

Audiobooks and Public Libraries

2024
Audiobook
Survey
Report



Adult and Youth
Audio Collections
in U.S. Public Libraries



Public Library Audiobook Survey 2024

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Executive Summary

Methodology

LJ/SLJ worked with representatives from the Audio Publishers Association (APA) to develop a survey about audiobooks in America's public libraries in order to understand the library perspective on formats, budgeting, licensing terms, and selection influences. Survey questions were framed for both adult and youth audio collections.

A survey invite was emailed to a random sample of library selectors and adult/youth services librarians on September 11, 2024, with a reminder to reply on September 20. Respondents were offered the chance to receive a summary of results and to be included in a drawing to win a \$100 electronic Visa® gift card. The survey closed October 21, 2024 with 486 U.S. public library responses.

The sample was screened to include only library staff who are involved in recommending/purchasing audiobooks for their library. Respondents were branched to a line of either adult or children's/YA questioning based on their responses. The data was cleaned, tabulated, and analyzed by the LJ/SLJ research department. The data is unweighted.

Takeaways

- Audiobooks are a vital part of any public library's adult and children's/YA collections.
- Libraries are in the midst of a format transition away from physical media (like CDs) to digital audiobooks (eaudiobooks)—the latter outcirculate the former.
- Libraries have increasing difficulties buying new titles on physical media, hastening the shift to digital audiobook.
- Just as public libraries have been reducing their print book collections, so, too, are they starting to consider reducing their physical audiobook collections.
- On the children's/YA side, physical media remain popular—not necessarily CDs, but hybrid book/audioplayers like Playaways. Even those libraries that are eliminating audiobook CDs are keeping Playaways and the like.
- Audiobooks account for, on average, less than 20 percent of their overall materials budgets. More spending is being allotted to digital than physical audiobooks.
- Libraries struggle with the various access models, although for now they seem generally content with simultaneous use models for new titles and one copy/one user for backlist or older titles.
- In terms of content, fiction is far more popular than nonfiction.
- Only libraries serving large populations have audiobooks in languages other than English.
- Choice of narrator is an important criterion when selecting an audiobook title.
- Libraries are vehement in their opposition to non-human or "AI" narrators.



Please estimate the percentage of your library's total ADULT audiobook circulation that comes from DIGITAL versus PHYSICAL audiobooks.	ADULT audiobooks	CHILDREN'S/ YA audiobooks
Physical vs. digital circulation	30% physical/70% digital	44% physical/56% digital
Physical vs. digital spending	29% physical/71% digital	45% physical/55% digital
Fiction vs. nonfiction circulation	78% fiction/22% nonfiction	87% fiction/13% nonfiction
Audiobooks share of total materials circulation	12.5%	8.7%
Audiobooks share of total materials budget	11.8%	8.5%
Exclusive audio borrowers (do not borrow other materials)	26%	13%
Percent of audiobook collection in languages other than English	2.3%	1.8%

Audiobook Collections and Acquisition

Almost all (98%) of our survey respondents said that they have adult audiobook titles, while 89 percent have children's audiobooks. Seventy-nine percent offer young adult audiobooks to their patrons.

What types of audiobooks does your library currently offer?	% of respondents
Adult audiobooks	98%
YA audiobooks	79%
Children's audiobooks	89%
We have no audiobooks	1%

Thirty-five percent of public libraries independently acquire audiobooks, while 7 percent acquire them through a regional library cooperative or consortium. Nearly six out of ten (57%) acquire audiobooks through both means.

Does your library independently license/acquire audiobooks or does it receive access through a regional or state library cooperative/consortium?	% of respondents
Independently license/acquire audiobooks	35%
Get audiobook access through a regional library cooperative	7%
Both	57%



Audiobook Formats

Just about all of our survey respondents (99%) have audiobooks as physical CDs in their adult audiobook collections, while 91 percent have CDs for their children’s/YA audiobook collections. Ninety-two percent offer digital audiobooks (aka eaudiobooks) in their adult collections, while 88 percent offer them in their children’s/YA collections. For their children’s/YA collections, 60 percent offer print books with an integrated audiobook. Between 41 and 45 percent offer preloaded audiobook players for both adults and children/YA.

<i>Which ADULT and CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook formats does your library currently have available?</i>	<i>% of respondents—ADULT audiobooks</i>	<i>% of respondents—CHILDREN’S/YA audiobooks</i>
Digital audiobooks	92%	91%
CDs	99%	45%
Preloaded audiobook players (e.g., Playaways, Yoto Players, etc.)	41%	60%
Children’s print books with integrated ready-to-play audiobook (e.g., Vox Books, Wonderbooks)	N/A	1%
Other	5%	88%

Audiobook Circulation

For adult audiobooks, digital audiobooks account for 70 percent of circulation and physical audiobooks account for 30 percent. For children’s/YA audiobooks, digital audiobooks account for 56 percent of circulation and physical audiobooks account for 44 percent.

<i>Please estimate the percentage of your library’s total ADULT audiobook circulation that comes from DIGITAL versus PHYSICAL audiobooks.</i>	<i>% of ADULT audiobook circulation</i>	<i>% of CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook circulation</i>
Digital audiobooks	70%	56%
Physical audiobooks	30%	44%

For 80 percent of libraries, audiobooks in general account for less than 20 percent of total adult circulation, and for 89 percent of libraries, audiobooks account for less than 20 percent of total children’s/YA circulation.

Nearly half (46%) of public libraries have seen their circulation of adult digital audiobooks increase significantly over the past year. This increase of digital audiobook circulation has come at the expense of physical audiobooks, which had corresponding declines in circulation.

As for children’s/YA audiobooks, 11 percent said physical audiobooks increased significantly, while 43 percent said they increased moderately. Circulation of digital audiobooks has been declining—20 percent of respondents said it decreased moderately and 21 percent said it decreased significantly in the past year. Thirty-five percent reported that circulation for both physical and digital audiobooks has remained the same.



How has your ADULT and CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook circulation changed in the last year?	% of respondents—ADULT audiobooks	% of respondents—CHILDREN'S/YA audiobooks
<i>Physical audiobooks</i>		
Increased significantly	2%	11%
Increased moderately	8%	43%
Stayed the same	17%	35%
Decreased moderately	37%	2%
Decreased significantly	33%	1%
N/A	2%	9%
<i>Digital audiobooks</i>		
Increased significantly	46%	6%
Increased moderately	44%	18%
Stayed the same	4%	35%
Decreased moderately	0%	20%
Decreased significantly	0%	21%
N/A	6%	4%

Fiction vs. Nonfiction

Fiction audiobooks circulate far more than nonfiction—78 percent of adult audiobook circulation is fiction while 22 percent is nonfiction. As for children's/YA audiobooks, 87 percent of audiobook circulation is fiction vs. 13 percent nonfiction.

Please estimate how your ADULT and CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook circulation breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction.	% of ADULT audiobook circulation	% of CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook circulation
Fiction audiobooks	78%	87%
Nonfiction audiobooks	22%	13%

Audiobook Genres

The top adult fiction audiobook genres are thrillers and suspense titles (selected by 23 percent of respondents), followed by mysteries (20%), general fiction (20%), and romance (15%).

What three fiction genres are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library?	% of respondents
Thrillers/Suspense	23%
General fiction	20%
Mysteries	20%
Romance	15%
Historical fiction	9%
Literary fiction	4%
Fantasy	3%
Inspirational fiction	2%
Science Fiction	1%
Classics	0%
Horror	0%
Other	0%

The top adult nonfiction genres are biographies (25%), history (15%), self help (12%), and memoirs (12%).

<i>What three nonfiction genres are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library?</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
Biographies	25%
History	15%
Self Help	12%
Memoirs	12%
True Crime	8%
Politics	4%
Religion or Spirituality	4%
Humor	3%
Social Science	3%
Travel/Adventure	2%
Psychology	2%
Cooking	1%
Business	1%
Health & Fitness	1%
Parenting	1%
Popular Science	1%
Other Nonfiction	1%
Poetry	0%
Environment & Nature	0%
Sports	0%

Multiple Format Circulation

Adult library patrons tend to borrow formats other than audiobooks—74 percent of libraries say patrons borrow multiple formats (this can include print books, ebooks, video, etc.). Still one-fourth (26%) say their adult patrons borrow only audiobooks. Child/YA patrons (or their parents) are inclined to borrow multiple formats more than adults—87 percent of libraries say patrons borrow multiple formats while only 13% say their child/YA patrons borrow only audiobooks.

<i>Thinking about your library's ADULT and CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook borrowers, what percentage would you estimate exclusively borrow audiobooks and what percent borrow other formats as well (e.g., ebooks, print books)?</i>	<i>% of respondents—ADULT audiobooks</i>	<i>% of respondents—CHILDREN'S/YA audiobooks</i>
exclusively borrow audio	26%	13%
borrow multiple formats	74%	87%

Audiobook Access Models

Public libraries say that on average 61 percent of their digital audiobook collection is based on a one copy/one user access model, 19 percent is based on simultaneous access, 30 percent is based on metered access, and 23 percent on pay per use.

<i>In percentage terms, please estimate how the access models below apply to your library's digital audiobook collection?</i>	<i>Average % of audiobook collection</i>
One copy/one user	61%
Simultaneous access	19%
Metered access	30%
Pay per use	23%

In terms of which access model public libraries prefer, 48 percent prefer one copy/one user for new titles and 56 percent prefer it for backlist titles; 35 percent prefer simultaneous use for new titles, and 23 percent prefer it for backlist titles. Metered access and pay per use are not preferred by very many libraries.

<i>What audiobook access model do you most prefer for new releases and what is your preference for backlist titles?</i>	<i>% of respondents—NEW RELEASES</i>	<i>% of respondents—BACKLIST TITLES</i>
One copy/one user	48%	56%
Simultaneous use	35%	23%
Metered access	8%	7%
Other	6%	6%
Pay per use	4%	8%



Audiobooks and Library Patrons

Supported Users

According to 91 percent of public libraries, audiobook collections are ideally suited for commuters. Seniors (77%) are the second most supported patron base for audiobooks, followed by “multitaskers” (76%), or people looking for something to play in the background as they are doing other things.

Would you say your audiobook collection particularly supports any of the following patrons?	% of respondents
Commuters/Travelers	91%
Seniors	77%
Multitaskers (e.g., crafters, runners, etc.)	76%
Blind people/those with low vision	60%
Reluctant readers	52%
Struggling readers	50%
Emerging readers	46%
Auditory learners	46%
People with learning disabilities	39%
People with physical disabilities and/or differences	36%
English language learners	34%
People with intellectual disabilities	24%
Listeners of languages other than English	19%
Other	3%

Foreign Language Audiobooks

For slightly more than one-half (56%) of public libraries, titles in non-English languages account for between 1 and 5 percent of their adult audiobook collections. One-third (35%) have no audiobooks in non-English languages. For children’s/YA audiobooks, for 56 percent of public libraries, titles in non-English languages account for between 1 and 5 percent of their children’s/YA audiobook collections, while 33% percent of public libraries have no children’s/YA audiobooks in non-English languages.

Approximately what percent of your CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook collection is represented by titles recorded in languages other than English?	% of respondents— ADULT audiobooks	% of respondents— CHILDREN’S/ YA audiobooks
0 percent	35%	33%
1-5 percent	56%	54%
6-10 percent	6%	13%
11-15 percent	3%	
16-20 percent		1%

Audiobook Promotion

The primary means of promoting a library's audiobook collection is the library's website (selected by 65% of libraries), followed by signage in the library (59%), librarian recommendations (59%), displays (58%), and the library's catalog/MARC records (56%).

How does your library promote its audiobook collection to the public?	% of respondents— ADULT audiobooks
Website	65%
Signage	59%
Librarian recommendations/Listening advisory	59%
Displays	58%
Catalog/MARC records	56%
Cloud library shelves (e.g., Libby, Hoopla, etc.)	52%
Social media	46%
Flyers/Bookmarks	41%
Newsletter	32%
Booklists	21%
Programming	14%
Local media (e.g., newspaper blurbs, ads)	8%
None of the above	3%
Other	1%

The vast majority (87%) of libraries have not hosted any audiobook-specific programming or other events, but those who did, identified specific events:

- Audio Booktalks.
- Audiobook-focused RA podcast in National Audiobook Month.¹
- Community read option.
- Demonstration of the LIBBY App.
- For National Audiobook Month, we had a program/audiobook club—listen to 5 audio books in a month/win a prize—and hosted a book club event.
- Not audio-specific, but many of our book club members prefer audio, so we always choose books that are available in audio.
- One location did a mini carnival to kick off getting VOX books, and we do audiobook displays to promote these collections, too.
- Overview of download resources.
- Programming to learn how to access digital collections, including eAudio.
- Programs on using Libby/Hoopla.
- We have two regular book clubs and we always make sure that the titles we choose are available in both ebook and audiobook format through either LIBBY or Hoopla.
- Author with a new book, including audio.

¹ The American Library Association's National Audiobook Month is held in June of every year: <https://www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/promo/audiobook#:~:text=Originally%20started%20by%20the%20American,1%20%2D%20June%2030%20every%20year.>

- Book clubs always have the title available digitally.
- Book clubs, programs with library reading lists.
- Eaudiobook clubs.
- Eaudio for storytimes.
- Hosted a how-to-use LIBBY and Hoopla program.
- Learning how to use LIBBY, Hoopla, and CT Lab.

Audiobooks and the Budget

Spending on Audiobooks

For nearly one-half (46%) of public libraries, adult audiobooks account for 1 to 10 percent of the library's total materials budget, while for one-fourth they account for 11 to 20 percent. For only 17 percent of libraries do adult audiobooks account for more than 21 percent of the total materials budget. Only 1 percent spend none of their budget on audiobooks. For 60 percent of public libraries, children's/YA audiobooks account for 1 to 10 percent of the library's total materials budget, while for 21 percent they account for 11 to 20 percent. For only 7 percent of libraries do children's/YA audiobooks account for more than 21 percent of the total materials budget. Five percent spend none of their budget on children's/YA audiobooks.

<i>Approximately what percent of your library's total materials budget is devoted to audiobooks (in all formats)?</i>	<i>% of respondents— ADULT audiobooks</i>	<i>% of respondents— CHILDREN'S/ YA audiobooks</i>
0 percent	1%	5%
1-10 percent	46%	60%
11-20 percent	25%	21%
21-30 percent	14%	6%
Over 30 percent	3%	1%
Don't know	11%	8%

More than one-third (36%) of public libraries expect adult audiobooks' share of their materials budget to increase over the next 12 months, while 23% expect it to decrease and 41 percent expect it to stay the same. Two-thirds (65%) of public libraries expect children's/YA audiobooks' share of the materials budget to stay about the same over the next 12 months, while just under one-fourth (22%) expect it to increase. Only 14 percent expect it to decrease.

<i>Over the next year, how do you expect the share of total materials budget devoted to ADULT and CHILDREN'S/YA audiobooks will change?</i>	<i>% of respondents— ADULT audiobooks</i>	<i>% of respondents— CHILDREN'S/ YA audiobooks</i>
Increase	36%	22%
Decrease	23%	14%
Stay the same	41%	65%

More spending is allotted to digital than physical audiobooks—for adult audiobooks, the mix is 71 percent digital, 29 percent physical. For children’s/YA audiobooks, the mix is 55 percent digital, 45 percent physical.

And more spending is allotted to fiction than nonfiction audiobooks—for adult audiobooks, the mix is 78 percent fiction, 22 percent nonfiction. For children’s/YA audiobooks, the mix is 86 percent fiction, 14 percent nonfiction.

Elimination of Physical Audiobooks

Nearly one-half (46%) report that they have no plans to eliminate physical adult audiobooks, while 16 percent are planning to—although only 3 percent say it will be within the next year. Nineteen percent don’t know, while 20 percent selected “other.”

<i>Does your library have plans to eliminate physical audiobooks for ADULTS in the near future?</i>	<i>% of respondents—ADULT audiobooks</i>	<i>% of respondents—CHILDREN’S/YA audiobooks</i>
Yes, within the next year	3%	3%
Yes, within the next two years	13%	11%
No plans	46%	53%
Don’t know	19%	11%
Other	20%	22%

Common “other” responses for adult audiobooks included:

- Discontinued in 2023.
- Eliminating books on CD not Playaways.
- Increase. Ours are widely used.
- It’s dwindling but we don’t have specific plans to get rid of it entirely.
- Keeping them on the shelves but not purchasing any more.
- We do not have current plans but it is something we are evaluating.
- In 3 to 5 years.

Common “other” responses for children’s/YA audiobooks included:

- Books on CD within the next two years.
- CD books are beginning to self-weed but Playaways are still massively popular. We just added Wonderbooks this year and these have also been hugely popular. We have no plans to eliminate physical audio books but will focus more on Playaways and Wonderbooks as they are available. We are not purchasing anymore audiobooks on cd.
- CD format will be eliminated.
- CDBs were eliminated from YA, but not Children's yet. They are considering it. YA only has Playaways for the moment and circulation has been good.
- Currently under assessment.
- Hopefully yes. They circ so poorly they are literally get dusty. There are currently no plans to stop collecting them/withdraw them.

- I'd say the CDs will probably be gone within the next few years, but we've had great success with the audio players integrated with physical books.
- Keeping an eye on circ. YA is being eliminated. Children's is another selector.
- More than likely, but no specific date set
- Probably will eliminate within five years.
- Some formats, Wonderbooks and Vox will definitely stay.
- We are assuming that they will become obsolete but we don't know how fast this will happen.
- We are no longer purchasing new audio on CD, only purchasing Playaways and Digital. We will eventually weed all of our audio CDs.
- Yes, we'll be removing the books on CD in the future as it is not always easy to get replacements.
- We no longer purchase physical audiobooks for children/young adults.

Selecting Audiobooks

Selection Criteria

The top criterion library staff takes into account when selecting audiobook titles for their collections is patron request, cited by 81 percent of respondents, followed by positive reviews (73%), and whether a title has won awards (63%).

<i>Of the factors below, which are most likely to influence your audiobook selection decisions for the library?</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
Patron request	81%
Positive audiobook reviews	73%
Award winners (Audies, etc.)	63%
Vendors' e-newsletters/websites	40%
Publishers' e-newsletters/websites	36%
Audiobook recommendation database	35%
Narrator	34%
Audio-specific e-newsletters	25%
Other	16%
Special features (e.g., musical accompaniment, full cast, sound effects, etc.)	16%
Supplementary resources (e.g., photos, downloads, additional materials, etc.)	12%

Impact of Narrator on Audiobook Selection

About one-half (48%) of public libraries say that the narrator of a title has a moderate or large impact on their selecting it for their collections, while 31 percent say it has a minimal impact. For 21 percent it has no impact.

<i>How much impact does narrator have on your audiobook selection for the library?</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
Large impact	8%
Moderate impact	40%
Minimal impact	31%
No impact	21%



Non-Human Narrators

Librarians are pretty anti-AI/non-human audiobook narrators. One-third would not purchase an audiobook with a non-human narrator, while a further 38 percent would only purchase it if there were no other choice. Twelve percent say a non-human narrator would have a large impact on their choice. Eighteen percent say it would have little or no impact on their purchase decision.

Would a non-human voiced narrator influence your library's decision to obtain an audio title?	% of respondents
Would only select if no other narrator choice is available	38%
Large impact on choice	12%
Little impact on choice	10%
No impact on choice	8%
Would not purchase	33%

Patron Selection Criteria

According to 34 percent librarians, a book's popularity is the top factor library patrons consider when choosing to check out an audiobook title, followed by the specific title (22%) and the author (19%).

