

Your Public Library: An Investment Into Your Community

When it's time to talk about the library's tax rate with citizens, public library trustees often feel at a loss. For those who are not library users and are therefore unfamiliar with the wealth of materials, programs and resources that the library provides, it can be difficult to express how important the library is to the community. Emphasizing the library's role in the community overall can help taxpayers understand the library's importance to citizens who may never check out books or attend programs.

Libraries Offer Public Assistance...

Access to most public services such as unemployment insurance, Medicare, or WIC, requires signing up online. The access that the library provides through computers and connectivity is vital in all counties, but especially those that recently lost their local workforce development/unemployment offices. Public libraries have stepped up to become a benefits portal for residents who are sometimes over 50 miles from a regional benefits office. Children who rely on their schools for access to food look to public libraries when school is out. It's not just Summer Feeding programs, either; public libraries across the state participate in or initiate programs that provide food for children after school hours or on weekends.

...and Assistance to the Public Agencies in Your Community

It's not just public assistance that has moved from local offices to the online realm. Everything from the driver's manual to tax forms are no longer printed and must be accessed online, which for many means a trip to the library. Other public agencies and community organizations rely on public libraries for everything from parenting classes to hunter education classes to space for a polling place for elections. Local law enforcement often uses the library's WI-FI without even entering the building -- especially in areas where cell coverage is spotty. Local schools depend on the public library for access to WI-FI and other resources for their students after hours; schools that distribute snow day packets encourage students who do not have internet at home to go to the public library to complete their assignments.

Libraries are Important to the Local Economy

Public libraries play a vital – but often invisible – role in the local economies of communities across Kentucky. Some ways libraries support the economy include:

- Acting as a hub for economic development organizations that have “job clubs” and providing other economic/employment-related opportunities. Libraries help local employers to find job hunters, entrepreneurs to build their brands, and local economic initiatives like Farmer's Markets to get off the ground
- Providing computers/connectivity for job applicants. Many employers exclusively accept online applications for employment. For those who do not have a computer or internet access, applying for jobs is only possible by visiting the library.
- Serving as a small business center. The public library is often the only place in the community where one can make copies, scan a document, or send/receive a fax.
- Returning local money to the local economy. Public libraries provide jobs, support local merchants and trades, and influence the decisions of individuals and industries that see a local library as a good indicator of the health of a community when considering a move.
- Providing WI-FI access to businesses, visitors to the community and to the community itself. Kentucky public libraries are known as a place where free WI-FI is available, even after hours in many communities.

Your public library's resources are valuable to even to those who do not use the library in a traditional sense. The tax money collected by your library directly benefits the local economy and supports public agencies (even other taxing districts)!