

July 2014

The library benchmark

Mary Ginnane
Oregon State Library

Recommended Citation

Ginnane, M. (2014). The library benchmark. *OLA Quarterly*, 5(1), 11-14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1512>

© 2014 by the author(s).

OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

The Library Benchmark

A Tool for Improving Service to those Underserved by Public Libraries

by Mary Ginnane

Group Leader, Library Development Services
Oregon State Library

The Oregon Progress Board has published the Oregon Benchmarks since 1991. The Oregon State Library submitted a library benchmark to the effort. The library benchmark provides a means to identify where citizens are underserved by public libraries. Strategies for improvement of those libraries can then be planned and implemented by local leaders.

BACKGROUND

Governor Neil Goldschmidt's administration instituted the concept of Oregon Benchmarks, setting measurable standards for progress in education, the economy, and quality of life in Oregon. The Benchmarks grew directly from Oregon Shines, a 20 year strategic vision for Oregon developed in 1989. The Oregon Progress Board invited state agencies to suggest benchmarks, and the State Library submitted a library benchmark to the first Benchmarks effort in 1991. The Public Library Division of the Oregon Library Association assisted the State Library with the minimum service criteria for the library benchmark improved upon for the second publishing of the Oregon Benchmarks in late 1992.

The Oregon Progress Board accepted the library benchmark as an important indicator of a livable Oregon. The library benchmark continues to be included in the Oregon Benchmarks despite an effort to pare down the overall number of benchmarks. The Progress Board worked with the State Library on benchmark targets to achieve by the year 2000, and the year 2010. They biennially request progress reports from the State Library based on the most recent data available. The "Oregon Public Library Statistical Report" is the data source for calculating progress on achieving the library benchmark. State Library staff also processed past data from public libraries against the minimum service criteria in order to establish an historical picture to contribute to the analysis of progress.

THE LIBRARY BENCHMARK

The Progress Board's latest biennial report to the Legislature is entitled, *Achieving the Oregon Shines II*

Vision 1999 Benchmark Report. The library benchmark is worded as follows, "Percentage of Oregonians served by a public library which meets minimum service criteria." The "Endnotes" section of the Progress Board's report notes the benchmark's importance by saying, "Public libraries make major contributions to achieving the Oregon Benchmarks by providing educational resources and services to preschool children, by providing information to students, businesses, and citizens, and by contributing to the quality of life in communities throughout Oregon." The historical, current, and target percentages listed in the 1999 report are shown in Table 1.

MINIMUM SERVICE CRITERIA

The minimum service criteria established for the library benchmark are less rigorous than "Standards for Oregon Public Libraries", the Oregon Library Association's voluntary standards that were last revised in 1994. The benchmark criteria set a modest bar for public libraries in the areas of governance, public service hours, staffing, collection size, and children's services. The minimum service criteria are:

- 1) The library is legally established and makes basic services available to citizens within its tax-supporting service area without charge;
- 2) The library is open a minimum of 20 hours per week;

Historical	
1980	73%
1990	86%
1991	83%
1992	83%
1993	86%
1994	84%
1995	85%
1996	88%
1997	89%
Current	
1997	89%
Target	
2000	90%
2010	99%

Table 1: The Library Benchmark: Actual and Future Targets

- 3) Staff consists of one paid staff person per 4,000 persons in service area or .5 FTE, which ever is greater, and populations over 10,000 must have a full-time paid professional librarian (with a Master of Library Science degree);
- 4) Collection is 5,000 books or one volume per capita, which ever is greater;
- 5) Children's programming is provided.

UNSERVED, SERVED, AND UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

To fully understand the library benchmark it is necessary to distinguish between citizens who have library service and those who don't. Based upon 1996-97 data, there are 5.25 percent of Oregonians who are "unserved" citizens. These 167,000 people live in locations where they do not have the opportunity to support a legally established, tax-funded public library. While these Oregonians may drive to a public library in another jurisdiction and buy a library card, they do not have a library of their own to use and support.

Correspondingly, those Oregonians who do support a tax-funded public library are considered to be served by a public library. For purposes of the library benchmark, "served by" means residing in the service area of a legally established public library which received tax support for providing service. The percentage of Oregonians served by a public library is 94.75 percent.

Once the data from public libraries providing service to Oregonians is compared against the minimum service criteria in the library benchmark, more gradations in classifying citizens' access to library service come into use. "Underserved" citizens are those whose public library does not meet one or more of the criteria. Based upon the library benchmark calculation using 1996-97 public library statistics, 5.61 percent of Oregonians are underserved.

