

# GROWING MINDS AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES: AN ECONOMIC VALUATION STUDY OF THE ANCHORAGE PUBLIC LIBRARY

A new study shows that the Anchorage Public Library (APL) contributed between **\$10,797,426 and \$18,679,410 worth of benefits** to the community in 2007. This means that **for every \$1 in municipal operating support** to APL, the people of Anchorage, Eagle River-Chugiak and Girdwood **see a return in the range of \$1.42 to \$2.46**. The study was done by Anchorage Public Library with support from University of Alaska Anchorage's Institute of Social and Economic Research and is the first to assign a dollar value to APL benefits.



***“The Anchorage Public Library is a valuable resource for our community. Our libraries strengthen our neighborhoods, enrich our lives, preserve our history, and nurture the minds and creativity of our youth.”***

***-Mayor Mark Begich***

Using a conservative measure, the calculated benefits in this study reflect the value of services received by Anchorage residents in the form of books, movies, music, computer use, facility rentals, programs, reference support, electronic databases, and volunteer output.

The total value does not include services that APL is unable to track, such as the use of historical documents and reference materials not available for check-out. Further, some of the most valuable benefits provided by APL cannot be easily quantified, such as **the benefit of having a free, public space to gather, an educated society, outlets for creative energy, and having information and resources easily accessible to all members of the community.**

This report details both the quantitative values calculated by ISER as well as the qualitative benefits of the Anchorage Public Library.

## **Estimated Annual Benefits for 2007:**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Subtotals (Low)</b>	<b>Subtotals (High)</b>
Circulation	\$8,238,721.00	\$13,495,5132.50
Room Rentals	\$249,650.00	\$361,300.00
Database Downloads	\$492,325.00	\$600,837.50
Adult Programs	\$24,600.00	\$49,200.00
Youth Programs	\$338,340.00	\$482,895.00
Reference Services	\$974,000.00	\$2,922,000.00
Computer Usage	\$479,790.00	\$767,664.00
Volunteer Hours	\$158,221.00	\$158,221.00
<b>Totals<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>\$10,797,426.00</b>	<b>\$18,679,410.00</b>

**For every \$1 in municipal support invested in annual operations, APL gives back between \$1.42 and \$2.46.**

**This amounts to a yearly value of:  
\$105.57 to \$182.64 for each Anchorage household.**

<sup>1</sup>Ralph, Kelcie. 2008. A Benefit Study of the Anchorage Public Library. University of Alaska Anchorage, Institute of Social and Economic Research. Includes updated values by APL for volunteer hours and reference services.

*“New studies provide solid evidence that the nation’s public libraries are engines of economic growth, contributing to local development through programming in early literacy, employment services and small-business development. Other studies show that libraries provide an excellent return on investment, have a measurable positive impact on the local economy and contribute to the stability, safety and quality of life of their neighborhoods.”*

**- American Library Association’s  
2008 State of America’s Libraries Report**

## **Anchorage Public Library**

Anchorage has always had strong ties to its libraries. The first Anchorage Public Library opened in 1917 and was funded through donations and operated by volunteers. By December 1922, the public library had 820 books on the shelves and an average circulation of 50 books per day, a significant number for a town of around 2,000 residents.

Today's bustling Anchorage Public Library system has expanded far beyond anything the city's early library founders could have imagined. APL has become Alaska's largest free public library and is a critical asset to Anchorage, and Alaska, residents and visitors alike. Today, APL serves over 850,000 visitors a year through the Loussac Public Library and five branches, spanning from Chugiak-Eagle to Girdwood. Anchorage Public Library is staffed by 100 employees, with additional support from hundreds of volunteers, and is overseen by a nine-member Library Advisory Board.

***The mission of the Anchorage Public Library is to provide the people of our diverse community with resources to enrich their lives and empower their futures, while preserving the past for generations to come.***

More than 150,000 Anchorage residents have library cards, more than 33,000 children and adults participated in library programs last year, there are over 700,000 items in the collection, and circulation is over 1.5 million items a year. Several special collections at APL include: the Alaska Collection with 25,000 books, historical archives, and fine art exhibits; the World Languages collection that includes titles in 17 different languages; the Martin Luther King Jr. collection that includes materials on the history of the social justice movement; and, over forty electronic databases that cover topics from consumer health to auto repair.

APL operations are funded primarily by the Municipality of Anchorage, with state and federal grant support for several individual programs. The Friends of the Anchorage Public Library, a non-profit organization, supports programs and collection enhancement through private fundraising efforts, and the Anchorage Library Foundation exists to fundraise for library capital projects and an endowment for the future. In 2006, the Anchorage Library Renewal Initiative was launched to improve library operations, increase outreach to the community and fund a \$21+ million capital campaign to upgrade library facilities. The capital campaign is funded by local, state and federal dollars, private foundations, businesses and individual members of the community.



## **Anchorage Public Library's True Value? Priceless**

While it is possible to assign a dollar value to many of APL's benefits, there are others that cannot be calculated. For many of us, it is impossible to put a price on the value of having an institution of learning in our community that is equally accessible to members of all income levels, educational backgrounds, ages, and neighborhoods. People who benefit from the library range from the child who learned to love reading at **Storytime**, to the job seeker who used a library computer to turn in an online job application.

"Millions of Americans rely on their public library to find jobs, further their education, learn English, get e-government information, and more. Our nation must continue to support public libraries and ensure they are able to provide information and opportunities for all people."

