

Public Libraries: Pillars of Social Infrastructure

Libraries are a vital part of social infrastructure, providing accessible spaces for community engagement, educational opportunities, and cultural enrichment that foster social cohesion and support the well-being of individuals across all ages and demographics. Libraries today are being designed and redesigned with this multi-functional role in mind.

Communities are **investing millions of dollars** to construct state-of-the-art, **sustainable and purposeful buildings** that stand out as architectural beacons for their cities and towns. Libraries also serve as a refuge, **creating a peaceful environment** conducive to reading, studying or simply taking a break from the hustle and bustle of daily life. It's a space where individuals can escape distractions and immerse themselves in quiet activities without interruption.

Libraries are **experts in listening to the community** and identifying ways to advance personal enrichment and encourage lifelong learning. From knitting circles and chess clubs, language workshops and author talks, to children's story times and retirement planning, libraries offer **programming for a wide range of ages and personal interests**.



What other institution can offer storytime for children, entrepreneurial services and financial literacy for adults, programs ranging from author talks to musical acts, and a place to work remotely or get on a Zoom call with people from across the world?

Libraries Can Unite a Lonely, Divided Nation ([Bloomberg City Lab](#))

*Richard Florida, Professor, University of Toronto
Brooks Rainwater, President and CEO, Urban Libraries Council*





Cambridge Public Library (MA)

In 2015, the City of Cambridge committed to an **Action Plan to become a Net Zero** community by 2040. The Valente Branch Library is one of the city's first projects to be built under this mandate, and the building serves as a **model for integrating sustainability and wellness** into library design. The building integrates durable and healthy materials with a variety of seating options to create a comfortable space for everyone and was built with a focus on flexibility, allowing the community space to open for larger gatherings. Additionally, the branch has five play spaces, a reading garden, and a bocce court to support physical and emotional wellness. Since opening in 2019, circulation, programming, and patronage have more than doubled.



Columbus Metropolitan Public Library (OH)

The Columbus Metropolitan Library serves Franklin County in neighborhoods large and small, urban and suburban, providing programs and services for customers of all ages and from all walks of life. In 2013, it began a **multiphase aspirational building program** to bring 21st century libraries to 10 communities. Since then, it has added 141,300 new square feet of library space, transformed its outdoor gathering space at Main Library into Kaufman Plaza – a fun and engaging place for all ages to enjoy – and expanded its goal to renovate more branches. Additionally, more than 20 percent of the value of construction contracts were awarded to minority and women business enterprises, exceeding the goal set by the Columbus Metropolitan Library Board of Trustees.



WHAT'S AHEAD FOR LIBRARIES: PRESERVING LIBRARIES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Libraries are essential public infrastructure that need to be preserved for future generations. Building tax credits, historic site preservation designations and new state block grants can help libraries continue to serve their communities.

We seek to bolster support for infrastructure through federal grants, extending historic site preservation to libraries, including public libraries in future infrastructure legislation and advocate for a national public library infrastructure bill. We ask Congress to support the reauthorization of the Museum and Library Services Act and support increased funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and its broad mission of supporting all types of libraries, state library agencies, archives and museums across the United States.