Introduction
On Friday, June 22, the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project released the report “Libraries, Patrons, and E-books,” as part of a series of research activities funded by a $1.4 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to study the role of libraries in users’ lives and in their communities. The three-year grant, announced in October 2011, starts with a portrait of new technology adoption with a special focus on e-book readers, tablet computers and the new challenges and opportunities they bring to libraries. A first short report was issued in January, followed by a larger report (“The Rise of E-Reading”) in March that attracted significant media attention.

The newest report examines the roles that libraries play in the shifting digital terrain as e-reading, tablet computers and e-book readers become more popular. Particularly as it came on the heels of Penguin Group USA announcing a new pilot with libraries in New York, the report has garnered quite a lot of press coverage since its release. The report offers opportunities – and perhaps also some challenges – for libraries around the country to tell their own e-book stories. This backgrounder is intended to briefly share report highlights, key messages developed by the American Library Association Digital Content and Libraries Working Group, and additional data and resources that may assist libraries as they communicate about this greatly expanding area of library collections and services.

The Pew Internet Project is a nonprofit, nonpartisan “fact tank.” It is up to libraries and our supporters to translate their data into action and advocacy. Comments/questions? Send an email to dcwg-input@ala.org. Keep on top of breaking news related to libraries and digital content at the American Libraries E-Content blog.

Highlights from “Libraries, Patrons, and E-books”
The headline: 12% of e-book readers have borrowed an e-book from their library
The Pew Internet Project has now provided libraries with a baseline for measuring how well we are able to reach and support e-book readers with our electronic collections.

Key messages:

- We all recognize that e-books are still in the early stages of adoption. The number of public libraries that offer e-books has doubled in the past five years (76% now compared with 38%). We expect the number of e-book readers borrowing from their libraries to grow over the coming years and are encouraged that Pew found that “e-book users are quite attached to their libraries” and that “they [libraries] are very important to them and their families.”
- The report also found that many people would like to know more about borrowing e-books from their libraries. We can help people start using e-books and e-reader devices.
Make it local

- When did your library introduce e-books?
- What has been the response (e.g., circulations, patron feedback, changes in library buying patterns)?
- What else have you learned that might be of interest—such as favorite titles or genres?
- What are some compelling examples of how patron access to e-books resulted in beneficial outcomes?

The subheadline: 62% of people don’t know they can borrow e-books from their library

Holy cats! Pew Internet Project Director Lee Rainie put it this way: “It was a genuine surprise to see these data, especially after all of the attention that has been paid to the tension between libraries and major book publishers about whether many of the most popular books should be available for lending by libraries. E-book borrowing is gaining a foothold in the library world and will likely grow much more in the future as more people become aware of it.” Unfortunately, even people who presumably have an interest in knowing about library e-book lending, don’t know, including 58% of library card holders, 53% of tablet computer owners and 48% of owners of e-book reading devices (e.g., Kindle or NOOK).

Key messages:

- Clearly there is an opportunity here for libraries to step up our outreach and increase public awareness of all the 21st century services our libraries have to offer readers, thinkers, entrepreneurs and dreamers. ALA and libraries welcome this challenge and encourage our users, partners and the media to help us get the word out.
- Of course, awareness is not enough. When people go to their public libraries to borrow e-books, they should find books from all of our publishers. As Pew points out, there are difficulties with respect to e-book availability.
- Libraries cannot lend what they cannot obtain. ALA and others continue to call on these publishers to make their e-books available to all—which includes libraries and at fair prices and terms.
- Budget constraints also are a continuing problem. At a time when public libraries must invest in important new services such as e-books, many libraries are facing budget cuts. Reduced access to library services hurts everyone in a community, but particularly those who rely most on the library to stay connected and informed.
- Library lending promotes literacy, creativity, and innovation—all critical for being competitive in the global knowledge economy.

Make it local:

- Depending on how long you have offered e-books, can you show growth in usage over time? How are you getting the word out?
- How have publisher restrictions or budget constraints impacted your library services?
Very good news: 69% of people report the library is important to them and their family.

There is a lot of data and information in the report’s 80 pages, so don’t stop at the headlines. Pew also asked about library card holders and the place of the library in our communities.

Key messages:

- The new report underscores that libraries continue to be a vital part of people’s lives in the digital age. Close to 70 percent of people say their local library is important to them and their family, and a majority of adults 16 years and older (58 percent) are library cardholders.
- The report also confirms that library patrons make a great target market for publishers. Library card holders:
  - Read a lot (double the number of books as non-library users)
  - Read widely (are more likely than others to say they read for every reason Pew queried, including for pleasure, for work, for research or to keep up with events)
  - Buy books (are twice as likely to have bought their most recent book than to have borrowed it), and
  - Are avid technology users (are more likely than non-library users to be Internet users and to own cell phones, desktop and laptop computers)

Make it local:

- What percent of people in your community are library card holders? Has this increased in recent years?
- Do you have any data about your library patrons and their interests and/or uses of the library you can share?
- What new services are you offering that people really like and/or you really want them to know about?

More good news: Many people would like to learn more about borrowing e-books.

Pew also asked all those who do not already borrow e-books at the public library how likely it would be that they might avail themselves of certain resources if their library were to offer them. The results:

- 46% of those who do not currently borrow e-books from libraries say they would be “very” or “somewhat” likely to borrow an e-reading device that came loaded with a book they wanted to read.
- 32% of those who do not currently borrow e-books say they would be “very” or “somewhat” likely to take a library class on how to download e-books onto handheld devices.
- 32% of those who do not currently borrow e-books say they would be “very” or “somewhat” likely to take a course at a library in how to use an e-reader or tablet computer.
African-Americans, Hispanics, and those who live in lower-income households are more likely than others to say they would be interested in borrowing pre-loaded e-reading devices and taking classes about how to use the devices and download books.

Key message:
- This research resonates on several levels: We know library use “feeds” the reading habit, and our patrons are heavy readers, book buyers and technology users. We also know people look to librarians to support digital literacy and learn new skills that lead to wider adoption of technology. The double- and triple-digit growth in demand for e-books, desire for access to e-reader devices, and demand for e-reading help and classes clearly express a hunger for these services.

Make it local:
- Does your library lend e-reading devices? What has been the community response?
- Does your library offer classes or courses? What has been the response?
- Are you considering offering classes or courses?

One more highlight: E-book borrowers appreciate the selection of e-books at their local library, but they often encounter difficulty borrowing.
Focusing on those who do borrow e-books from libraries, two-thirds say the selection is good at their library. Pew also asked those who borrowed e-books whether they had experienced difficulties that could be associated with such borrowing, and found that:
- 56% of e-book borrowers from libraries say that at one point or another they had tried to borrow a particular book and found that the library did not carry it.
- 52% of e-book borrowers say that at one point or another they discovered there was a waiting list to borrow the book.
- 18% of e-book borrowers say that at one point or another they found that an e-book they were interested in was not compatible with the e-reading device they were using.

Key messages:
- Libraries cannot lend what they cannot obtain. ALA and others continue to call on publishers to make their e-books available libraries at fair prices and terms.
- Budget constraints also are a continuing problem. At a time when public libraries must invest in important new services such as e-books, many libraries are facing budget cuts.
- Libraries provide free access to all to help build a literate nation. As more and more content is delivered digitally, we cannot afford to lock down books and lock out readers.
- Libraries are instrumental to help readers find authors, and authors find readers. We do this by selecting locally relevant materials, and through author readings, recommendations, book clubs and other collaborations with authors and publishers.

Read all the key findings from the report here, and get additional recent data on libraries and technology (including e-books) here.