What do you think patrons care about most when selecting an audiobook? Please select only one answer.	% of respondents
Popularity of book	34%
Specific title	22%
Author	19%
Subject/Genre	12%
Availability	11%
Narrator	0%
Run time	0%
Other	0%

Impact of Narrator on Patron Selection

In the previous question, we saw that librarians didn't see the narrator of an audiobook as a *primary* consideration when selecting, but 69 percent of librarians believe that it does have an impact on patron selection. Thirteen percent of respondents don't think narrator has an impact, while 18 percent don't know.

Do you think the narrator has an impact on patrons' audiobook selections?	% of respondents
Yes	69%
No	13%
Don't know	18%

Introduction

Welcome to the *Library Journal* Public Library Audiobook Survey. Since their advent, audiobooks have become popular alternatives—or even complements—to printed books. It is not uncommon for individuals to listen to audiobooks while commuting, on long road trips, while exercising, while doing household tasks or other errands, or even just while sitting and not doing anything else. For children, audiobooks are a popular supplement to printed books to help with learning to read, and they are also of use to those with learning or visual disabilities. At the same time, audiobook technology has been changing. Once upon a time, audiobooks were available as cassette tapes, to be replaced by CDs, MP3 CDs, and, currently, digital ebooks aka eaudiobooks². At the same time, a popular children’s book format includes an eaudio player built into a printed book that allows children to read along with the audiobook narrator. As our survey has found, these have become popular.

As the audiobook technological landscape has shifted, how have libraries and their patrons kept up? This report looks at the formats in which libraries offer audiobooks, the extent to which physical media are being replaced by digital audiobooks, how the respective budget allocations are changing, and so forth.

How the Data in This Report Are Organized

If you have read past *Library Journal* reports, you are familiar with how we typically present our data. The bulk of this report provides top-level survey results in chart form—in essence, the “all responses” results, or what all public library professionals surveyed said about a specific question. This provides the prevailing attitude.

Each chart is followed by a corresponding table that segments the survey responses by population served, which we divided into five categories:

- Under 10,000
- 10,000 to 24,999
- 25,000 to 99,999
- 100,000 to 499,999
- 500,000 and over

We have called out in commentary where some results in these segments caught our attention, but readers who are looking for more granularity will find much of value in these tables.

We also asked an open-ended question soliciting respondents’ comments about audiobooks in general or clarifying their responses to the survey questions. These comments are very often a useful lens through which to look at the quantitative results.

Appendix A provides the demographics of this year’s respondents, and our methodology and 2024 questionnaire are included in Appendix B.

² Various known as eAudiobooks, eAudio, or eaudio.



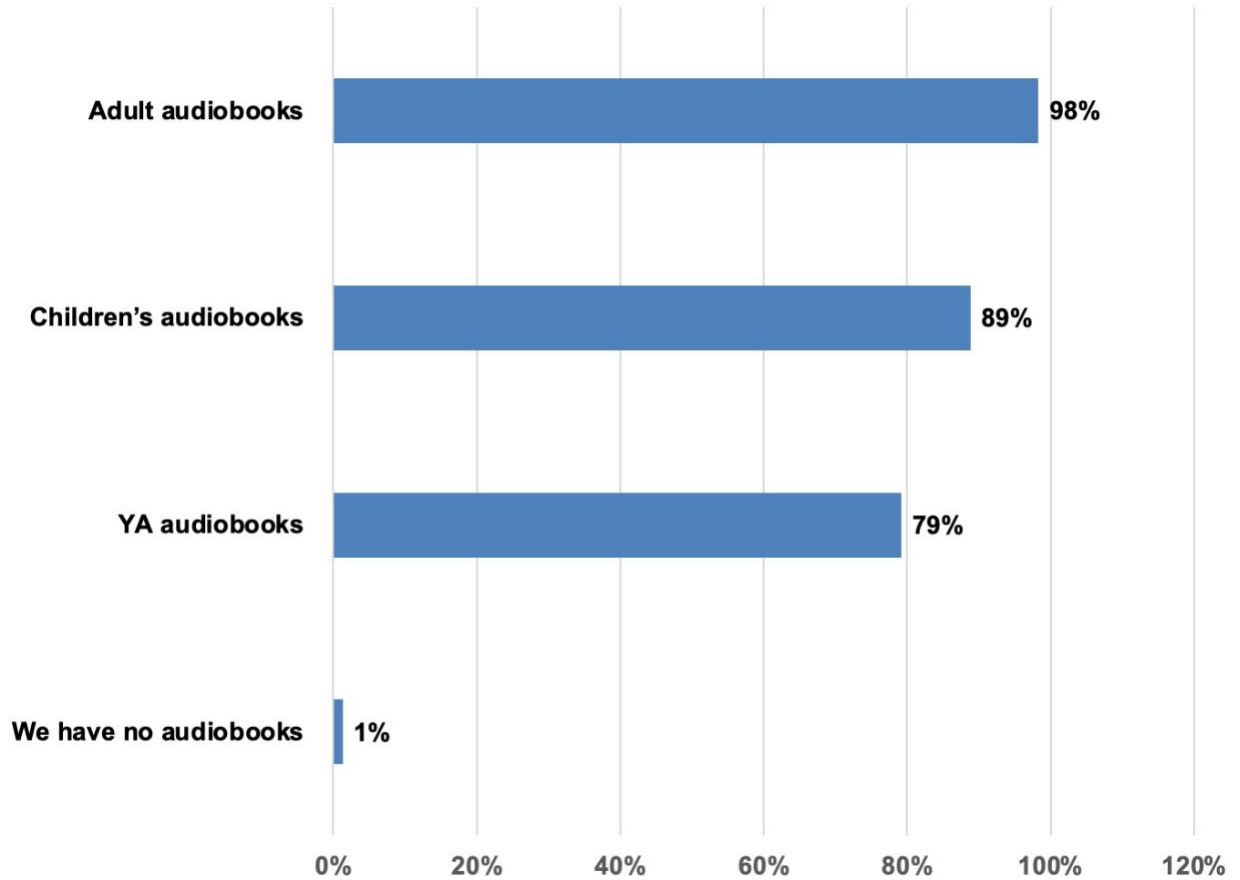
Audiobook Collections

This section will look at public libraries’ adult and children’s/young adult audiobook collections.

Types of Audiobooks

Almost all (98%) of our survey respondents said that they have adult audiobook titles, while 89 percent have children’s audiobooks. Seventy-nine percent offer young adult audiobooks to their patrons.

Figure 1. What types of audiobooks does your library currently offer? —All Respondents



Libraries serving larger populations tend to offer more kinds of audiobooks. A very tiny amount of the smallest libraries don’t offer audiobooks at all.

Table 1. What types of audiobooks does your library currently offer? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Adult audiobooks	96%	98%	99%	100%	100%
YA audiobooks	69%	77%	81%	84%	93%
Children's audiobooks	79%	90%	91%	91%	97%
We have no audiobooks	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%



Audiobook Acquisition

Just over one-third (35%) of public libraries independently acquire audiobooks, while 7 percent acquire them through a regional library cooperative or consortium. Nearly six out of ten (57%) acquire audiobooks through both means.

Figure 2. Does your library independently license/acquire audiobooks or does it receive access through a regional or state library cooperative/consortium? —All Respondents

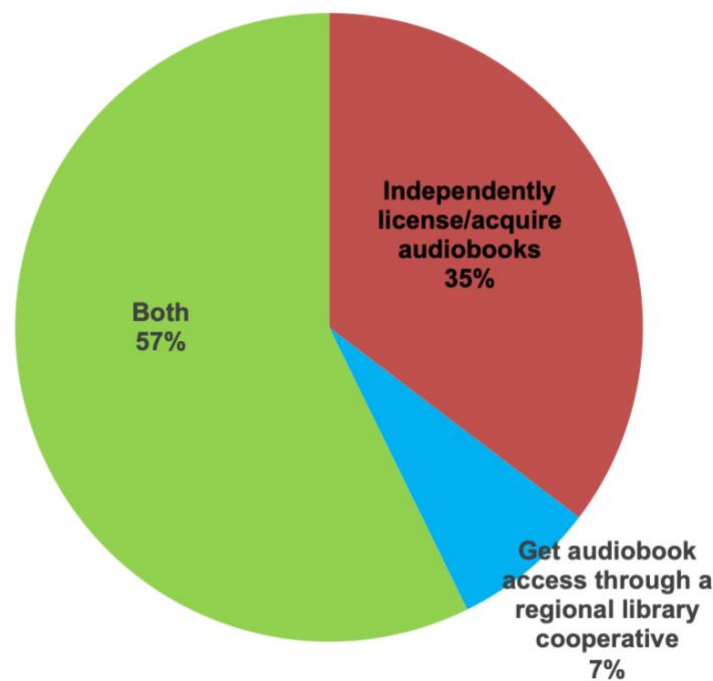


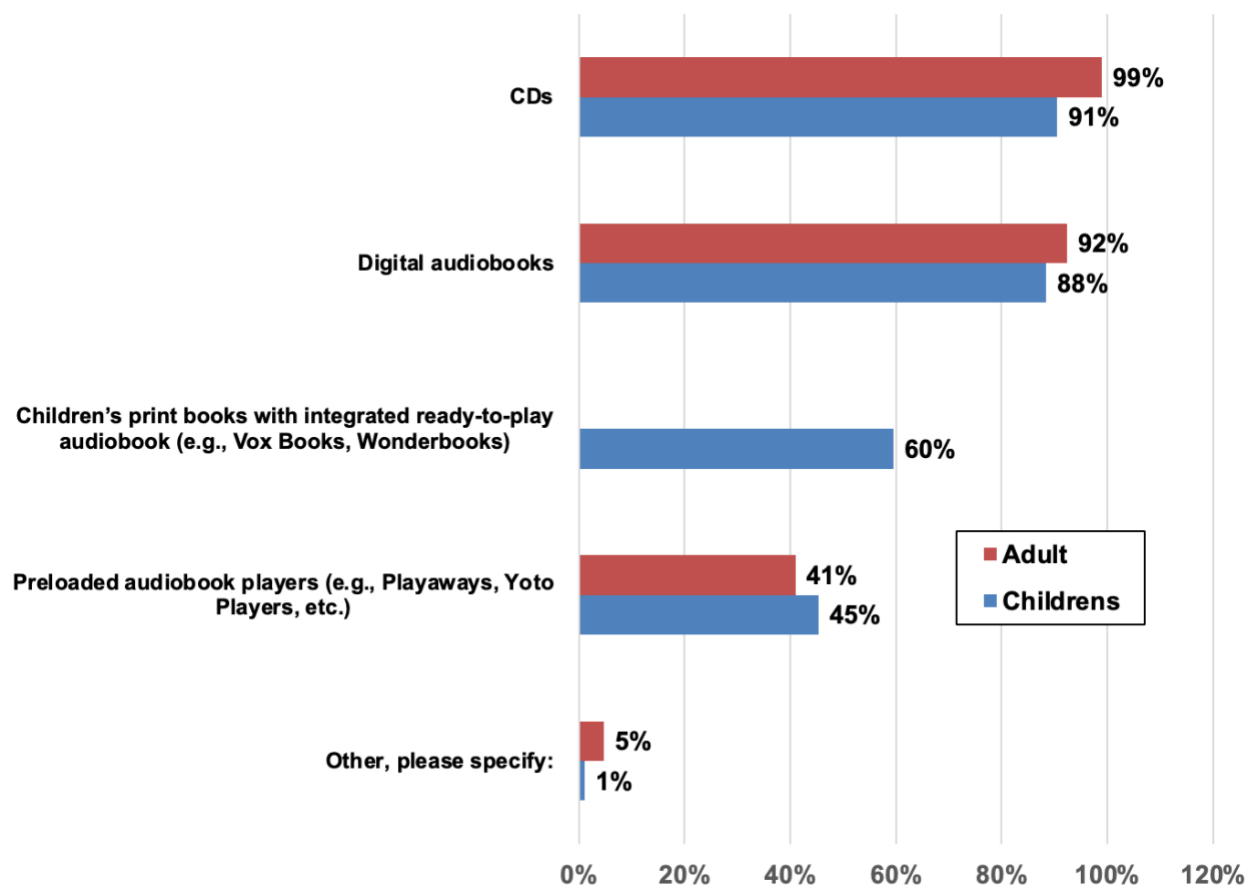
Table 2. Does your library independently license/acquire audiobooks or does it receive access through a regional or state library cooperative/consortium? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Independently license/acquire audiobooks	25%	15%	31%	56%	72%
Get audiobook access through a regional library cooperative	9%	6%	10%	4%	5%
Both	66%	79%	59%	41%	23%

Audiobook Formats

Virtually all public libraries (99%) have audiobooks as physical CDs in their adult audiobook collections, while 91 percent have CDs for their children's/YA audiobook collections. Ninety-two percent offer digital audiobooks in their adult collections, while 88 percent offer them in their children's/YA collections. For their children's/YA collections, 60 percent offer print books with an integrated audiobook. Between 41 and 45 percent offer preloaded audiobook players for both adults and children/YA.

Figure 3. Which ADULT and CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook formats does your library currently have available?
—All Respondents



The libraries with the smallest populations served are slightly less likely to have digital audiobooks for adults (71%) or children/YA (74%). Libraries serving the largest populations are the least likely to offer preloaded ebook readers for adult audiobooks, but do offer them for children's/YA audiobooks. Libraries offering children's print books with integrated ready-to-play audiobooks increase in frequency with size.

Table 3. Which ADULT and CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook formats does your library currently have available?
—Respondents by Population Served

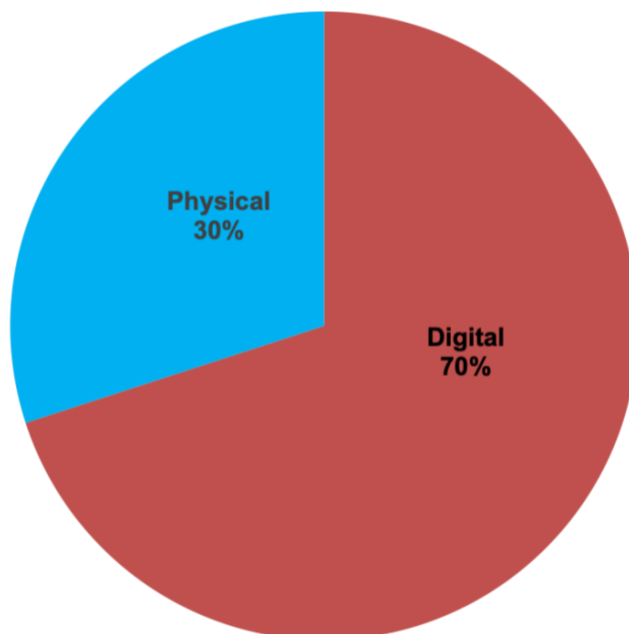
	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
<i>Adult</i>					
Digital audiobooks	71%	100%	94%	94%	100%
CDs	100%	100%	100%	94%	100%
Preloaded audiobook players (e.g., Playaways, Yoto Players, etc.)	35%	68%	47%	11%	11%
Other	0%	0%	3%	22%	0%
<i>Children/YA</i>					
Digital audiobooks	74%	93%	93%	97%	95%
CDs (including book & CD sets for children)	90%	93%	98%	91%	70%
Preloaded audiobook players (e.g., Playaways, Yoto Players, etc.)	29%	47%	51%	64%	45%
Children's print books with integrated ready-to- play audiobook (e.g., Vox Books, Wonderbooks)	31%	53%	73%	79%	85%
Other	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%



Digital vs. Physical Audiobooks

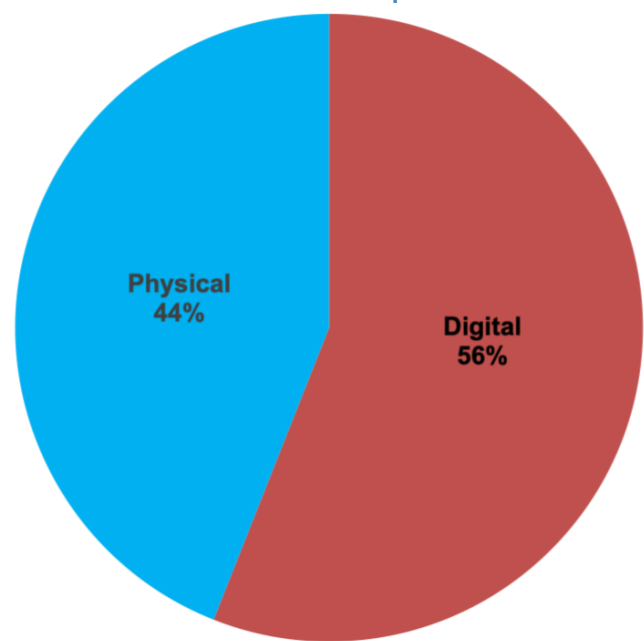
Digital audiobooks account for 70 percent of public libraries' adult audiobook circulation, while physical audiobooks account for 30 percent.

Figure 4. Please estimate the percentage of your library's total ADULT audiobook circulation that comes from DIGITAL versus PHYSICAL audiobooks. —All Respondents



Digital audiobooks account for 56 percent of public libraries' children's/YA audiobook circulation, while physical audiobooks account for 44 percent.

Figure 5. Please estimate the percentage of your library’s total CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook circulation that comes from DIGITAL versus PHYSICAL audiobooks —All Respondents



Libraries serving smaller populations are more likely to have a more or less even mix of digital and physical audiobooks circulating, at least for adult audiobooks. For children’s/YA audiobooks, all population size categories are fairly consistent.

Table 4. Please estimate the percentage of your library’s total ADULT and CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook circulation that comes from DIGITAL and PHYSICAL audiobooks —Respondents by Population Served

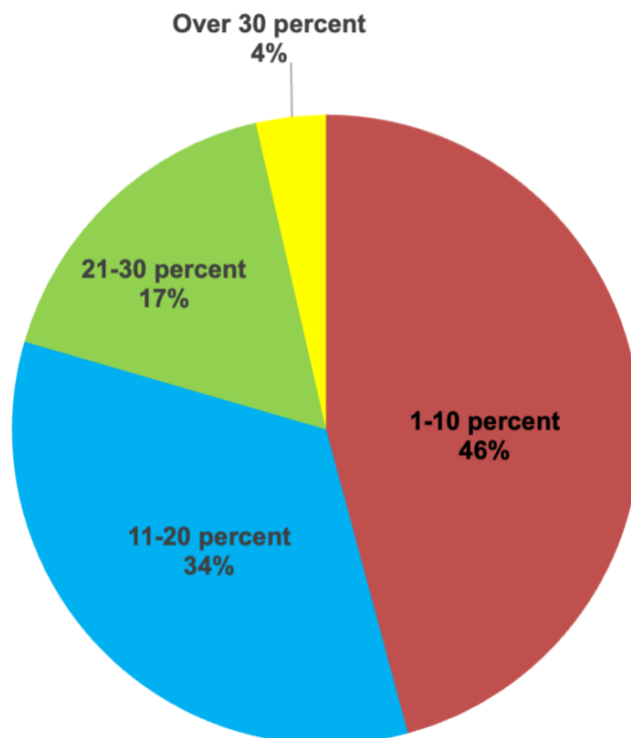
	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Adult Audiobooks					
% digital audiobooks	49%	66%	69%	86%	90%
% physical audiobooks	45%	34%	30%	16%	10%
Children's/YA Audiobooks					
% digital audiobooks	40%	39%	51%	43%	39%
% physical audiobooks	55%	60%	50%	57%	61%

Audiobook Circulation

Portion of Total Adult Circulation

Nearly half of public libraries (46%) say that audiobooks account for 1–10 percent of their total adult circulation, while one-third (34%) say that they account for 11–20 percent. So for 80 percent of libraries, audiobooks account for less than 20 percent of total adult circulation.