- **Allan Golston, president of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's U.S. Program, September 12, 2007, American Library Association press release**

## **Examples of APL's Qualitative Benefits**

**Strengthening communities-** libraries are community hubs that bring neighbors together, increase community pride, and improve the quality of life of residents.

**Fostering economic growth-** APL helps job-seekers prepare and apply for jobs, helps small businesses conduct research and attracts new business development through an improved quality of life in neighborhoods.

**Serving as a center for humanities-** APL programs celebrate the different cultures of Anchorage, offer continuing educational opportunities, and provide an outlet for creativity.

**Cultivating the workforce of the future-** teenagers are frequent visitors to APL, who visit to do homework and check-out materials. APL provides the resources to give our young people the tools they need to succeed in life.

**Improving Children's Literacy-** In her study, "Summer Learning and the Effects of Schooling" (Academic Press, 1978), Barbara Heyns found that "Children in every income group who read six or more books over the summer gained more in reading achievement than children who did not," and "More than any other public institution, including the schools, the public library contributed to the intellectual growth of children during the summer." Over 6,000 children participate in APL's summer reading program each year.

## **But don't just take our word for it...**

"I have used and loved libraries my entire life. My mother used to take us regularly and I followed her lead when my children came along. My first job, at age 12, was re-shelving the returned books at my school library. Today's libraries are more than shelves and stacks...they are the heart of our community."

- **Debbie Ossiander, Anchorage Assembly Member and Chugiak-Eagle River Patron**

"As a home school mother, we use the library as our main resource for research, literature, and entertainment. Staff at the Gerrish Branch library are always eager to help with selecting, referring, and finding materials that I am searching for. It's one of my favorite places in Girdwood."

- **Amy Stone and family, Girdwood Branch Patrons**

"I cannot imagine life without having access to libraries. Lots of knowledge and entertainment in one always-exciting place."

- **Larry Teague, Chugiak-Eagle River Patron**

"Anchorage's public libraries are important because they are a window and door to the past, present and future, to what the world, nation, state, community, family and we ourselves as individuals have been, are, and can become. Without public libraries, the quality of our lives would be seriously diminished."

- **Sallie & Norman Hogg, Muldoon Branch Patrons**

"Currently I am writing two books on my families' histories; so, your genealogy software and books on hand are immensely useful. The computer labs are great for research as well as a quick check on my emails. The Samson-Diamond Branch personnel are most helpful and pleasantly courteous."

- **Bill Holden, Samson-Diamond Branch Patron**

"Very interested in story-packets. Love Bilingual CDs/Cassette book sets! We think you guys do a great job."

- **Loussac Central Library Patron, from a survey of children's programs**

# GROWING MINDS AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES: CONCLUSIONS

## ***Anchorage Public Library is a vibrant and central part of the community and provides many benefits to the people of Anchorage:***

- **Access to information and research assistance-** with **1.5 million items circulated** and nearly 200,000 reference questions answered each year, APL is the place to go for homework help, small business research, and entertainment.
- **Computer time-** in the age of the Internet, access to computers is an important tool to apply for jobs, fill out government forms, and communicate with others. For the many people who do not have personal computers, the library is an essential resource.
- **Unique programs-** from inspiring a joy of reading through children's story times to helping adults continue their education with **Wildlife Wednesdays** and **Brown Bag Opera**, the library has programs to engage all members of the community.
- **Meeting space-** in a busy metropolis like Anchorage, meeting spaces are at a premium. APL offers meeting rooms and auditoriums for public use at an affordable price.
- **Gathering places-** Anchorage libraries are essential public places for fostering a sense of community and **bringing neighbors together**.
- **An economic engine for Anchorage-** libraries help job-seekers prepare for and apply for jobs, help small businesses conduct research and **attract new business development** through an improved quality of life in neighborhoods.
- **An entrance to the community-** APL is often the first stop for new residents who want to learn about their new community and find the resources to get settled.
- **Increased civic engagement-** Loussac is a site for voter registration and a polling location for local, state and federal elections. Anchorage Assembly meetings and municipal, state and federal public hearings are held in the **Assembly Chambers** and **Wilda Marston Theatre** at the Loussac Public Library.

## **Conclusion**

As one of the oldest educational and research institutions in the community, the Anchorage Public Library has been an important resource for enriching the daily lives and empowering the future of the people of Anchorage for generations. While it is no secret that the Anchorage Public Library is an important part of the community, this study provides solid proof of the value of the many benefits offered by APL.



The annual return on investment of \$1.42 to \$2.46 for each \$1 of Municipal operating support makes APL an ideal outlet for community investment. Not only does Anchorage Public Library provide a financial benefit to the community, it brings communities together, increases literacy levels among our youth, offers continuing education opportunities for adults, provides outlets for creative energy and supports local businesses, entrepreneurs and job-seekers.

With locations from Girdwood to Chugiak-Eagle River, unique resources like the Alaska, World Languages, and Martin Luther King Jr. collections, and innovative programs like **Lapsit**, **Storytime**, **Big Read**, **Brown Bag Opera**, music concerts, and **Reading Rendezvous**, Anchorage Public Library has something to offer everyone in our community.

**Growing Minds and Strengthening Communities: An Economic Valuation Study of the Anchorage Public Library** is a collaborative report by the Anchorage Public Library and University of Alaska Anchorage's Institute of Social and Economic Research.

View the full report at: [www.anchoragelibrary.org](http://www.anchoragelibrary.org)