Those Oregonians whose libraries meet the library benchmark criteria, comprising 89.14 percent of the population, can be considered, at a minimum, adequately served. Fortunately, sound local planning, stable governance, larger units of service, and solid funding has moved service far beyond adequate into the excellent level for many Oregonians. Table 2 summarizes the above data about unserved, underserved, and adequately served Oregonians.

Population Base	3,181,000	
Population Served by Libraries	3,013,931	94.75%
Population "Unserved"	167,069	5.25%
Population "Underserved"	178,368	5.61%
Population Adequately Served	2,835,563	89.14%

Table 2: Oregon's Population by Type of Library Service: 1996-1997

FINDINGS ABOUT THE LIBRARY BENCHMARK

Last fall, when the Oregon Progress Board asked for the current progress report on the library benchmark, State Library staff plugged 1996-97 data into a spreadsheet that compared the data against the minimum service criteria. In a few cases where data is missing, estimates based on previous years are developed. The headquarter offices of library cooperatives that do not provide direct library service are deleted. The progress report showed that 31 of 129 legally established public libraries did not meet one or more of the minimum service criteria. As previously mentioned in this article, 5.61 percent of Oregonians or 178,368 citizens can currently be designated as underserved. Table 3 shows how that number of underserved breaks out by library.

Reviewing the current and past progress reports about the library benchmarks leads to certain findings about unserved citizens and public libraries being identified:

- Consistent with library development experience over the years that smaller jurisdictions of government have difficulty funding libraries adequately due to smaller tax bases, a majority of libraries not meeting the criteria are small libraries. Only 14 of of 31 public libraries that serve populations under 2,000 did meet the minimum service criteria, leaving 17 small libraries that did not. Expanding the population size being considered up to 5,000 yields the result that 68 percent of the libraries (21 in number) not meeting the minimum service criteria serve populations under 5,000. The predominant criteria not met by the smaller libraries are: 1) offering a minimum of 20 public service hours per week; and 2) employing the minimum of .5 FTE staffing (which is greater for this size library than the criterion of staff per 4,000).
- Meeting the collection size criterion does not appear to present a problem for any size of Oregon library. Only one library's collection is undersized to the extent that it does not satisfy the criterion.
- Improvements have been noted over the years in the number of libraries meeting the criterion for providing children's programming. Only ten public libraries reported offering one or none children's programs. In 1992-93, 18 libraries reported offering one or none children's programs. The 1992-93 year is significant because it precedes the establishment of the Ready to Read state aid grant program, and is prior to the State Library's youth services consulting program beginning. Library Development staff hypothesize that the increased emphasis on youth services in the state, and the availability of targeted consulting, has assisted in increasing the number of libraries offering children's programming.

Official Name	Population Served	Service Hours	Total Staff	Staff per 4000	ALA/MLS	Total Volumes	Children's Programs	Underserved Population
Agness Library District	173	14.00	.35	8.09	0.00	12,323	22	173
Helix Public Library	284	12.00	.44	6.20	0.00	7,448	50	284
Ukiah Public Library	321	15.50	.50	6.23	0.00	15,789	35	321
Wallowa County Library	372	15.00	1.30	13.98	0.00	16,101	131	372
Adams Public Library	400	13.00	.28	2.75	0.00	2,685	0	400
Fossil Public Library	515	6.00	.15	1.17	0.00	3,645	1	515
Yachats Public Library	655	26.00	.00	0.00	0.00	12,977	78	655
Scio Public Library	665	18.00	.45	2.71	0.00	10,671	count not available	665
Arlington Public Library	723	14.00	.30	1.66	0.00	16,881	8	723
Echo Public Library	815	20.00	.70	3.44	0.00	10,839	0	815
Southern Wasco County Library	887	12.00	.30	1.35	0.00	6,428	0	887
Falls City Public Library	1,027	10.00	.25	0.97	0.00	5,956	0	1,027
Irrigon Public Library	1,090	24.00	.00	0.00	0.00	728	0	1,090
Gilliam County Library	1,177	17.00	.50	1.70	0.00	9,048	26	1,177
Amity Public Library	1,373	15.00	.23	.66	0.00	14,899	3	1,373
Athena Public Library	1,698	10.00	.49	1.15	0.00	10,680	0	1,698
Mary Gilkey Library	1,910	40.00	.25	.52	0.00	11,781	21	1,910
Vernonia Public Library	2,180	20.00	.50	.92	0.00	8,579	73	2,180
Stanfield Public Library	2,697	32.00	.85	1.26	0.00	6,025	0	2,697
Emma Humphrey Library	2,934	20.00	.50	.68	0.00	13,689	1	2,934
Warrenton Community Library	3,940	17.00	.25	.25	0.00	8,430	15	3,940
Umatilla Public Library	5,087	32.00	1.25	.98	0.00	14,500	0	5,087
Milton-Freewater Public Library	9,307	39.00	2.00	.86	1.00	27,609	66	9,307
Astoria Public Library	10,130	59.00	3.38	1.33	0.00	78,622	count not available	10,130
Lebanon Public Library	11,995	55.00	5.33	1.78	0.00	25,575	83	11,995
Stayton Public Library	15,112	45.50	4.61	1.22	0.00	39,619	95	15,112
Crook County Library	15,900	61.00	6.20	1.56	0.00	30,813	319	15,900
Jefferson County Library	16,900	50.00	3.75	.89	1.00	43,387	117	16,900
La Grande Public Library	18,910	46.00	5.40	1.14	0.00	47,090	408	18,910
Sandy Public Library	22,687	57.00	6.00	1.06	0.00	35,263	80	22,687
Woodburn Public Library	26,504	48.00	9.84	1.49	0.40	69,612	64	26,504
Underserved Population								178,368
Count of Libraries								31