Figure 6. Approximately what percent of your library's total ADULT circulation do audiobooks represent? — All Respondents



Portion of Total Children’s/YA Circulation

Seven out of ten public libraries say that audiobooks account for 1–10 percent of total children’s/YA circulation, while 19 percent say that they account for 11–20 percent. So for 89 percent, audiobooks account for less than 20 percent of total children’s/YA circulation.

Figure 7. Approximately what percent of your library’s total CHILDREN’S/YA circulation do audiobooks represent? —All Respondents

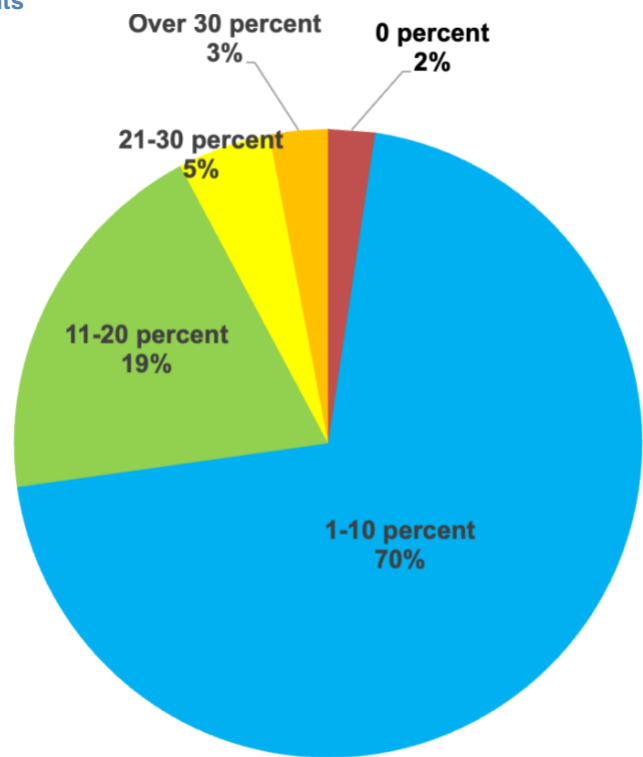


Table 5. Approximately what percent of your library’s total ADULT and CHILDREN’S/YA circulation do audiobooks represent? —Respondents by Population Served

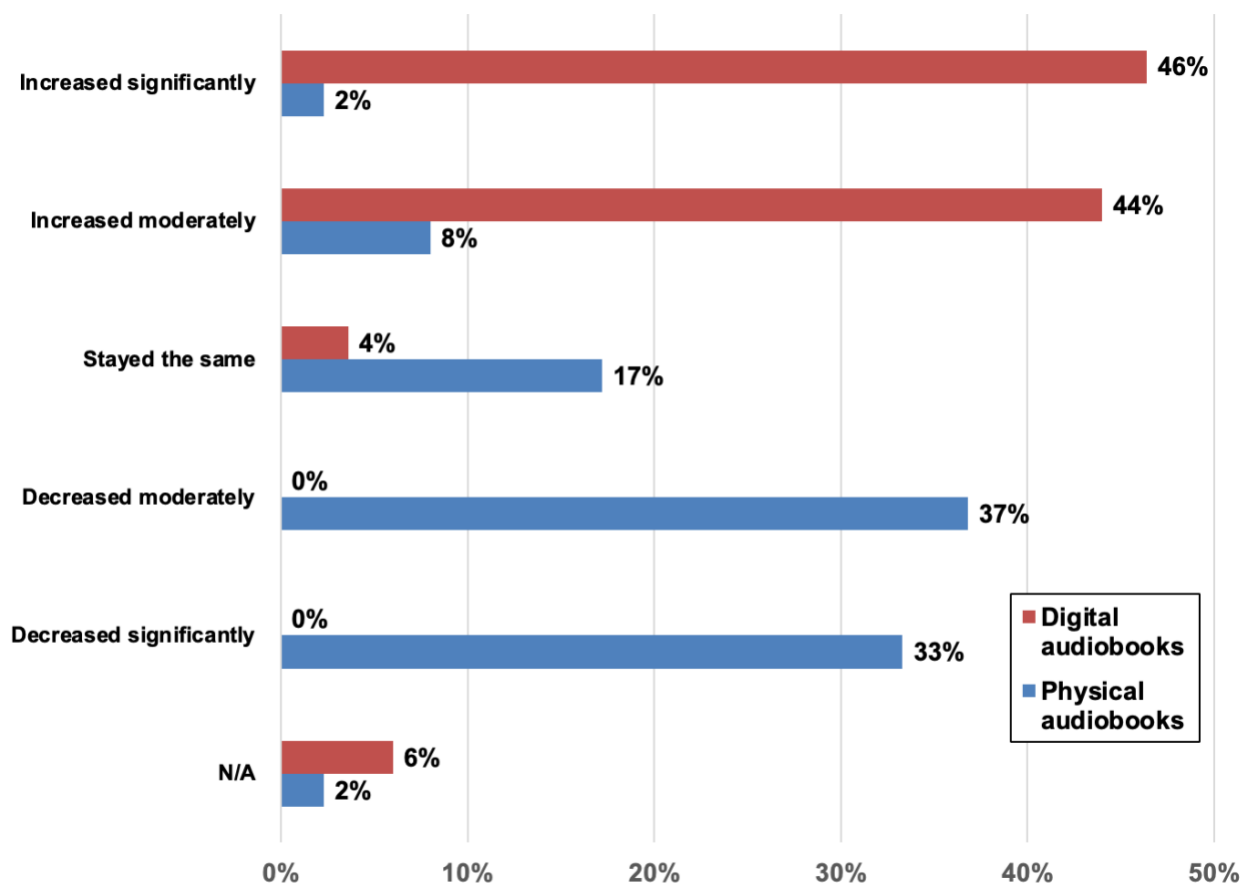
	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Adult Circulation					
1-10%	88%	35%	45%	13%	25%
11-20%	13%	55%	36%	25%	25%
21-30%	0%	10%	13%	50%	50%
Over 30%	0%	0%	7%	13%	0%
Children/YA Circulation					
0%	5%	0%	3%	0%	0%
1-10%	80%	70%	62%	68%	56%
11-20%	13%	15%	31%	23%	22%
21-30%	2%	11%	3%	5%	11%
Over 30%	0%	4%	3%	5%	11%



Circulation Changes

Nearly half (46%) of public libraries have seen their circulation of digital audiobooks increase significantly over the past year. This increase of digital audiobook circulation has come at the expense of physical audiobooks, which had corresponding declines in circulation.

Figure 8. How has your ADULT audiobook circulation changed in the last year? —All Respondents



Libraries serving larger populations reported increased circulation of digital audiobooks, although all libraries reported decreases in circulation of physical audiobooks.³

³ We did not have a very strong response to this question so the results in the below table are not especially robust.

Table 6. How has your ADULT audiobook circulation changed in the last year? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
<i>Digital audiobooks</i>					
Increased significantly	40%	52%	45%	60%	29%
Increased moderately	27%	48%	45%	40%	71%
Stayed the same	7%	0%	7%	0%	0%
Decreased moderately	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Decreased significantly	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
N/A	27%	0%	3%	0%	0%
<i>Physical audiobooks</i>					
Increased significantly	0%	9%	0%	0%	0%
Increased moderately	6%	0%	16%	10%	0%
Stayed the same	38%	14%	16%	0%	13%
Decreased moderately	25%	36%	29%	40%	88%
Decreased significantly	25%	41%	39%	40%	0%
N/A	6%	0%	0%	10%	0%

As for children's/YA audiobooks, those still remain the purview of physical media: 11 percent of respondents said physical audiobooks increased significantly, while 43 percent said they increased moderately. Circulation of digital audiobooks has been on the wane—20 percent said it decreased moderately and 21 percent said it decreased significantly. Still, 35 percent reported that circulation for both physical and digital audiobooks has remained the same.

Increases in digital audiobook circulation were higher among libraries serving larger populations.



Figure 9. How has your CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook circulation changed in the last year? —All Respondents

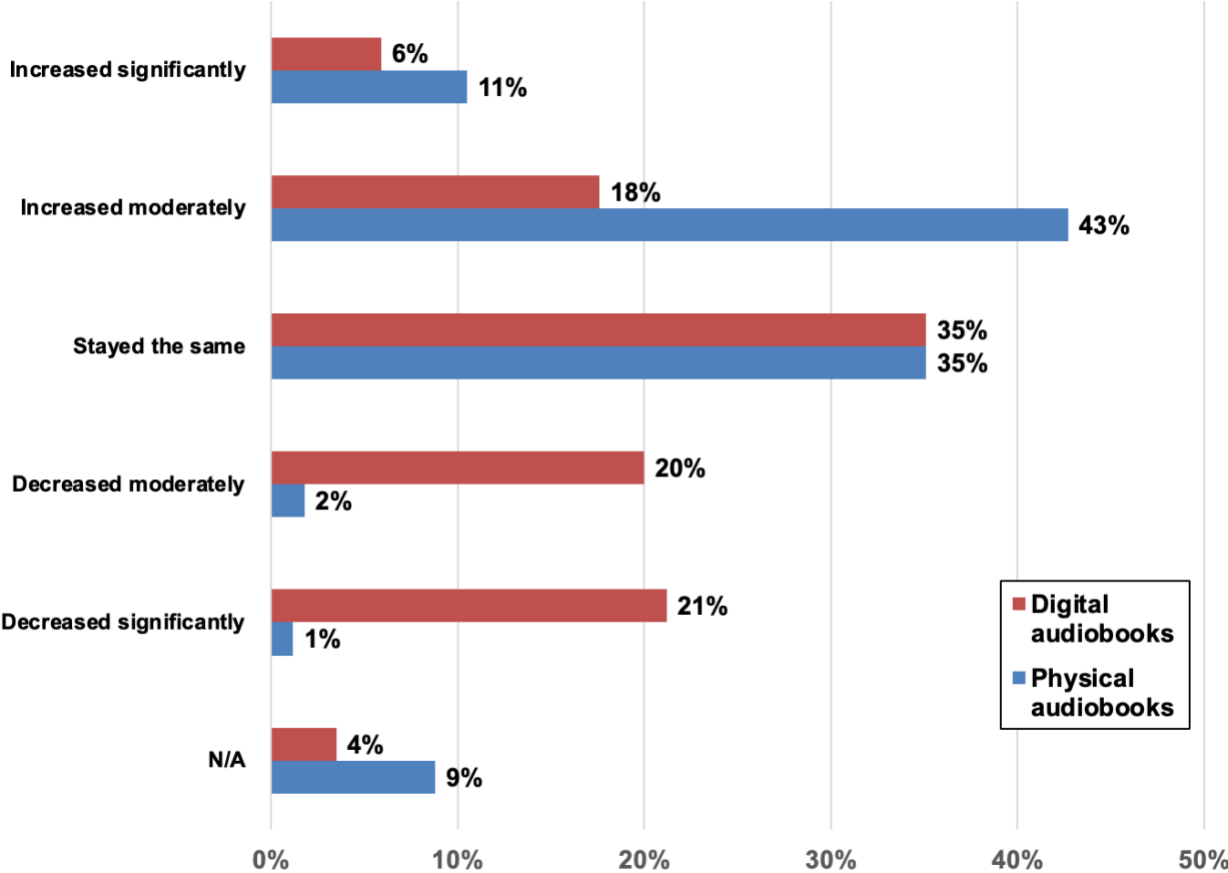


Table 7. How has your CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook circulation changed in the last year? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Digital audiobooks					
Increased significantly	9%	7%	8%	16%	21%
Increased moderately	30%	36%	55%	48%	58%
Stayed the same	46%	36%	30%	32%	16%
Decreased moderately	0%	7%	3%	0%	0%
Decreased significantly	2%	4%	0%	0%	0%
N/A	14%	11%	5%	4%	5%
Physical audiobooks					
Increased significantly	5%	4%	5%	13%	5%
Increased moderately	12%	22%	22%	21%	16%
Stayed the same	42%	26%	34%	8%	26%



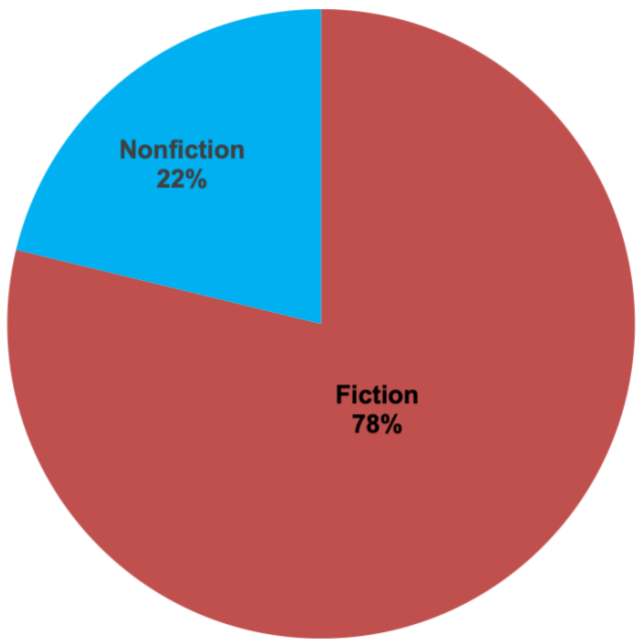
	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Decreased moderately	18%	22%	22%	21%	21%
Decreased significantly	16%	22%	17%	38%	26%
N/A	7%	4%	0%	0%	5%

Audiobook Content

Fiction vs. Nonfiction

Fiction audiobooks circulate far more than nonfiction—78 percent of adult audiobook circulation is fiction while 22 percent is nonfiction.

Figure 10. Please estimate how your ADULT audiobook circulation breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction —All Respondents



Adult fiction audiobooks are more popular in libraries service smaller populations (87% in under 10,000 population served).

Table 8. Please estimate how your ADULT audiobook circulation breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Fiction	87%	77%	79%	76%	71%
Nonfiction	12%	23%	21%	24%	29%

As for children’s/YA audiobooks, fiction audiobooks circulate even more than nonfiction—87 percent fiction vs. 13 percent nonfiction.

Figure 11. Please estimate how your CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook circulation breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction —All Respondents

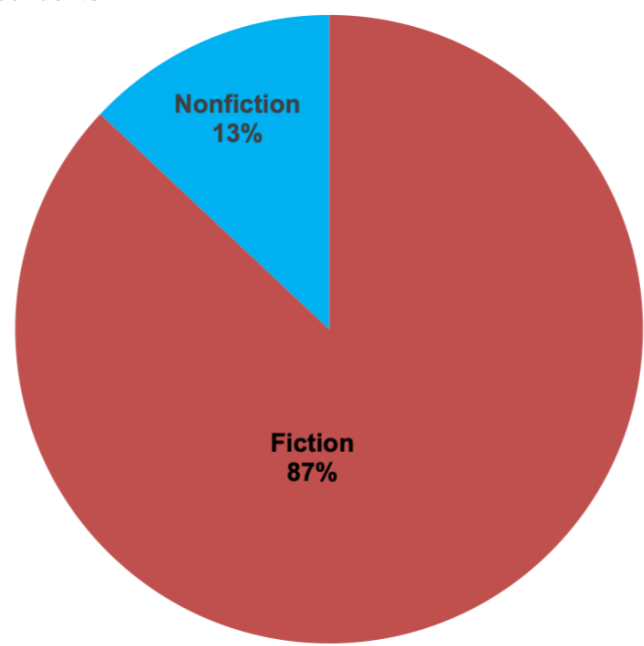


Table 9. Please estimate how your CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook circulation breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Fiction	86%	91%	88%	87%	85%
Nonfiction	14%	9%	12%	13%	15%

Audiobook Genres

The top adult fiction audiobook genres are thrillers and suspense titles (selected by 23 percent of respondents), followed by mysteries (20%), general fiction (20%), and romance (15%).

Figure 12. What three fiction genres are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library? —All Respondents

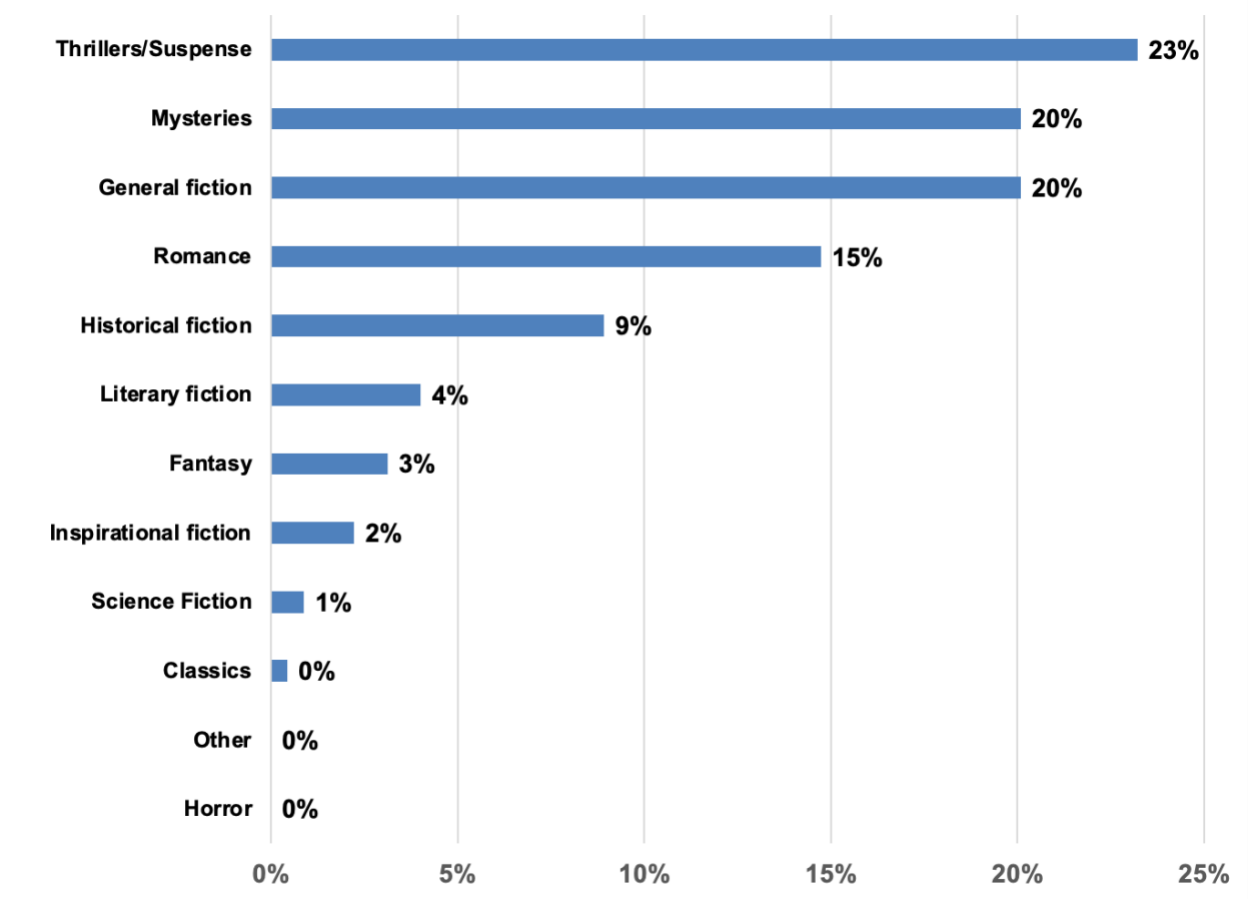


Table 10. What three fiction genres are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library? — Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Classics	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Fantasy	0%	2%	6%	3%	4%
General fiction	11%	27%	22%	16%	30%
Historical fiction	10%	11%	8%	6%	9%
Horror	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Inspirational fiction	2%	2%	5%	0%	0%
Literary fiction	2%	4%	6%	3%	4%
Mysteries	15%	27%	25%	16%	13%



	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Romance	3%	13%	22%	13%	30%
Science Fiction	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%
Thrillers/Suspense	20%	33%	25%	19%	13%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The top adult nonfiction genres are biographies (25%), history (15%), self help (12%), and memoirs (12%).

