia, 521–527*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3282894.3289719>
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2013). *Public needs for library and museum services survey: 2013* [Data set]. <https://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-needs-library-and-museum-services-survey>
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2022). *Public libraries survey* [Data set]. <https://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-libraries-survey>
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2024). *Changes in public library services as the COVID-19 pandemic continued through FY2021*. <https://www.ims.gov/publications/research-brief-changes-public-library-services-covid-19-pandemic-continued-through-fy>
- Katz, S. (2020). The case for OER in LIS education. *Library Trends, 69*(2), 419–434. CUNY Academic Works. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/le_pubs/321/
- Kleinman, M. (2008). The beauty of “Some Rights Reserved”: Introducing Creative Commons to librarians, faculty, and students. *College & Research Libraries News, 69*(10), 594–597. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.69.10.8077>
- Lopez, S., Love, S., & Blankstein, M. (2024). *Exploring basic needs support across public and community college libraries: Opportunities for collaboration*. Ithaka S+R. <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.321005>

REFERENCES

- Oh, S., & Mon, L. (2024). Community-based learning and data literacy: The role of the public library. *Information and Learning Sciences*, 125(7/8), 456–474. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ILS-06-2023-0078>
- Public Library Association. (2022). *Public library services for strong communities report: Results from the 2022 PLA annual survey*. https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/pla/content/data/PLA_Services_Survey_Report_2023.pdf
- Public Library Association. (2023). *Public library technology survey: Summary report*. https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/PLA_Tech_Survey_Report_2024.pdf
- Salubi, O., & Majavu, U. (2023). Toward the development of a framework for literacy support and promotion by public libraries in financially and infrastructurally low-resourced territories. *Reference Services Review*, 52(2), 218–230. <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-06-2023-0056>
- Santamaria, M., & Reed, M. (2023, November 28). Unlocking OER for public libraries. *Library Futures*. <https://www.libraryfutures.net/post/oer-for-public-libraries>
- Schoppert, J. (2020). *Librarian leadership in open education resources: Implementing and supporting innovation in community colleges* [Doctoral dissertation, Oregon State University]. ScholarsArchive@OSU. https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/graduate_thesis_or_dissertations/sj1398289
- Seaman, J., & Seaman, J. (2023). *Digitally established educational resources in U.S. higher education, 2023*. Bay View Analytics. <https://www.bayviewanalytics.com/reports/digitallyestablished-2023.pdf>
- Shear, L., Means, B., & Lundh, P. (2015). Research on Open: OER Research Hub review and futures for research on OER. SRI International. <https://hewlett.org/library/research-on-open-oer-research-hub-review-and-futures-for-research-on-oer/>
- Shepard, E. (2020). Knowing is half the battle: A librarian OER needs assessment. University of South Alabama Libraries. <https://libguides.southalabama.edu/SPARC/projectinformation>
- Swanberg, S. M., Bulgarelli, N., Jayakumar, M., Look, E., Shubitowski, T. B., Wedemeyer, R., Yuen, E. W., & Lucia, V. C. (2022). A health education outreach partnership between an academic medical library and public library: Lessons learned before and during a pandemic. *Journal of the Medical Library Association: JMLA*, 110(2), 212–221. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2022.1413>
- UNESCO. (2002). Forum on the impact of open courseware for higher education in developing countries, UNESCO, Paris, 1-3 July 2002: Final report. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000128515>
- Walsh, A. J. (2020). Removing barriers: Textbook affordability and OER at Sinclair community college. *Reference Services Review*, 48(3), 385–396. <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-03-2020-0011>

ABOUT

Library Futures

Library Futures is the vanguard nonprofit organization uncovering and confronting the fundamental policy issues that threaten libraries in the digital age. We believe librarians, policymakers, and community leaders deserve a new approach to digital rights so they can protect, advocate for, and advance a fair digital future for libraries and the communities they serve. Library Futures meets this need with fresh research, visionary policy and advocacy initiatives, and engaging education programs.

Library Futures is a project of the Engelberg Center on Innovation Law & Policy at the New York University School of Law.

Authors

Tova Gaster is an intern at Library Futures. Tova recently graduated with a BA in environmental geography and history from the University of British Columbia. Her research focuses on climate (in)justice, specifically corporate influence on environmental monitoring and policy. Having worked in journalism, youth programming, and libraries, she's excited about everything that expands access to information and education, which brings her to Library Futures!

As the Director of Programs for Library Futures, **Michelle Reed** oversees the student internship program and manages the organization's research portfolio in support of digital rights and equitable access to knowledge. Michelle worked in academic libraries at the intersections of technology, education, and intellectual property prior to joining Library Futures in May 2023, including as the Director of Open Educational Resources at the University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Kathleen DeLaurenti for contributing feedback on early drafts of this report and to Braden Schmidt and Joshua Been for providing the data visualizations included in the Methods section. Additional thanks to Jennie Rose Halperin, Laura Crossett, and Ransom Jabara for providing feedback on the survey used in this study and to Arianna Alcaraz for design assistance.



**ENGELBERG
CENTER**
on Innovation Law & Policy
NYU School of Law

97%

**OF PUBLIC LIBRARIANS
ARE INTERESTED IN
LEARNING MORE ABOUT
OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**



WWW.LIBRARYFUTURES.NET

info@libraryfutures.net