

COMMUNITY HUBS

Libraries are the only public spaces where people can find trusted information, community, and connection; borrow books, music, and “things” like laptops, musical instruments, and exercise equipment; access art, culture, sports, games, and technology; and get support for lifelong learning, health and wellness, job seeking and career development—all free of charge.

Library buildings are a source of civic pride. Library spaces and programs bring people together. Library services—including volunteer programs and literacy programs—help people become more engaged with their communities. California’s 54 library bookmobiles¹ take essential services out to the community.

Libraries serve as “bedrocks of civil society ... it’s important that institutions like libraries get the recognition they deserve. ... They are the kinds of places where the public, private, and philanthropic sectors can work together to reach for something higher than the bottom line.”^a

Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People*

Communities are stronger when their members work together. Across the state, public libraries partner with private sector, non-profit, and other government entities to connect people to essential services and information resources, and support new citizens, vulnerable populations, children, teens, job seekers, and entrepreneurs.

BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES

- Public libraries are commonly referred to as a “third place”—neither home nor workspace. Third places are “*the informal spaces that are often mainstays in a neighborhood, places where both random and intentional in-person relationships are made.*”²
- The Aspen Institute asserts that the library’s “*physical presence provides an anchor for economic development and neighborhood revitalization, and helps to strengthen social bonds and community identity.*”³
- In 2016, 91 percent of Americans agreed that the closure of their local library would negatively impact their community. Some 66 percent of them felt the impact on their communities would be major. An equal number said closure of their local library would directly impact themselves and their families.⁴



- The meeting spaces and social connections that libraries offer help individual users create stronger communities, especially in rural areas where neighbors aren’t as close together.⁵
- Seventy-three percent of Americans say their local libraries promote a sense of community across different groups, while 65 percent see libraries as gathering places for addressing community challenges.⁶

FOSTERING ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

- Through reading, library users gain empathy for others, strengthen friendships, and increase their understanding of and engagement with social issues.⁷ Book readers are 74 percent more likely to volunteer than non-readers.⁸
- Adults with greater education and literacy levels are more than twice as likely to vote in national elections. Recent immigrants with strong English-language skills are more than twice as likely to become citizens as those with limited proficiency.⁹
- Two of the four most popular volunteer activities nationwide are tutoring and food collection and distribution.¹⁰ Library programs like homework help, California Library Literacy Services, and Lunch at the Library, which provides free meals to children when schools are closed, give communities opportunities for volunteer service.

In Butte County, the library's literacy coach makes about 230 visits a year, delivering family literacy services countywide. Library staff also partner with community organizations like the Gridley Farm Labor Camp to provide library access, conversation practice, and computer services to migrant workers.^b

In Solano County, library staff placed books for boys of color in barbershops. Young boys read the books during their frequent haircuts. Barbers say the books encourage the boys to read and provide reading materials for families who aren't able to visit their local library.^c



The community hub at El Dorado County Library offers classes, groups, and activities for expectant parents and families with children ages 0–18. The hub brings together a team of local community agencies including First 5 El Dorado, and El Dorado County's Early Care and Education Planning Council, Child Abuse Prevention Council, and Health and Human Services Agency.^d

Atadena Library District, Pasadena Public Library, and Sierra Madre Public Library are at the heart of a local network of early childhood hubs, named Growing Together Pasadena. Well-established community organizations provide coordinated services and support to families. The hubs focus on kindergarten-readiness and offer welcoming spaces, individualized resources and referrals, parenting support, and opportunities for children to grow in key developmental areas.^e

NOTES

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- a. Klinenberg, Eric. 2018. *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*. New York: Crown.
- b. Project results reported by Butte County Library to the California State Library, 2019–2020.
- c. Project results reported by Solano County Library to the California State Library, 2019–2020.
- d. El Dorado County Library. 2021. "Community Hubs at the Library." Placerville, CA: El Dorado County Library. <https://eldoradolibrary.org/community-hubs/>.
- e. Collaborate Pasadena. 2021. "Growing Together Pasadena." Pasadena, CA: Collaborate Pasadena. <https://www.collaboratepasadena.org/growingtogetherpasadena>.

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