Figure 13. What three nonfiction genres are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library? — All Respondents

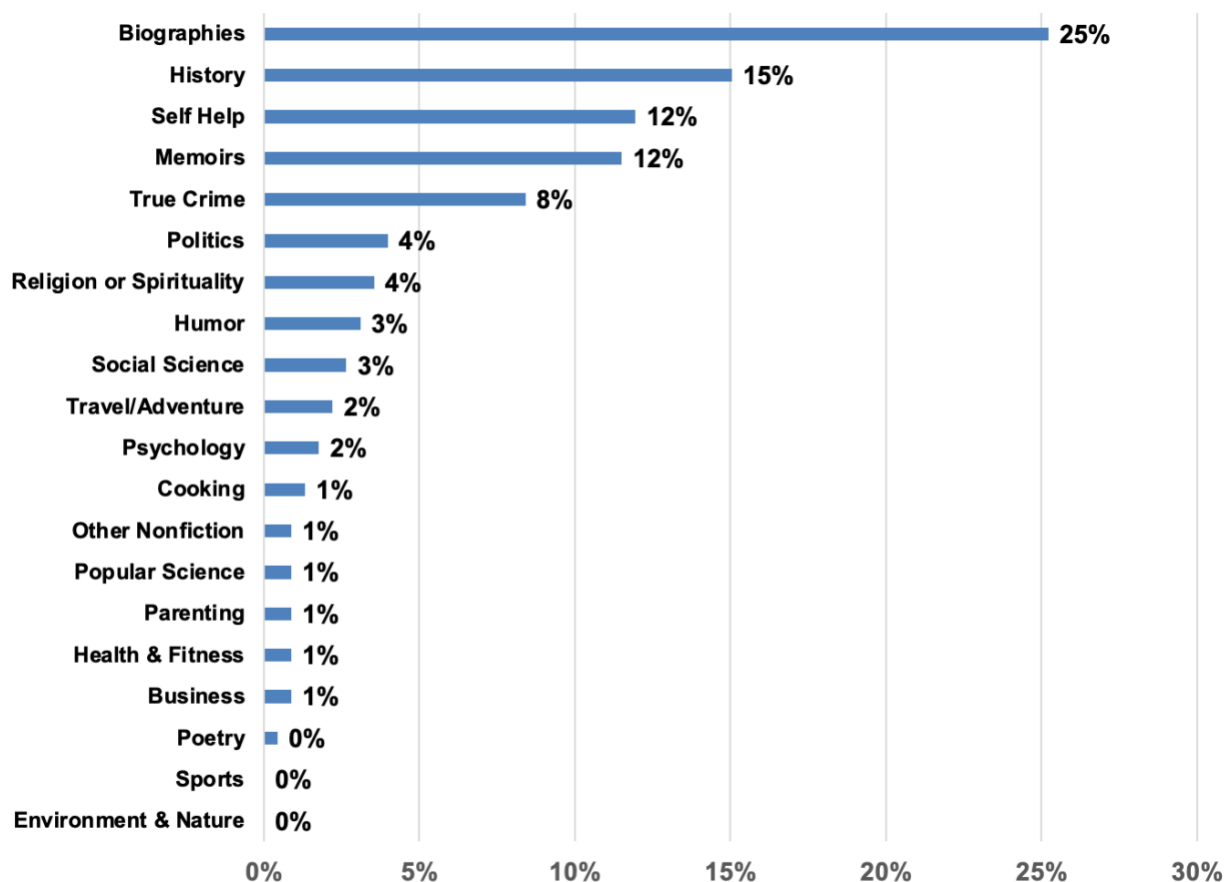


Table 11. What three nonfiction genres are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library? — Respondents by Population Served

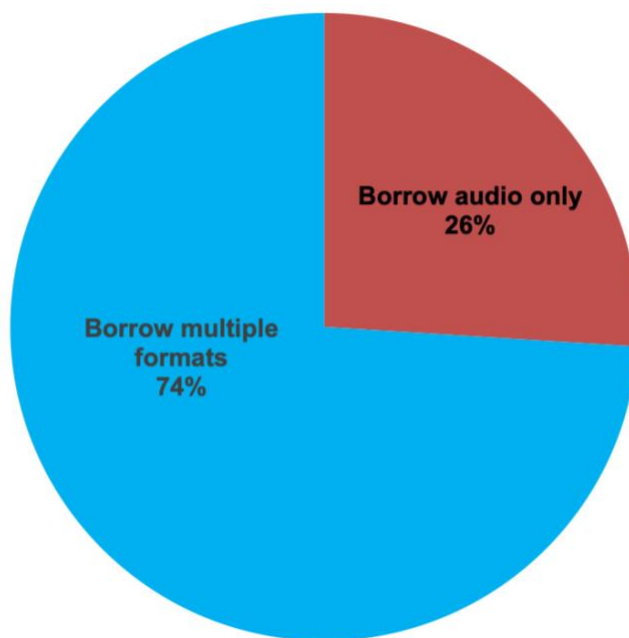
	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Biographies	28%	32%	34%	26%	26%
Business	4%	2%	0%	3%	0%
Cooking	5%	0%	3%	0%	0%
Environment & Nature	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Health & Fitness	4%	0%	0%	3%	0%
History	18%	18%	15%	13%	17%
Humor	7%	5%	3%	3%	4%
Memoirs	15%	16%	15%	3%	4%
Parenting	4%	0%	2%	0%	0%
Poetry	4%	0%	0%	0%	4%
Politics	7%	7%	3%	0%	13%
Popular Science	4%	0%	2%	0%	4%
Psychology	5%	0%	3%	0%	0%
Religion or Spirituality	7%	5%	2%	13%	0%
Self Help	15%	18%	15%	3%	22%
Social Science	6%	2%	5%	3%	4%
Sports	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Travel/Adventure	6%	0%	6%	0%	0%
True Crime	12%	18%	9%	6%	4%
Other Nonfiction	4%	0%	3%	0%	0%



Multiple Format Circulation

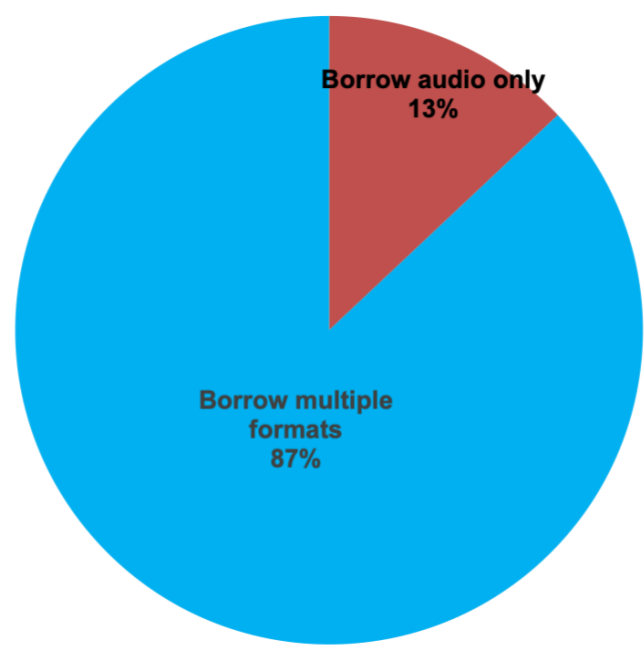
Adult library patrons tend to borrow formats other than audiobooks—74 percent of libraries say patrons borrow multiple formats (this can include print books, ebooks, video, etc.). Still, one-fourth (26%) say their adult patrons borrow only audiobooks.

Figure 14. Thinking about your library's ADULT audiobook borrowers, what percentage would you estimate exclusively borrow audiobooks and what percent borrow other formats as well (e.g., ebooks, print books)? — All Respondents



Child/YA patrons (or their parents) tend to borrow multiple formats more than adults—87 percent of libraries say patrons borrow multiple formats while only 13% say their child/YA patrons borrow only audiobooks.

Figure 15. Thinking about your library's CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook borrowers, what percentage would you estimate exclusively borrow audiobooks and what percent borrow other formats as well (e.g., ebooks, print books)? —All Respondents



All library size categories are fairly consistent in the ratio of multiple formats to audio only circulating, although child/YA patrons in the largest libraries are most likely to borrow audiobooks only (26%).

Table 12. What three nonfiction genres are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library? — Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Adult					
exclusively borrow audio	28%	22%	29%	24%	27%
borrow multiple formats	72%	78%	71%	76%	73%
Children's/YA					
exclusively borrow audio	13%	10%	10%	13%	26%
borrow multiple formats	87%	90%	90%	87%	74%

Audiobook Access Models

In this section, we asked survey respondents to estimate the percentage of their digital audiobook collections represented by various access models.

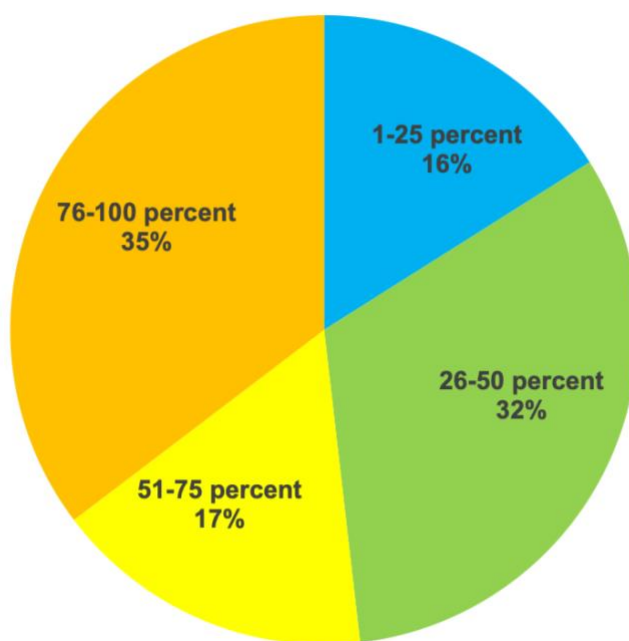
One Copy One User

Public libraries say that on average 61 percent of their digital audiobook collection is based on a one copy one user access model. More than one-third (35%) of respondents say that more than 75 percent of their digital audiobooks are one copy one user.

This access model is used more often by under 10,000 population served libraries, where 71 percent of their digital audiobook collections is based on a one copy one user access model.

Figure 16. In percentage terms, please estimate how the ONE COPY ONE USER access model applies to your library's digital audiobook collection? —All Respondents

Average: 61%

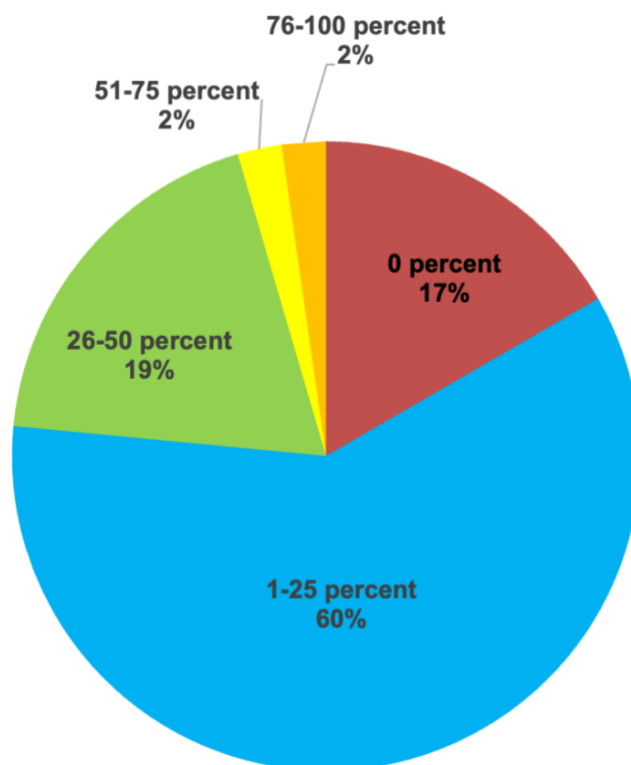


Simultaneous Access

Public libraries say that on average 19 percent of their digital audiobook collections is based on a simultaneous access model. Six out of ten respondents say that 1–25 percent of their digital audiobooks are simultaneous access.

This access model is used more often by 10,000 to 24,999 population served libraries, where 25 percent of their digital audiobook collections is based on a simultaneous access model.

Figure 17. In percentage terms, please estimate how the SIMULTANEOUS USE access model applies to your library's digital audiobook collection? —All Respondents
Average: 19%



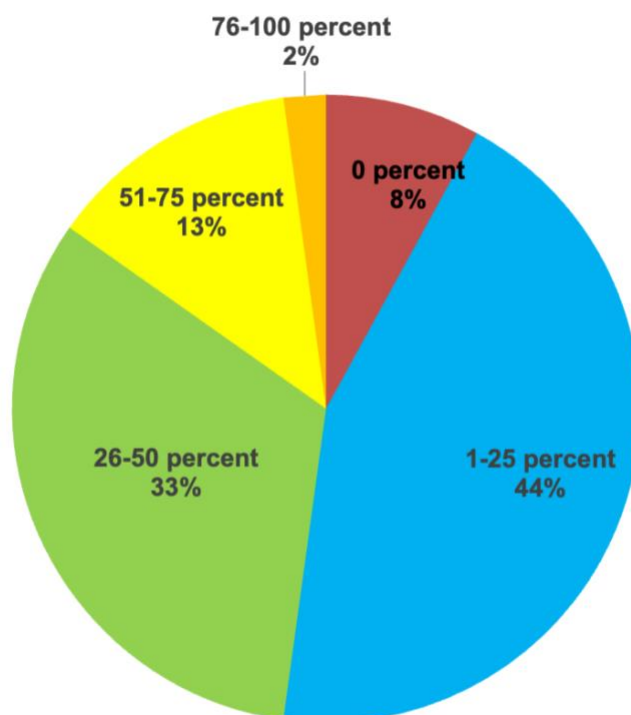
Metered Access

Public libraries say that on average 30 percent of their digital audiobook collections is based on a metered access model. Forty-four percent of respondents say that 1–25 percent of their digital audiobooks are metered access, while another 33 percent say that 26–50 percent of their digital audiobooks are metered access.

This access model is used more often by 10,000 to 24,999 and 25,000 to 99,999 population served libraries, where 35 and 38 percent, respectively, of their digital audiobook collections is based on a metered access model.

Figure 18. In percentage terms, please estimate how the METERED ACCESS model applies to your library's digital audiobook collection? —All Respondents

Average: 30%



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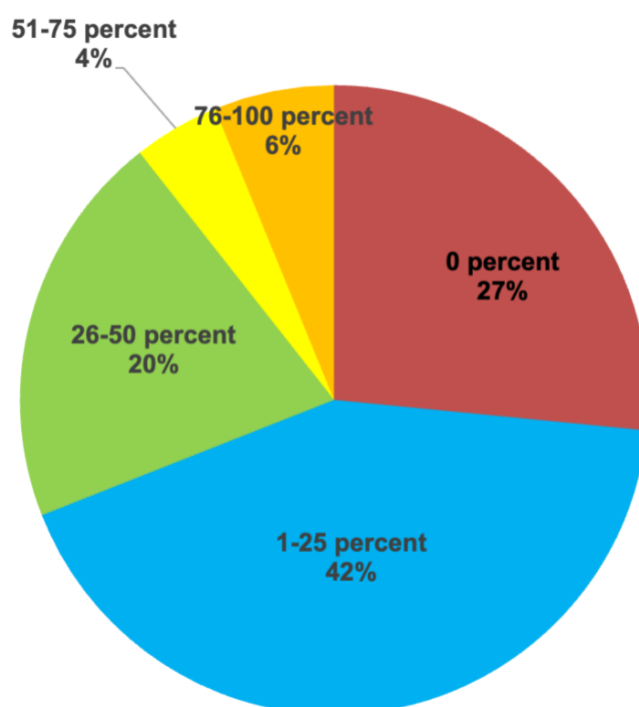
Pay Per Use

Public libraries say that on average 23 percent of their digital audiobook collections is based on a pay per use model. Forty-two percent of respondents say that 1–25 percent of their digital audiobooks are pay per use. More than one-fourth (27%) say that none of their digital audiobooks are pay per use.

This access model is used more often by 00,000 to 499,999 population served libraries, where 32 percent of their digital audiobook collections is based on a metered access model.

Figure 19. In percentage terms, please estimate how the PAY PER USE access model applies to your library's digital audiobook collection? —All Respondents

Average: 23%



Other

Very few respondents selected “other,” but of those who did the common responses was that they rely on physical audiobooks, or that they were unsure.