Table 3: 1996-1997 Underserved Oregonians from Library Benchmark Report

- Every year incremental growth in public library staffing moves a number of libraries toward satisfying the staffing level criteria of one paid staff person per 4,000 persons in the service area. It is expected that this incremental growth will help a few of the libraries currently not meeting this criterion to satisfy it in the future. However, it is also expected that staff decreases resulting from Measure 47/50 in a few libraries will cause setbacks in meeting this criterion in next year's benchmark progress report.
- The residents of a handful of libraries serving populations over 10,000 persons also end up being categorized as underserved because their jurisdictions have not traditionally employed a professional librarian with a Master of Library Science degree, or have made a decision not to re-employ a professional. Retirements and future hiring decisions will most likely affect this criterion's satisfaction by these libraries.


NEW USES OF THE LIBRARY BENCHMARK

The acceptance of the library benchmark by the Oregon Progress Board, and its ongoing maintenance by the State Library has led to its being used in other ways. The federal Institute of Museum and Library Services that administers the new Library Services and Technology Act stressed the importance of evaluating the use of LSTA funds in each state. The LSCA/LSTA Advisory Council subcommittee developing the Oregon LSTA Five-Year State Plan accepted the State Librarian's proposal to establish LSTA Benchmarks to assist in evaluating the use of Oregon's LSTA funds. One of the LSTA Benchmarks is "the percentage of Oregonians served by a public library that meets minimum service criteria" - the same library benchmark described in this article. When the Council and State Library Board were

adopting the LSTA Five-Year State Plan and the LSTA Benchmarks, it was expected that LSTA competitive grants submitted under certain LSTA priorities would advance the number of libraries meeting the library benchmark.

State Library staff delivered a report about the current library benchmark progress report to the State Library Board at their December 4, 1998 meeting. Board interest in developing some strategies for increasing the number of libraries meeting the library benchmark surfaced. The State Librarian and Library Development staff engaged in some planning discussions with a Board representative. On January 22, 1999 they made a report to the LSTA Advisory Council, and sought the Council's interest in developing a special LSTA Benchmarks grant program. The Council encouraged the development of a draft application packet to review at their May 25, 1999 meeting.

THE LIBRARY BENCHMARK AS A PLANNING TOOL

Local library leaders can use the library benchmark as a tool for improving service in their communities. The specific criteria that are not met by a local library can be targeted in planning sessions, and strategies developed for how the library might satisfy them. Short-term strategies to move a library from underserving citizens to adequately serving them may include incremental budget increases, a volunteer program (including training) for providing children's programming, fund development efforts for enhancing the library's basic support, and, applying for grants, particularly if an LSTA Benchmarks grant program is offered. Ideally, the planning effort will also identify major governance and funding changes to accomplish as the means to move service to citizens into the excellent level. 

Ten Years and Growing

(continued from page 3)

Goal No. 1 of the National Education Goals states: *By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.* Too many children are coming to kindergarten lacking the language and cognitive foundation necessary for school success. Busy, stressed parents do not spend sufficient time talking, reading, singing or interacting with their children. Child care providers are often under-educated and under-trained for the vitally important work they do. Early childhood is the critical time for brain devel-

opment. Adults must recognize their role and responsibility in a child's development. Influencing the attitudes and behaviors of one adult can impact the children in that adult's circle and many more children to come. As we begin the twelve month countdown to the year 2000, the goal feels much too large but the goal keeps us moving forward. *Early Childhood Resources* has made great strides in the past ten years and will continue to support adults through training, resources and inspiration. 