Table 13. In percentage terms, please estimate how the access models below apply to your library's digital audiobook collection? —Respondents by Population Served

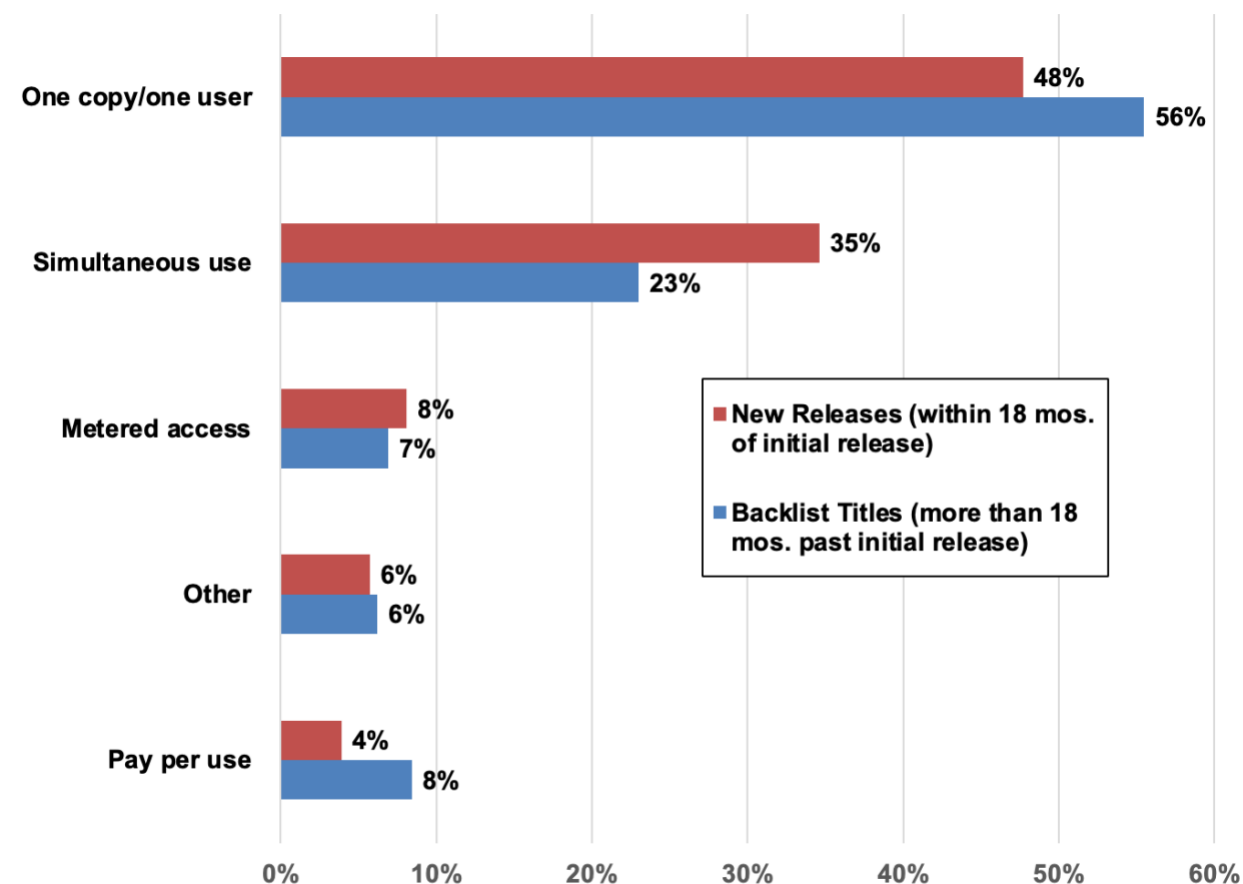
	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
<i>One copy/one user</i>					
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
1-25%	12%	21%	17%	23%	25%
26-50%	25%	37%	37%	34%	25%
51-75%	7%	18%	15%	23%	31%
76-100%	57%	24%	32%	20%	19%
Average %	71%	56%	59%	52%	56%
<i>Simultaneous Use</i>					
0%	24%	12%	9%	25%	10%
1-25%	56%	53%	66%	54%	70%
26-50%	12%	29%	22%	18%	20%
51-75%	6%	6%	0%	0%	0%
76-100%	3%	0%	3%	4%	0%
Average %	20%	25%	21%	16%	16%
<i>Metered access</i>					
0%	24%	8%	3%	0%	5%
1-25%	48%	35%	34%	55%	53%
26-50%	21%	42%	40%	31%	26%
51-75%	7%	12%	20%	10%	16%
76-100%	0%	4%	3%	3%	0%
Average %	20%	35%	38%	28%	30%
<i>Pay per use</i>					
0%	45%	22%	9%	22%	38%
1-25%	29%	50%	58%	33%	38%
26-50%	19%	22%	21%	22%	15%
51-75%	6%	0%	9%	0%	0%
76-100%	0%	6%	3%	22%	8%
Average %	16%	23%	26%	32%	16%



Preferred Access Model

In terms of which access model public libraries prefer, 48 percent prefer one copy/one user for new titles and 56 percent prefer it for back list titles. Thirty-five percent prefer simultaneous use for new titles, while only 23 percent prefer it for backlist titles. Metered access and pay per use are not preferred by very many libraries.

Figure 20. What audiobook access model do you most prefer for new releases and what is your preference for backlist titles? —All Respondents



Metered access has a slight edge among 10,000 to 24,999 population served libraries, while pay per use has its fans among 25,000 to 99,999 population served libraries, at least for backlist titles.

Table 14. What audiobook access model do you most prefer for new releases and what is your preference for backlist titles? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
<i>New releases</i>					
One copy/one user	49%	47%	46%	53%	43%
Simultaneous use	37%	22%	39%	34%	39%
Metered access	4%	20%	4%	11%	7%
Pay per use	4%	4%	8%	0%	0%
Other	7%	8%	4%	2%	11%
<i>Backlist titles</i>					
One copy/one user	54%	43%	57%	70%	54%
Simultaneous use	29%	30%	17%	13%	29%
Metered access	6%	13%	3%	13%	4%
Pay per use	4%	6%	18%	2%	7%
Other	7%	9%	6%	2%	7%

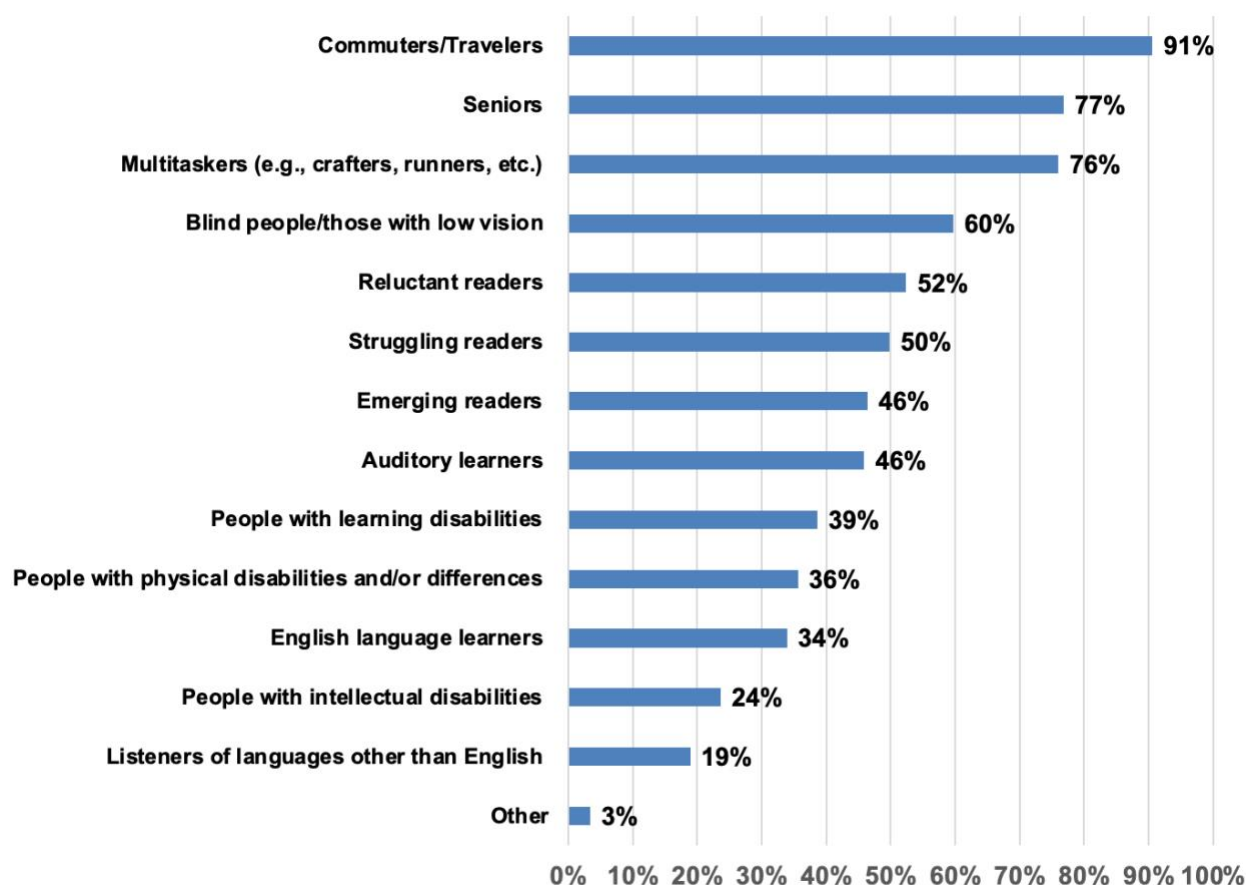


Audiobooks and Library Patrons

Supported Users

According to 91 percent of public libraries, audiobook collections are ideally suited for commuters and that the number is fairly consistent across all population sizes suggests that is true whether people are commuting by car or public transport. In the case of the former, this would also help explain the shift to digital vs. physical audiobooks, as most cars sold in the last 10 years no longer come with CD players. Seniors (77%) are the second most supported patron base for audiobooks, followed by “multitaskers” (76%), or people looking for something to play in the background as they are doing other things.

Figure 21. Would you say your audiobook collection particularly supports any of the following patrons? — All Respondents



Libraries serving large populations—i.e., cities—feel their audiobook collections particularly support English language learners (75% of 500,000 or more population served vs. 34% overall and 12% among under 10,000 population served). “Listeners of languages other than English” also comes in higher as population served increases.

Table 15. Would you say your audiobook collection particularly supports any of the following patrons? — Respondents by Population Served

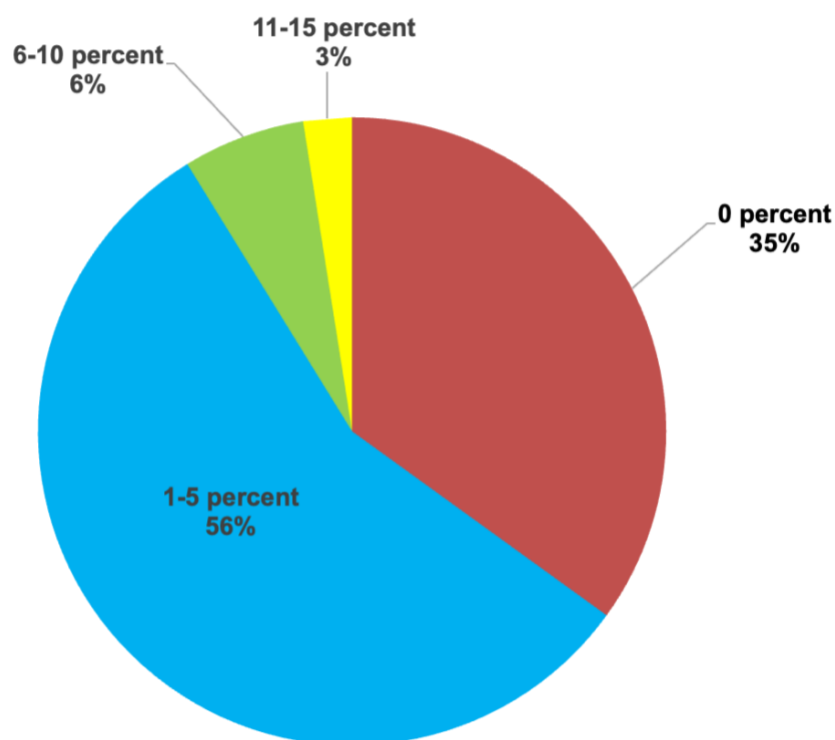
	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Commuters/Travelers	86%	96%	92%	93%	88%
English language learners	12%	28%	36%	50%	75%
Listeners of languages other than English	6%	11%	20%	30%	54%
Emerging readers	45%	39%	44%	50%	63%
Struggling readers	40%	52%	53%	53%	58%
Reluctant readers	43%	48%	53%	73%	58%
Blind people/those with low vision	42%	61%	70%	70%	71%
People with learning disabilities	25%	30%	47%	53%	50%
People with intellectual disabilities	14%	17%	33%	27%	33%
People with physical disabilities and/or differences	12%	37%	46%	60%	42%
Auditory learners	34%	39%	50%	57%	63%
Multitaskers (e.g., crafters, runners, etc.)	69%	85%	71%	90%	75%
Seniors	63%	87%	86%	83%	63%
Other	5%	0%	2%	10%	4%



Foreign Language Audiobooks

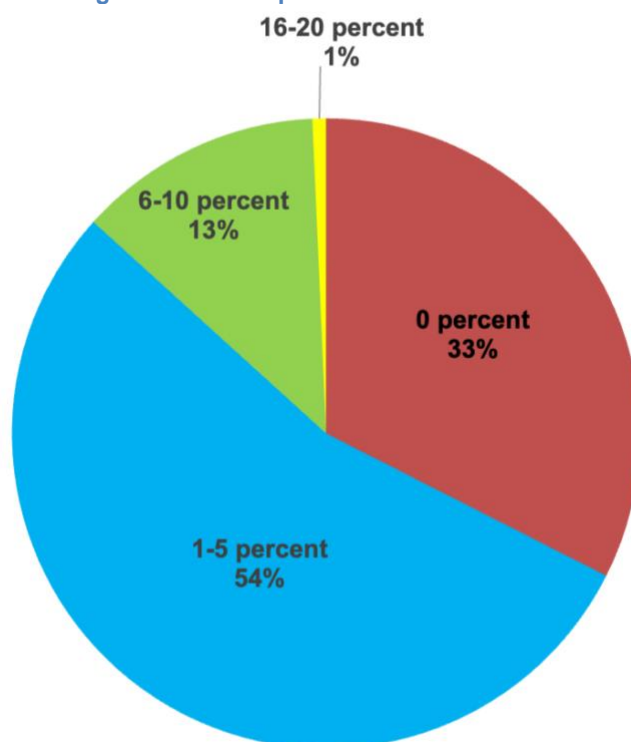
For slightly more than one-half (56%) of public libraries, titles in non-English languages account for between 1 and 5 percent of their adult audiobook collections. One-third (35%) of public libraries have no audiobooks in non-English languages.

Figure 22. Approximately what percent of your ADULT audiobook collection is represented by titles recorded in languages other than English? —All Respondents



For children's/YA audiobooks, for 54 percent of public libraries, titles in non-English languages account for between 1 and 5 percent of their children's/YA audiobook collections, while 33 percent of public libraries have no children's/YA audiobooks in non-English languages. For 13 percent of libraries, non-English audiobooks account for between 6 and 10 percent of their collections—higher than adult audiobooks, likely for foreign language instruction for students and other young learners.

Figure 23. Approximately what percent of your CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook collection is represented by titles recorded in languages other than English? —All Respondents



As expected, libraries serving larger populations tend to have more non-English audiobooks—for adults as well as children/YAs—although the sweet spot appears to be around 1 to 5 percent of adult audiobook collections and 6 to 10 percent of children's/YA audiobook collections.

Table 16. Approximately what percent of your ADULT and CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook collections are represented by titles recorded in languages other than English? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
<i>Adult Audiobooks</i>					
0%	67%	45%	21%	22%	14%
1-5%	33%	40%	72%	67%	71%
6-10%	0%	5%	7%	11%	14%
11-15%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%
<i>Children's/YA Audiobooks</i>					
0%	52%	44%	26%	5%	6%
1-5%	44%	48%	61%	76%	53%
6-10%	4%	8%	13%	19%	35%
16-20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%



Audiobook Promotion

The primary means of promoting a library’s audiobook collection is the library’s website (selected by 65% of libraries), followed by signage in the library (59%), librarian recommendations (59%), displays (58%), and the library’s catalog/MARC records (56%).

Figure 24. How does your library promote its audiobook collection to the public? —All Respondents

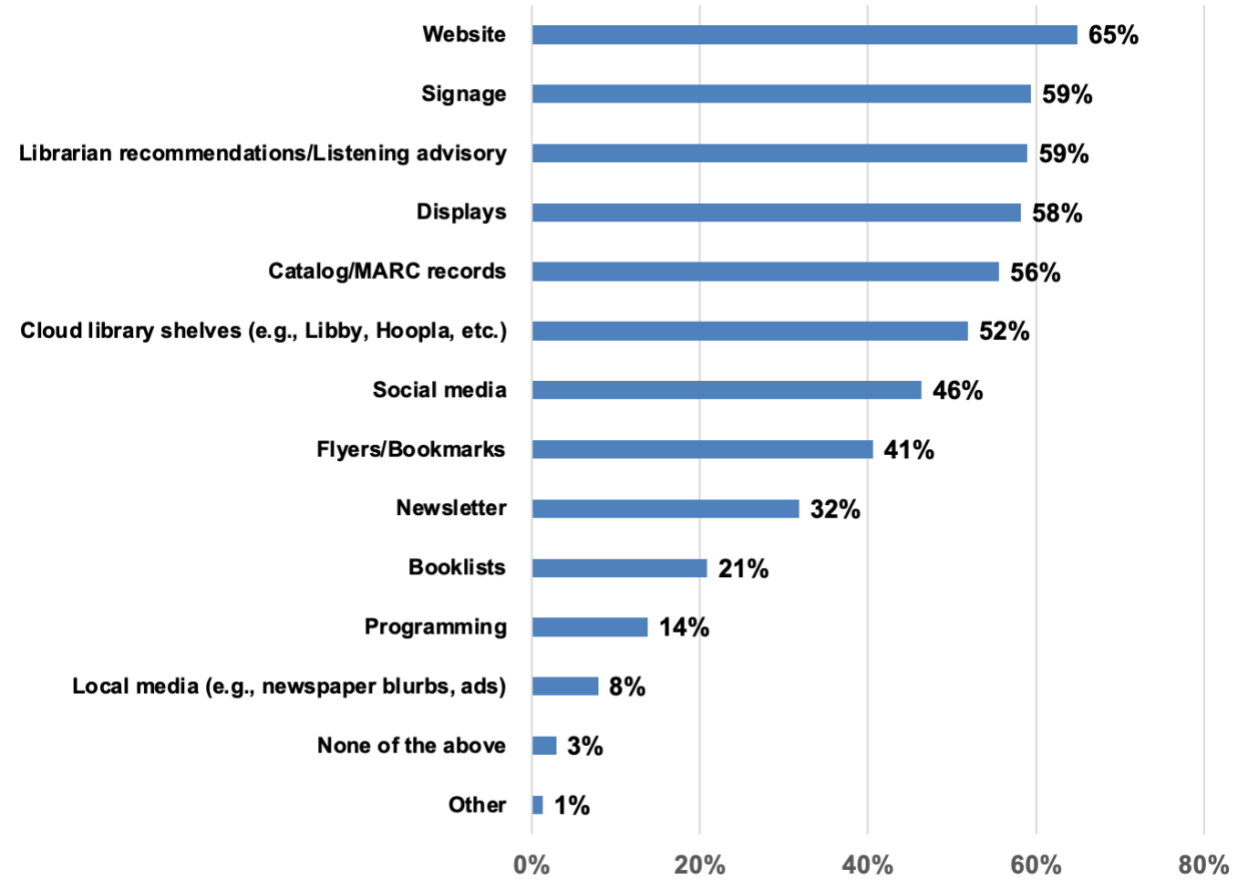


Table 17. How does your library promote its audiobook collection to the public? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Catalog/MARC records	47%	55%	52%	63%	76%
Website	53%	66%	61%	84%	80%
Newsletter	27%	43%	31%	34%	24%
Signage	47%	70%	66%	59%	52%
Programming	12%	4%	15%	19%	28%
Displays	55%	55%	67%	59%	44%
Librarian recommendations/Listening advisory	49%	64%	64%	59%	64%

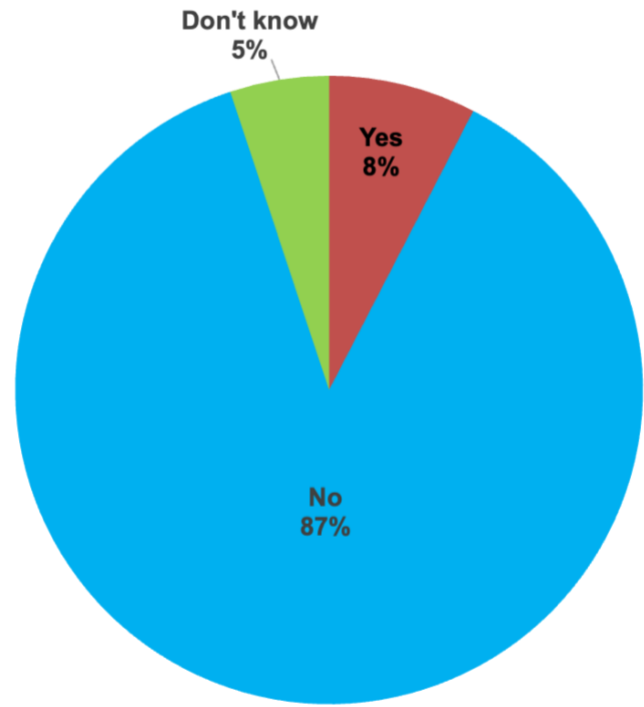


	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Booklists	8%	15%	31%	25%	36%
Social media	42%	40%	46%	69%	40%
Flyers/Bookmarks	30%	49%	46%	47%	32%
Local media (e.g., newspaper blurbs, ads)	11%	4%	9%	6%	8%
Cloud library shelves (e.g., Libby, Hoopla, etc.)	36%	47%	58%	66%	68%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	12%
None of the above	6%	2%	2%	0%	4%

Audiobook-Specific Events

The vast majority (87%) of libraries have not hosted any audiobook-specific programming or other events.

Figure 25. In the last year, has your library hosted any programming that is audiobook specific or involved your library’s audiobook collection? —All Respondents



Those who said “yes,” specified their programming:

- Audio Booktalks.

- Audiobook-focused RA podcast in National Audiobook Month.⁴
- Community read option.
- Demonstration of the LIBBY App.
- For National Audiobook Month, we had a program/audiobook club—listen to 5 audio books in a month/win a prize—and hosted a book club event.
- Not audio-specific, but many of our book club members prefer audio, so we always choose books that are available in audio.
- One location did a mini carnival to kick off getting VOX books, and we do audiobook displays to promote these collections, too.
- Overview of download resources.
- Programming to learn how to access digital collections, including eAudio.
- Programs on using Libby/Hoopla.
- We have two regular book clubs and we always make sure that the titles we choose are available in both ebook and audiobook format through either LIBBY or Hoopla.
- Author with a new book, including audio.
- Book clubs always have the title available digitally.
- Book clubs, programs with library reading lists.
- Eaudiobook clubs.
- Eaudio for storytimes.
- Hosted a how-to-use LIBBY and Hoopla program.
- Learning how to use LIBBY, Hoopla, and CT Lab.

Libraries serving larger populations are more likely to have hosted or conducted these kinds of events and programs.

Table 18. In the last year, has your library hosted any programming that is audiobook specific or involved your library’s audiobook collection? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Yes	5%	2%	9%	16%	12%
No	94%	87%	87%	84%	76%
Don't know	2%	11%	5%	0%	12%

⁴ The American Library Association’s National Audiobook Month is held in June of every year: <https://www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/promo/audiobook#:~:text=Originally%20started%20by%20the%20American,1%20%2D%20June%2030%20every%20year.>



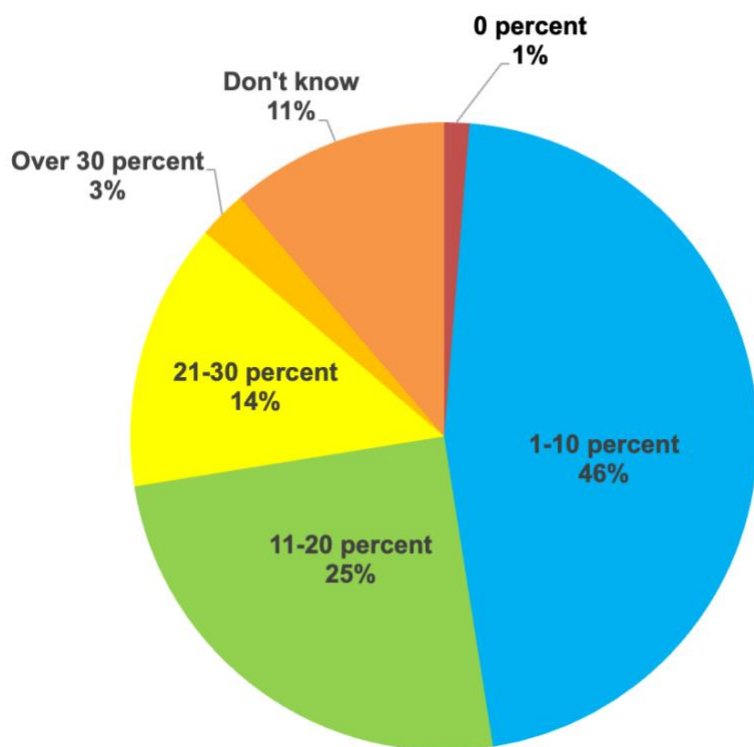
Audiobooks and the Budget

Spending on Audiobooks

Percentage of Materials Budget

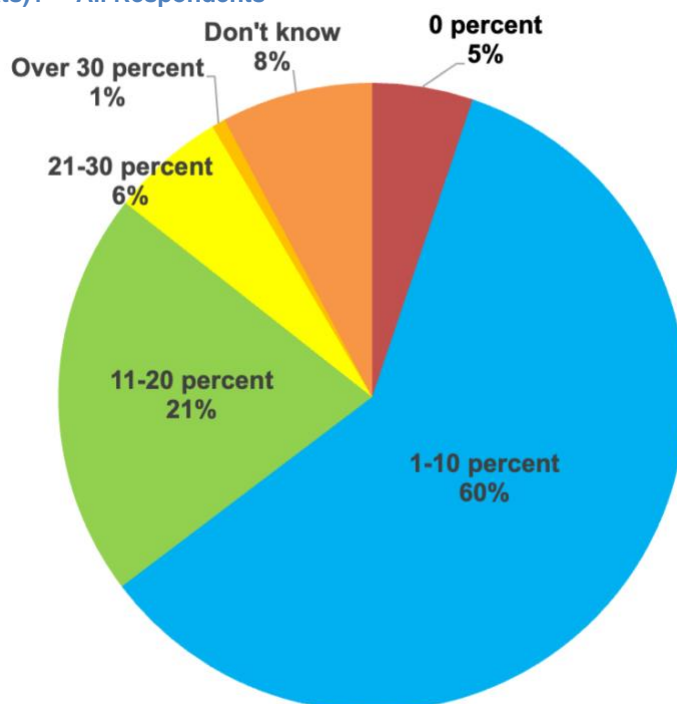
For nearly one-half (46%) of public libraries, adult audiobooks account for 1 to 10 percent of the library's total materials budget, while for one-fourth they account for 11 to 20 percent. For only 17 percent of libraries do adult audiobooks account for more than 21 percent of the total materials budget. Only 1 percent spend none of their budget on audiobooks.

Figure 26. Approximately what percent of your library's total ADULT materials budget is devoted to audiobooks (in all formats)? —All Respondents



For 60 percent of public libraries, children's/YA audiobooks account for 1 to 10 percent of the library's total materials budget, while for 21 percent they account for 11 to 20 percent. For only 7 percent of libraries do children's/YA audiobooks account for more than 21 percent of the total materials budget. Five percent spend none of their budget on children's/YA audiobooks.

Figure 27. Approximately what percent of your library's total ADULT materials budget is devoted to audiobooks (in all formats)? —All Respondents



Libraries serving larger populations report higher percentages of their budgets to audiobooks, although the sweet spot is in the 21 to 30 percent range for adult audiobooks and 11 to 20 percent for children's/YA audiobooks.

Table 19. Approximately what percent of your library's total ADULT and CHILDREN'S/YA materials budget is devoted to audiobooks (in all formats)? —Respondents by Population Served

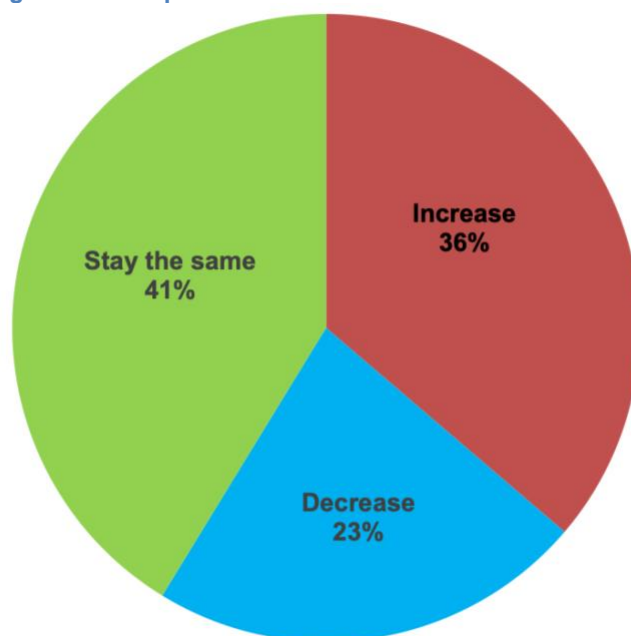
	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
<i>Adult Materials Budget</i>					
0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
1-10%	80%	53%	38%	44%	0%
11-20%	7%	32%	24%	22%	50%
21-30%	0%	5%	17%	22%	38%
Over 30%	7%	0%	3%	0%	0%
Don't know	7%	5%	17%	11%	13%
<i>Children's/YA Materials Budget</i>					
0%	8%	4%	8%	0%	0%
1-10%	61%	65%	58%	59%	50%
11-20%	16%	23%	24%	23%	25%
21-30%	8%	0%	5%	9%	6%
Over 30%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Don't know	6%	4%	5%	9%	19%



Budgetary Changes

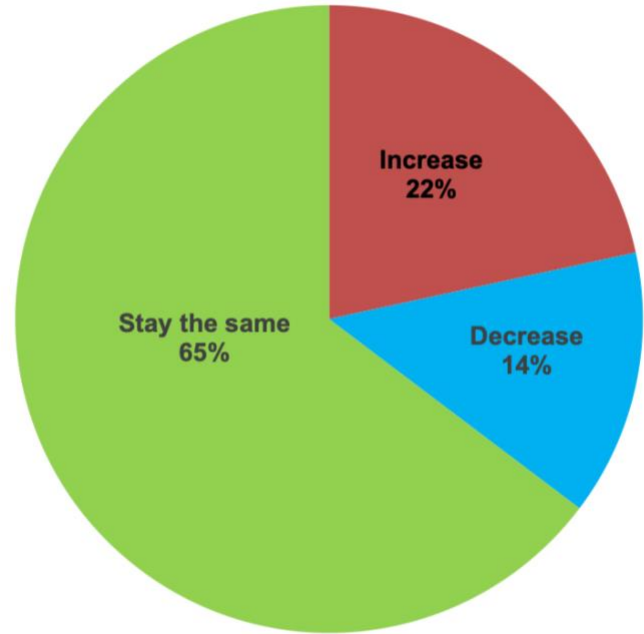
More than one-third (36%) of public libraries expect adult audiobooks' share of their materials budget to increase over the next 12 months, while just under one-fourth (23%) expect it to decrease. Forty-one percent expect it to stay the same.

Figure 28. Over the next year, how do you expect the share of total materials budget devoted to ADULT audiobooks will change? —All Respondents



As for children’s/YA audiobooks, two-thirds (65%) of public libraries expect their share of the materials budget to stay about the same over the next 12 months, while just under one-fourth (22%) expect it to increase. Only 14 percent expect it to decrease.

Figure 29. Over the next year, how do you expect the share of total materials budget devoted to CHILDREN’S/YA audiobooks will change? —All Respondents



The larger the library, the more inclined it is to expect an increase in audiobooks’ share of the materials budget.

Table 20. Over the next year, how do you expect the share of total materials budget devoted to ADULT and CHILDREN’S/YA audiobooks will change? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Adult Budget					
Increase	13%	37%	38%	56%	50%
Decrease	53%	26%	14%	11%	0%
Stay the same	33%	37%	48%	33%	50%
Children's/YA Budget					
Increase	18%	11%	24%	33%	25%
Decrease	14%	7%	13%	19%	13%
Stay the same	67%	82%	63%	48%	63%

Physical vs. Digital Audiobooks

More spending is allotted to digital than physical audiobooks—for adult audiobooks, the mix is 71 percent digital, 29 percent physical. For children’s/YA audiobooks, the mix is 55 percent digital, 45 percent physical.

Figure 30. What percent of your library’s ADULT audiobook spending would you estimate goes toward physical audiobooks versus digital audiobooks? —All Respondents

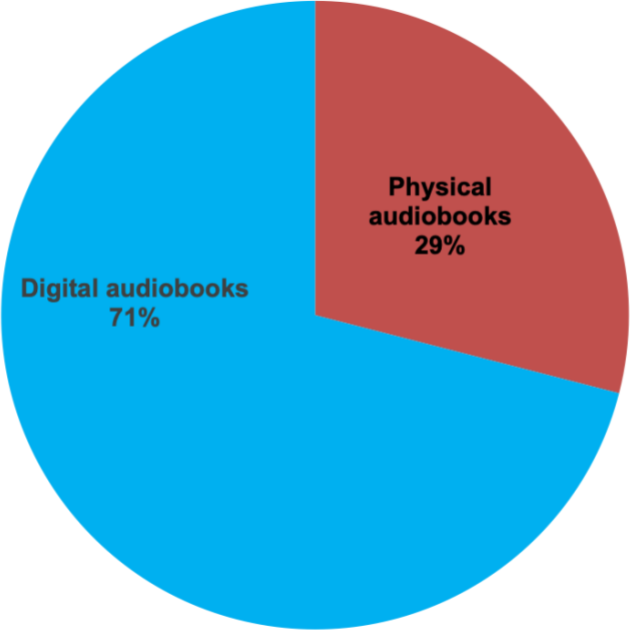
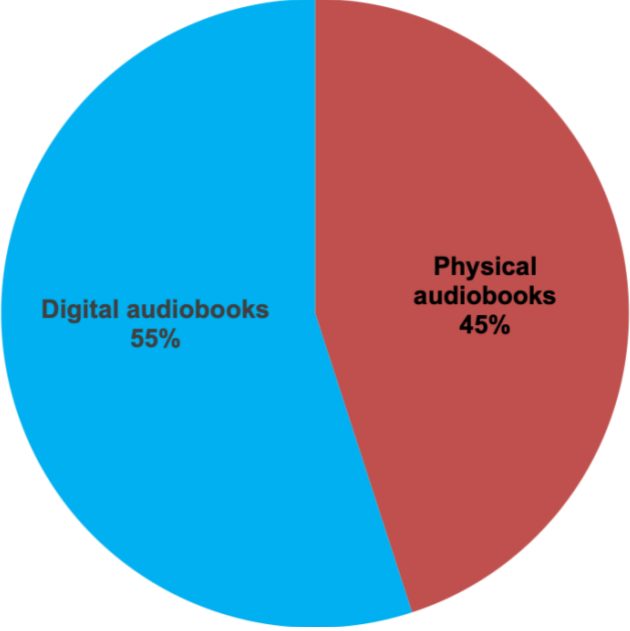


Figure 31. What percent of your library’s CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook spending would you estimate goes toward physical audiobooks versus digital audiobooks? —All Respondents



Libraries serving smaller populations are more likely to still be spending their budget on physical audiobooks—for example, for under 10,000 population served libraries, 53 percent of adult audiobook spending is on physical audiobooks compared to 8 percent of 500,00 and more population served libraries.

Table 21. What percent of your library's ADULT and CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook spending would you estimate goes toward physical audiobooks versus digital audiobooks? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Adult Audiobooks					
% physical audiobooks	53%	38%	41%	17%	8%
% digital audiobooks	47%	62%	59%	83%	92%
Children's/YA Audiobooks					
% physical audiobooks	49%	39%	47%	46%	27%
% digital audiobooks	51%	61%	53%	54%	73%



Fiction vs. Nonfiction Audiobooks

More spending is allotted to fiction than nonfiction audiobooks—for adult audiobooks, the mix is 78 percent fiction, 22 percent nonfiction. For children’s/YA audiobooks, the mix is 86 percent fiction, 14 percent nonfiction.

Figure 32. Please estimate how your ADULT audiobook spending breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction. —All Respondents

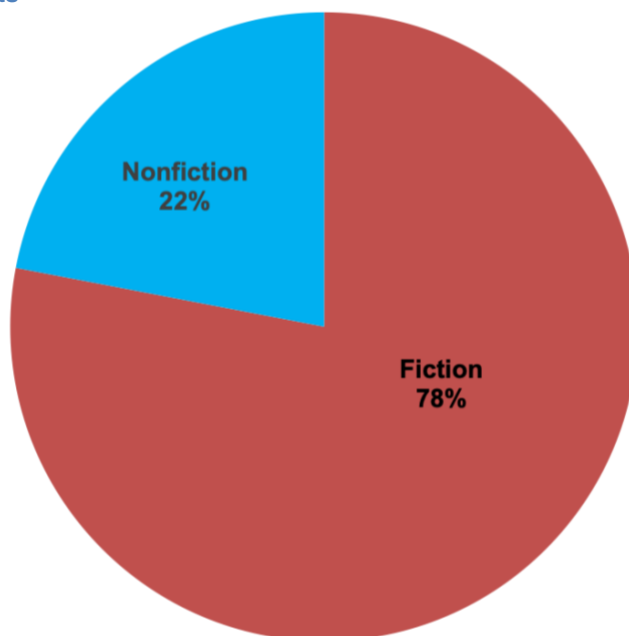
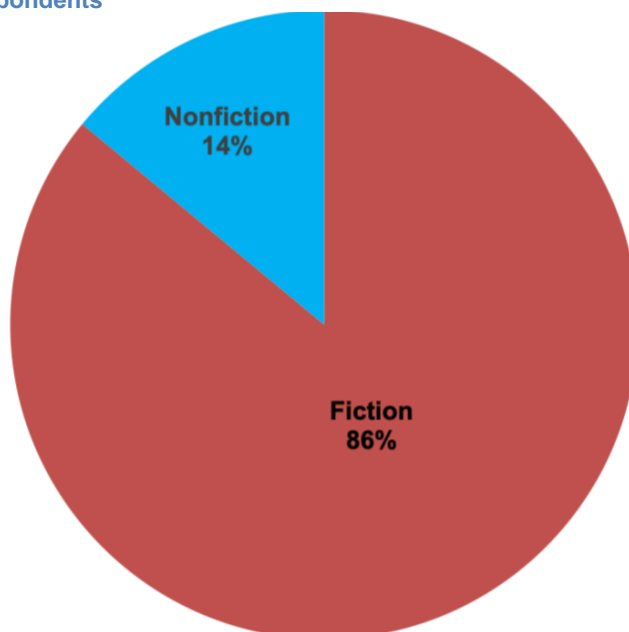


Figure 33. Please estimate how your CHILDREN’S/YA audiobook spending breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction. —All Respondents



Libraries serving larger populations spend more of their audiobook budget on nonfiction than libraries serving smaller populations.

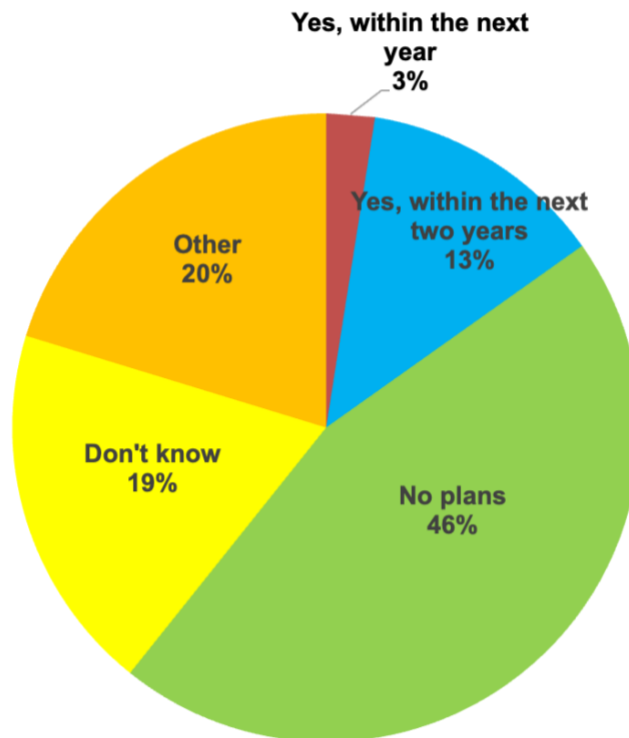
Table 22. Please estimate how your ADULT and CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook spending breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction. —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
<i>Adult Audiobooks</i>					
% fiction	88%	76%	79%	71%	70%
% nonfiction	12%	24%	21%	29%	30%
<i>Children's/YA Audiobooks</i>					
% fiction	91%	92%	85%	86%	79%
% nonfiction	9%	8%	15%	14%	21%

Elimination of Physical Audiobooks

Are libraries getting rid of their physical audiobooks? Nearly one-half (46%) report that they have no plans to eliminate physical adult audiobooks, while 16 percent are planning to—although only 3 percent say it will be within the next year. Nineteen percent don't know, while 20 percent selected "other."

Figure 34. Does your library have plans to eliminate physical audiobooks for ADULTS in the near future? — All Respondents

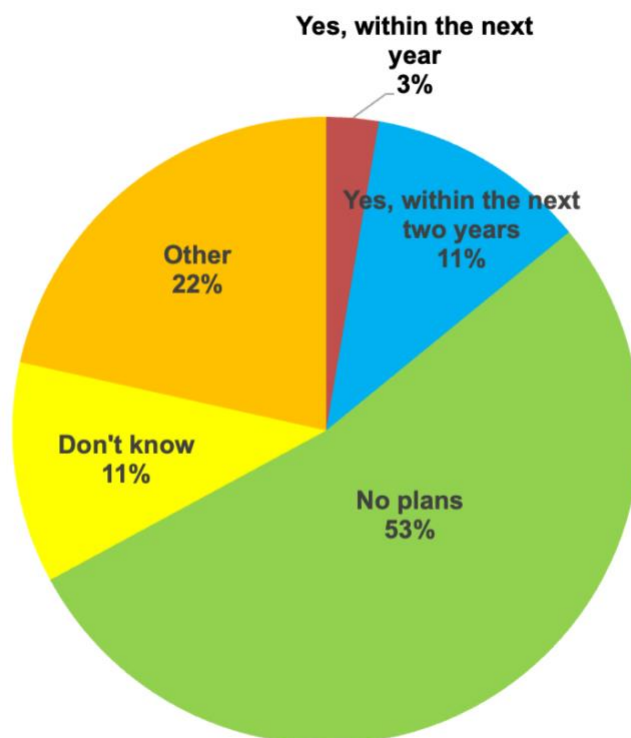


Common "other" responses included:

- Discontinued in 2023.
- Eliminating books on CD not Playaways.
- Increase. Ours are widely used.
- It's dwindling but we don't have specific plans to get rid of it entirely.
- Keeping them on the shelves but not purchasing any more.
- We do not have current plans but it is something we are evaluating.
- In 3 to 5 years.

In terms of children's/YA audiobooks, more than one-half (53%) report that they have no plans to eliminate physical audiobooks, while 13 percent are planning to—although only 3 percent say it will be within the next year. Eleven percent don't know, while 22 percent selected "other."

Figure 35. Does your library have plans to eliminate physical audiobooks for CHILDREN/YA in the near future? —All Respondents



n=149

Common "other" responses included:

- Books on CD within the next two years.
- CD books are beginning to self-weed but Playaways are still massively popular. We just added Wonderbooks this year and these have also been hugely popular. We have no plans to eliminate physical audio books but will focus more on Playaways and Wonderbooks as they are available. We are not purchasing anymore audiobooks on cd.
- CD format will be eliminated.
- CDBs were eliminated from YA, but not Children's yet. They are considering it. YA only has Playaways for the moment and circulation has been good.
- Currently under assessment.
- Hopefully yes. They circ so poorly they are literally get dusty. There are currently no plans to stop collecting them/withdraw them.
- I'd say the CDs will probably be gone within the next few years, but we've had great success with the audio players integrated with physical books.
- Keeping an eye on circ. YA is being eliminated. Children's is another selector.

- More than likely, but no specific date set
- Probably will eliminate within five years.
- Some formats, Wonderbooks and Vox will definitely stay.
- We are assuming that they will become obsolete but we don't know how fast this will happen.
- We are no longer purchasing new audio on CD, only purchasing Playaways and Digital. We will eventually weed all of our audio CDs.
- Yes, we'll be removing the books on CD in the future as it is not always easy to get replacements.
- We no longer purchase physical audiobooks for children/young adults.

Libraries serving smaller populations are more likely to keep physical audiobooks than those serving larger populations.

Table 23. Does your library have plans to eliminate physical audiobooks for ADULTS and CHILDREN/YA in the near future? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
<i>Adult Audiobooks</i>					
Yes, within the next year	0%	5%	4%	0%	0%
Yes, within the next two years	27%	16%	7%	11%	0%
No plans	53%	42%	54%	22%	38%
Don't know	7%	26%	18%	44%	0%
Other	13%	11%	18%	22%	63%
<i>Children's/YA Audiobooks</i>					
Yes, within the next year	2%	0%	3%	4%	7%
Yes, within the next two years	10%	4%	8%	22%	21%
No plans	69%	46%	50%	35%	50%
Don't know	6%	8%	16%	17%	7%
Other	13%	42%	24%	22%	14%

Selecting Audiobooks

Selection Criteria

What factors do library staff take into account when selecting audiobook titles for their collections? The top criterion is patron request, cited by 81 percent of respondents, followed by positive reviews (73%), and whether a title has won awards (63%). As we’ll see in the next question, “narrator” is only a moderate factor (34%).

Figure 36. Of the factors below, which are most likely to influence your audiobook selection decisions for the library? —All Respondents

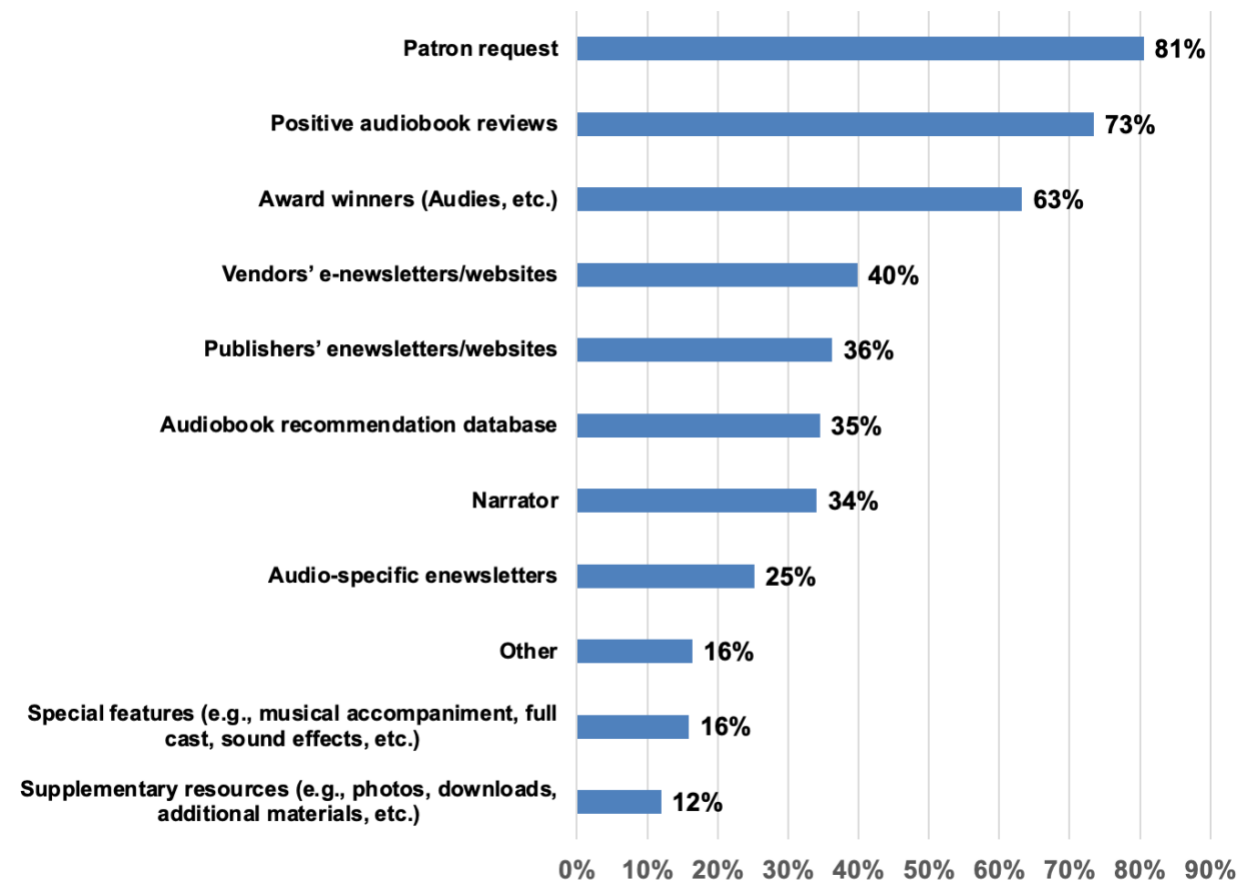


Table 24. Of the factors below, which are most likely to influence your audiobook selection decisions for the library? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Audiobook recommendation database	41%	36%	40%	13%	30%
Audio-specific e newsletters	25%	32%	26%	29%	9%
Award winners (Audies, etc.)	67%	66%	60%	61%	61%
Narrator	34%	32%	35%	26%	48%
Patron request	85%	84%	85%	68%	70%
Positive audiobook reviews	77%	77%	74%	55%	83%
Publishers' e newsletters/websites	44%	30%	35%	39%	26%
Special features (e.g., musical accompaniment, full cast, sound effects, etc.)	23%	14%	8%	16%	26%
Supplementary resources (e.g., photos, downloads, additional materials, etc.)	10%	18%	11%	6%	17%
Vendors' e- newsletters/websites	34%	32%	46%	45%	43%
Other	16%	7%	14%	26%	30%



Impact of Narrator on Audiobook Selection

About one-half (48%) of public libraries say that the narrator of a title has a moderate or large impact on their selecting it for their collections, while 31 percent say it has a minimal impact. For 21 percent it has no impact.

Figure 37. How much impact does narrator have on your audiobook selection for the library? —All Respondents

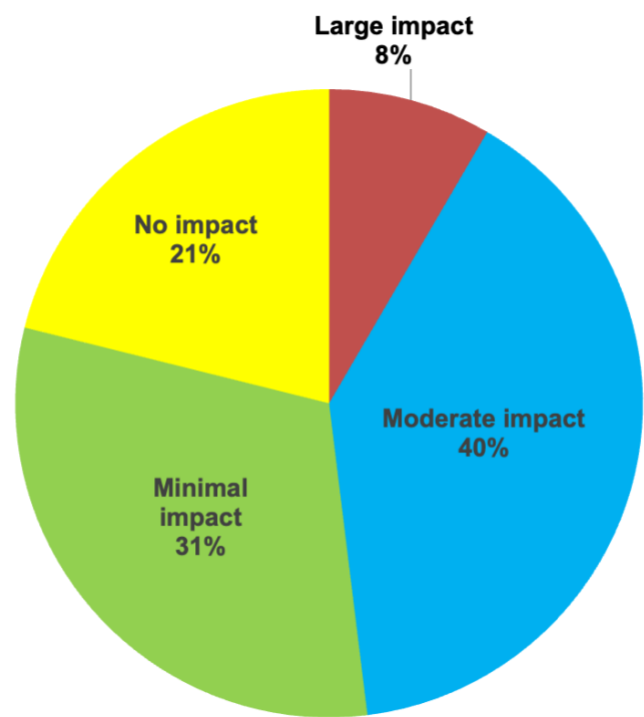


Table 25. How much impact does narrator have on your audiobook selection for the library? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Large impact	6%	14%	8%	10%	4%
Moderate impact	37%	46%	39%	38%	44%
Minimal impact	40%	25%	30%	14%	35%
No impact	18%	16%	23%	38%	17%

Librarians seem pretty resolute that human audiobook narrators are preferred over digital or “AI” readers⁵—one-third would not purchase an audiobook with a non-human narrator, while a further 38 percent would only purchase it if there were no other choice. Twelve percent say a non-human narrator would have a large (presumably negative) impact on their choice. Eighteen percent say it would have little or no impact on their purchase decision.

Figure 38. Would a non-human voiced narrator influence your library’s decision to obtain an audio title? —All Respondents

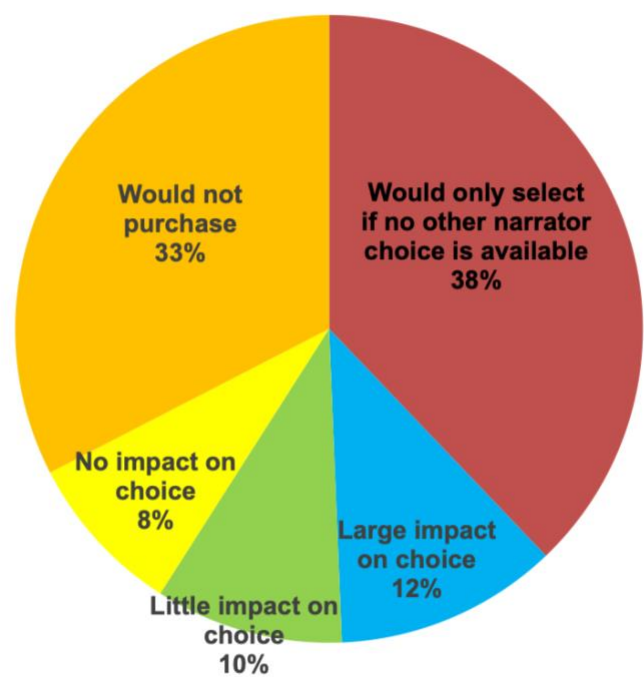


Table 26. Would a non-human voiced narrator influence your library’s decision to obtain an audio title? — Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Would only select if no other narrator choice is available	28%	41%	46%	39%	39%
Large impact on choice	13%	11%	9%	10%	13%
Little impact on choice	15%	9%	9%	3%	9%
No impact on choice	12%	7%	11%	3%	4%
Would not purchase	33%	32%	26%	45%	35%

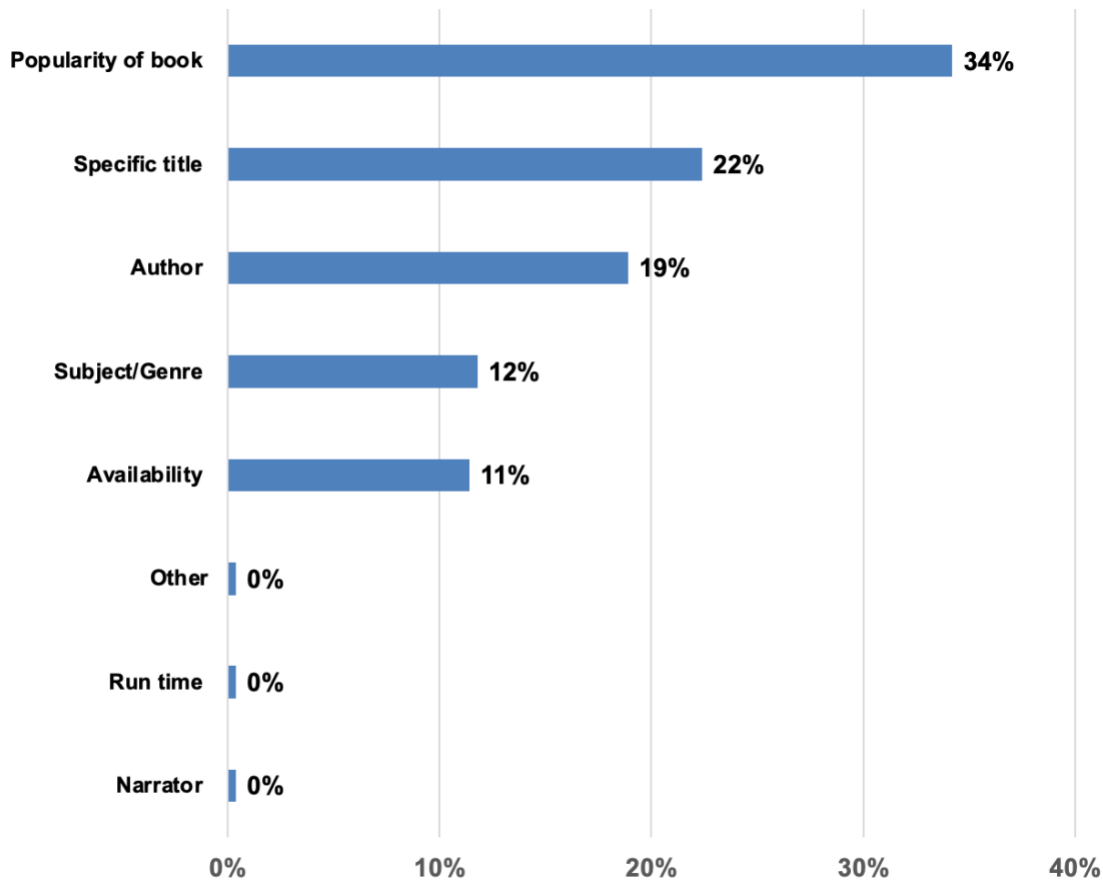
⁵ See some of the write-in comments from respondents in the next section—they are not fans of AI. Also some have identified that library consortia may have prohibitions on AI-generated content, including narrators.

Patron Selection Criteria

General Criteria

According to 34 percent librarians, a book’s popularity is the top factor library patrons consider when choosing to check out an audiobook title, followed by the specific title (22%) and the author (19%). Librarians don’t see the narrator as a primary factor in patron audiobook selection (<1%); we had asked respondents to only select one of the items below, so while (as we’ll see in the next question) narrator is a factor in patron audiobook selection, it’s not the main decision driver.

Figure 39. What do you think patrons care about most when selecting an audiobook? Please select only one answer. —All Respondents



n=228

Availability is more of a factor for patrons of libraries serving larger populations, while subject/genre is more of a factor for patrons of libraries serving smaller populations.

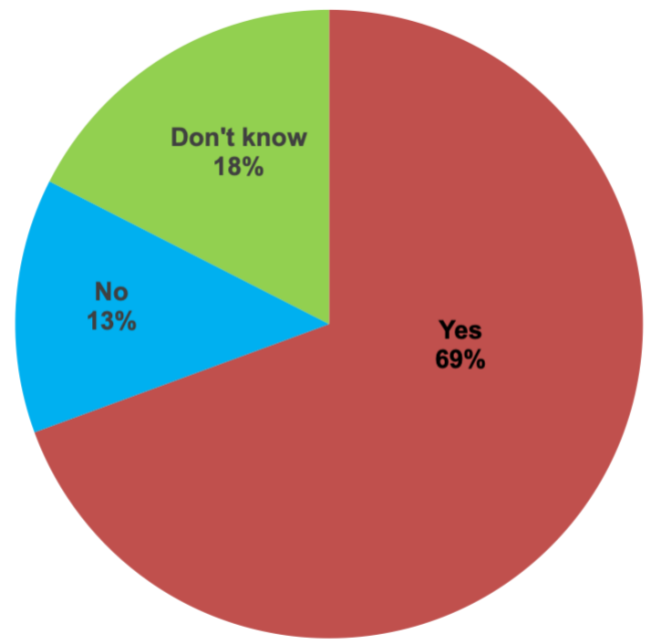
Table 27. What do you think patrons care about most when selecting an audiobook? Please select only one answer. —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Author	21%	16%	23%	13%	17%
Availability	5%	7%	12%	27%	17%
Narrator	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%
Popularity of book	24%	30%	46%	40%	30%
Run time	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Specific title	25%	32%	15%	20%	17%
Subject/Genre	24%	16%	3%	0%	13%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%

Impact of Narrator on Patron Selection

In the previous question, we saw that librarians didn’t see the narrator of an audiobook as a *primary* consideration when selecting but 69 percent of librarians believe that it does have an impact on patron selection. Celebrity narrators would have more cachet than professional but largely unknown audiobook narrators.⁶ Thirteen percent of respondents don’t think narrator has an impact, while 18 percent don’t know.

Figure 40. Do you think the narrator has an impact on patrons’ audiobook selections? —All Respondents



Almost 90 percent of the largest population served libraries feel that narrator has an impact on patron audiobook selection, well above any other size classification.

Table 28. Do you think the narrator has an impact on patrons’ audiobook selections? —Respondents by Population Served

	Under 10,000	10,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 499,999	500,000 or more
Yes	68%	73%	65%	65%	87%
No	14%	9%	12%	19%	13%
Don't know	18%	18%	23%	16%	0%

⁶ While there are narrators who are recognized outside the world of audiobooks—Stephen Fry, for example—there are popular audiobook narrators who are probably unknown to those who do not often listen to audiobooks. Indeed, Audible even has an audiobook Narrator Hall of Fame at <https://www.audible.com/ep/narrator-hall-of-fame>.

In Their Own Words...

As we always do, we asked an open-ended question soliciting general comments about audiobooks. Here is a sampling of their responses (lightly edited).

- Pay Per Use costs are skyrocketing and we are beginning to put restrictions on borrowing to try and mitigate the costs.
- For that very last question, I think the narrator impacts patron selection in the sense that if the narrator voice isn't working for the story, patrons are more likely to DNF it than sit through hours of a voice they do not like. When it comes to a non-human generated voice, I personally have concerns about the ethics of AI and whether the decrease in cost of production (since publishers wouldn't be paying an actor/actress) would translate into cheaper audiobooks, or if companies would be pocketing the extra profit. I am concerned about the actors and actresses whose jobs would be taken by AI and am very unlikely to support a movement like that. I would want reassurance that audiobooks can be AI-generated ethically and without a large impact to a huge community of people. I know that AI is being trained in sounding more human. Our library often receives calls from people trying to train their AI with our voices without our consent. As it stands, my experiences with AI have not endeared me to it and the only way I'd purchase a non-human generated audiobook is if I get a patron request for me to purchase it.
- It was hard to decide between author or narrator on why patrons chose which audiobooks to check out. I put author because most of our audiobook readers enjoy series, but many will also have us look up other books read by specific people because they like the voice.
- Investing in AI narration is not a good idea.
- I want to purchase more audiobooks—our demand is sky high. However, if an audiobook is only available in a leasing model, I won't purchase it unless I absolutely have to and even then I'll say no to some titles I know my patrons would love because there is no way a title can circulate enough before the lease expires to justify the expenditure. There are so many audiobooks I'd like to take a chance on that I just can't because leasing models offer no ROI.
- Audiobooks are their own fund, separate from Children's/YA funds, which is why 0% of children's budget goes to audiobook, even though we do purchase Children's/YA titles.
- My library system's patrons are just getting back into browsing after the pandemic. We have seen a rise in participants in programming, and I've seen a rise in physical audiobook usage since the pandemic, but it's still not back to where it was pre-COVID. With the interest and usage of eaudio, it will probably never get back to where it had been. We find kids and tweens are bigger users of Playaways than adults or teens. I lumped digital audiobooks (i.e. Vox and Wonderbooks) in with physical product as opposed to eaudio for children, playaways too, though they're digital books on physical devices. Diversity in all its forms: gender/race/religion/abilities is something we are always searching for and would love more options. In regards to what our patrons are looking for and what encourages us to purchase, the circulation of the print version obviously has a major impact, but I didn't want to put popularity as the catalyst, because



our audio circulation doesn't always reflect the bestseller lists, especially when it comes to nonfiction.

- We stopped purchasing physical audiobooks last year because the circulation dropped dramatically. The collection was significantly weeded and our patrons didn't notice. We have increased our spending on ebooks. Ebooks represent about 20% of our overall circulation with the majority of coming from eaudiobooks.
- A good narrator matters. We listened to project Hail Mary for book club and it was a great audiobook. Several book club members have gone on to listen to more books narrated by the same narrator. They found other titles just based on narrator.
- We have not purchased audiobooks on CD for the children's collection in years. Those will be phased out in the next few years. We have gone with all Vox or Wonderbooks for children's picture book audio budgets and soon will add in a few juvenile Vox as well.
- My consortium has a very strong policy against any purchasing of AI-narrated audiobooks, which I completely support.
- Narrator rarely matters, unless it's a super popular one. If they don't like a narrator they stop listening, but they don't blacklist that narrator. We are purchasing more eaudio for all ages, but for the kids the physical Playaways are still important, especially for those who are not allowed to have phones yet. We are looking into getting Wonderbooks for titles in the kids fiction section to help kids with reading comprehension and dyslexia.
- We've got to work on the pricing models. The current ones are not sustainable by most libraries with the growing demand.
- People might not choose a book because of the narrator, but they will stop listening to one because of the narrator.
- Used to be simpler with standing order plans from vendors, which are almost all gone. Liked being sent a list of what's coming next and picking the top X that looked best.
- To clarify, I'm sure the narrator matters to some patrons. However, I have never had any patron ask for books by specific narrators.
- Interest in audiobooks and Playaways continues to dwindle in our library district
- Our eaudiobooks don't come from my local library budget, they are purchased on a regional level. So I indicated 0% of my budget going to eaudio. Didn't have a way to clarify that.
- Our patrons who borrow audiobooks absolutely care about the quality of the narrator. Often, even if a book is popular, they will stop listening to the audiobook and return it if the narrator is not to their liking.
- While our budget and circ stats for physical audiobooks are going up, it is almost exclusively for Wonderbooks and Vox Books, which are quite popular with our patrons. I only buy maybe 10-15 juvenile titles a year on CD, and I am the selector for the whole library system
- We have been phasing out adult CD audiobooks for the past 3 years, teen and children's are already gone. Will be phasing in Playaways for all age groups, children's is already using several Playaway products.



- We are looking at eliminating adult audiobooks due to lack of circulation and availability of digital content. However, children's audiobooks go out well with parents. We have no physical YA audiobooks. Our digital collection is an Iowa Library based consortium.
- We have seen a marked decrease in demand for physical audiobooks. One of the main drivers of that trend is the fact that our community consists of many commuters, and vehicles are no longer equipped with CD players. For that reason, our eaudio has increased in popularity, since you can connect phones to car audio via Bluetooth. We order our physical audiobooks via committee for a 10-library system, but all digital media is purchased by our state's division of libraries for use by all the libraries in the state.
- Since we only have audio CDs in our library, some of the answers might not be pertinent. Also, we have not had any children's CDs checked out in several years except to adults.
- YA patrons want books that correlate with their class curriculum/project/assignment. Parents of children want audiobooks that will entertain on trips, or help with reading.
- I would not buy an audiobook narrated by AI because currently all the issues haven't been worked out regarding AI. Is the author getting compensated correctly, why should I pay the prices I am currently paying downloadable audios for an AI-generated narration, whose voice is being cloned and were they compensated, and is this taking work from a human?
- Physical audiobooks are getting less and less popular. Patrons want the easiest, most direct access available. Pay per use and simultaneous use models has exploded over the last few years.
- Selection is much more nuanced than this survey allows, especially when it comes to what lease or purchase options are offered. For popular hits with limited staying power or program related books, it makes sense to buy multi-user simultaneous use copies, for timeless titles it makes sense to purchase one user one copy to own as well as less expensive lease options that help the waitlist resolve quickly until demand drops. It would be nice to have consistent options apply to all titles.
- People do still check out audiobooks, but it is lessening now that everything is streaming. Our statistics do not show that digital audiobooks are checking out much more than physical audiobooks.
- CD audiobooks are on a huge decline but Wonderbook and Vox are on a huge rise.
- Shifting more money for audio from physical to digital budget for next year as that is the overwhelming preference with our patrons now.
- Digital audio is the fastest growing format.
- I would like to increase our eaudiobook collection, but the licensing terms make it impossible to lease all of the titles I want to buy. The titles are either too expensive as a perpetual license or I have to buy the title again when it expires. Publishers need to work with providers like OverDrive, CloudLibrary, and Hoopla to provide better options and terms for eaudio licenses.
- Our demand for digital audiobooks is so huge that we don't get a chance to do much collection development; our budget is eaten up meeting holds lists.



- Some of these questions don't apply to youth. Kids don't mostly care about narrators. We have gotten rid of middle school audio books altogether. Our collection of Vox and Wonderbooks is very popular and growing.
- The question about AI (non-human voices) was disturbing. Public libraries are an important advocate for writers, artists, and performers, and should support creators. AI does not create, it takes from human artists and the result is never good quality.
- We subscribe to OverDrive and Cloud Library. Those audiobooks have long wait lists. When we added hoopla, most of our circulation is digital audio. Our physical audiobooks only go out through interlibrary loan. Our children's CD books hardly ever go out. Our physical audio collection takes little space, but we have weeded heavily. Digital audio is most popular.
- Hoopla is becoming a favorite with many patrons. We have had to double our budget for this resource. Patrons like the titles to be immediately available.
- We purchase a minimal number of adult CD books. Selection is driven by demand, as the cost/demand is too high to select based on reviews, etc.
- I think it is safe to say, despite that I don't have numbers to back it up, that children's audiobooks are the smallest portion of an already small collection. I do not think it's a secret that CD audiobook circulation has been waning and many libraries have stopped purchasing these titles and are even deaccessioning their collections. I come from a severely underfunded urban library, so our collection of both digital and CD audiobooks has never been large. Our children's collections are even more severely underfunded, so they account for a very small portion of our budget. While you may find this to be an appalling state for our collection to be in (I assure you, you are not alone) it really doesn't make much sense for us to concentrate on the numbers of this collection too much, since they are inconsequential and everyone has already agreed that they our children's collections budget is pitiful.
- AI in audiobook narration should have very limited usage, such as textbooks or for patrons with auditory-only learning who have specific title requests. For audiobooks in general, AI is a violation of the expected human connection between narrator and listener. In any audiobook where the listener will find meaning, personal or emotional connection, AI has no way to convey that and should be entirely avoided.
- While audiobooks are very popular, it is getting harder to purchase them due to increased demand and costs that exceed budgets.
- The way our spending and circulation are separated out between digital/physical didn't allow for certainty in many budget questions about the overall use of youth audio, so I skipped some rather than give an inaccurate guess that would skew the data.
- We have seen a significant decrease in the circulation of physical audiobooks. So much so that we have removed 99% of all physical (disc) audiobooks from our collection and rely solely on digital audiobooks. We have not had any complaints or requests for a single physical audiobook since removal. Our Libby and Hoopla numbers continue to hold steady.
- I don't know if the narrator impacts if people will select the book, but I do know if they do not enjoy the narrator they will not enjoy or not finish the title.



- I left the access model preference question blank as deciding on a purchasing model is so complicated because of how the publishers are trying to take as much tax money as possible with so many complicated and cumbersome models. They make us purchase and repurchase and do so much math with barely accessible purchase data and guesstimated circulation projections. It's not necessary. Ideally, we could purchase 40 circulations for the price of a physical book instead of having publishers surge pricing or charging me outrageous prices that they think I will pay for access. They have to cut it out, libraries are a different kind of customer; they need to recognize our value to their business model (free marketing and education) and to society at large and charge accordingly.
- I think the genre and author are the most important for customers browsing for something to listen to. If they start listening to it and don't like the narrator, they will stop and not finish the book. For the books with the most buzz, they have to place holds, so they check out other available titles while they are waiting. Showing off available titles on the main page of our overdrive page is really important for keeping customers satisfied while waiting for the latest big title. Also, we love the 100 concurrent checkouts that are sometimes available now. We know how much usage we'll get. We don't know what a 24-month checkout will get us before it expires. The more options, the more likely we are to purchase a title. Every library's budget and needs for their digital collections differ. We would love to see backlist titles offered for renewal at a lower price or changing to oc/ou or concurrent checkouts. We would be more likely to purchase them again if it was cost effective and better matched the current demand.
- Audiobooks for children are still in demand because they still have CD players in their rooms and in the car. We find a lot of families use them for road trips and homeschoolers really like audio on CD. Since the school district offers digital audiobooks for kids and teens we find fewer teens want audio on CD or even digital from us.
- I love audiobooks for students who struggle with reading print books. I recommend combining a print book and an audiobook to help readers cope with attention span issues because that gives them more sensory input with the material. In the past year, I also helped one young woman who recently got a cochlear implant to find both print and audiobooks of titles so she could get used to matching the sounds of the words to the text.
- The trending lack of physical formats being released is a factor leading to larger budgets for digital audiobook supplementation. Also, the rising costs of digital audiobooks effects being able to give patrons access to titles (i.e., can't afford the high price \$75 for a license).
- Physical audiobooks are pretty much phased out of our library especially in the YA/children's collections.
- I don't like the idea of AI-narrated audio as a selector or listener. It feels icky and generic. However, for accessibility, I wouldn't decline across the board. A good narrator can make a good book great or a great book unpalatable.
- The narrator can make or break an audiobook.
- Our adult audiobook collection is the only audiobook collection we are still adding to, but even that collection is getting so little use now that I don't buy as many as I used to, and I expect to stop buying them altogether very soon.



- Just say no to AI narrated audiobooks! Don't take jobs from hard-working, talented narrators and voice actors.
- CDs and MP3s preferred for juvenile titles. Adult titles represent most of ebook use.
- Our physical collection seems to be dwindling. However, we have more patrons signing up for Libby and other ways to access digital materials.
- The biggest impact for library purchases is author and price. I'm not paying over \$50 for an audiobook that is double the price of the physical book. I'll wait until it goes on clearance to purchase it.
- We are moving towards removing audiobooks for all audiences from our branch locations with a repository at our central location for holds. Playaways are more popular than CDs. We will continue to house Vox books and Wonderbooks at all locations because they're very popular.
- Hard to find children's CD titles and they rarely go out. Hard to find adult CD that are not MP3.
- I think digital audiobooks and Wonderbooks/Vox books are where the future is.
- Digital audio is obviously going through the roof, but I can't wait to remove our physical collection.
- It is tricky to get books on CD as not everyone has a CD player anymore, so the distributors do not always have copies in for the desired title. We do still strive to get these when we can, and have other formats of audiobooks for patrons.
- Our library is such that individual departments cannot decide to spend our budgets, which are for physical items, on digital items. The board would need to decide to move that money over in preparation for an upcoming budget year.
- I would be interested in finding out if libraries have already been working on alternatives to offer portable CD players for checkout so that the audiobooks on CDs might be utilized more, since vehicles no longer have this option.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Audiobooks are a vital part of any public library's adult and children's/YA collections, and very few do not offer them to patrons. Many, if not most, libraries are in the midst of a format transition away from physical media (like CDs) to digital audiobooks (eaudiobooks). This is largely reflective of the fact that society in general is transitioning away from physical media. For example, our survey respondents told us that the primary audience for audiobooks is commuters—and just about any car bought in the last 10 years no longer comes with a CD player, which is going the way of the tape deck. Fewer and fewer people also have CD or other physical media players in their homes these days as well.⁷ At the same time, some libraries tell us that they are having difficulties even buying new titles on CD, so they are hanging on to the CD audiobooks they have but just not buying any new ones. Digital audiobooks are also increasingly circulating, at the expense of physical audiobooks.⁸

We have seen in past *Library Journal* studies that public libraries have been weeding and reducing their print book collections, and so, too, are they starting to consider the same thing for physical audiobooks. About half of respondents have no plans at the moment, but some already have started the process and others are thinking about it even if there are no specific plans for it yet. It will of course depend on patron demand and what is circulating, and the trends there are away from physical media.

That said, on the children's/YA side, physical media remain popular—not necessarily CDs, but hybrid book/audioplayers like Playaways are popular in many libraries, and even those that are eliminating audiobook CDs are keeping Playaways and the like.

For most libraries, audiobooks account for less than 20 percent of their overall materials budgets, although for some they can account for up to 30 percent, but that is as high as audiobooks go, budgetwise. Still, between one-fourth and one-third are expecting that to increase in the next year. As we would expect, more spending is allotted to digital than physical audiobooks.

As we have repeatedly seen with ebooks, libraries struggle with the various access models, although for now they seem generally content with simultaneous use models for new titles and one copy/one user for backlist or older titles.

In terms of audiobook content, fiction is far more popular than nonfiction, and only libraries serving large, probably diverse populations have audiobooks in languages other than English. Choice of narrator is an important criterion—not necessarily a famous name, but a voice that matches the content. A number of respondents mention that patrons don't necessarily select a title based on narrator (popularity is the chief factor) but a poor or unsuitable narrator will cause them to abandon the book.

We should also mention that libraries are vehement in their opposition to non-human or “AI” narrators. They told us this quantitatively, but stressed it in the write-in comments. Not only are

⁷ For some audiophiles, vinyl records are making something of a comeback, but this is not an ideal format audiobooks.

⁸ It also bears mentioning that audiobooks face strong competition from podcasts, particularly among commuters, especially as mobile devices can be synced with one's car audio system.

they leery of the presence of AI in general, but they are opposed to the idea of putting human narrators out of work.



Appendix A: Demographics

This section provides a portrait of the respondents and institutions that completed our survey.

Population Served

Figure 41. What is the population served by your library? —All Respondents

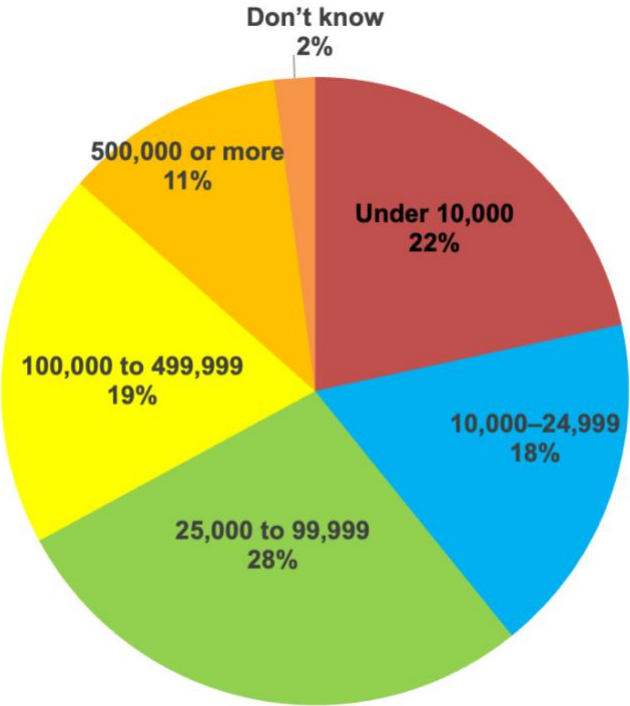


Figure 42. How would you characterize the area where your library is located? —All Respondents

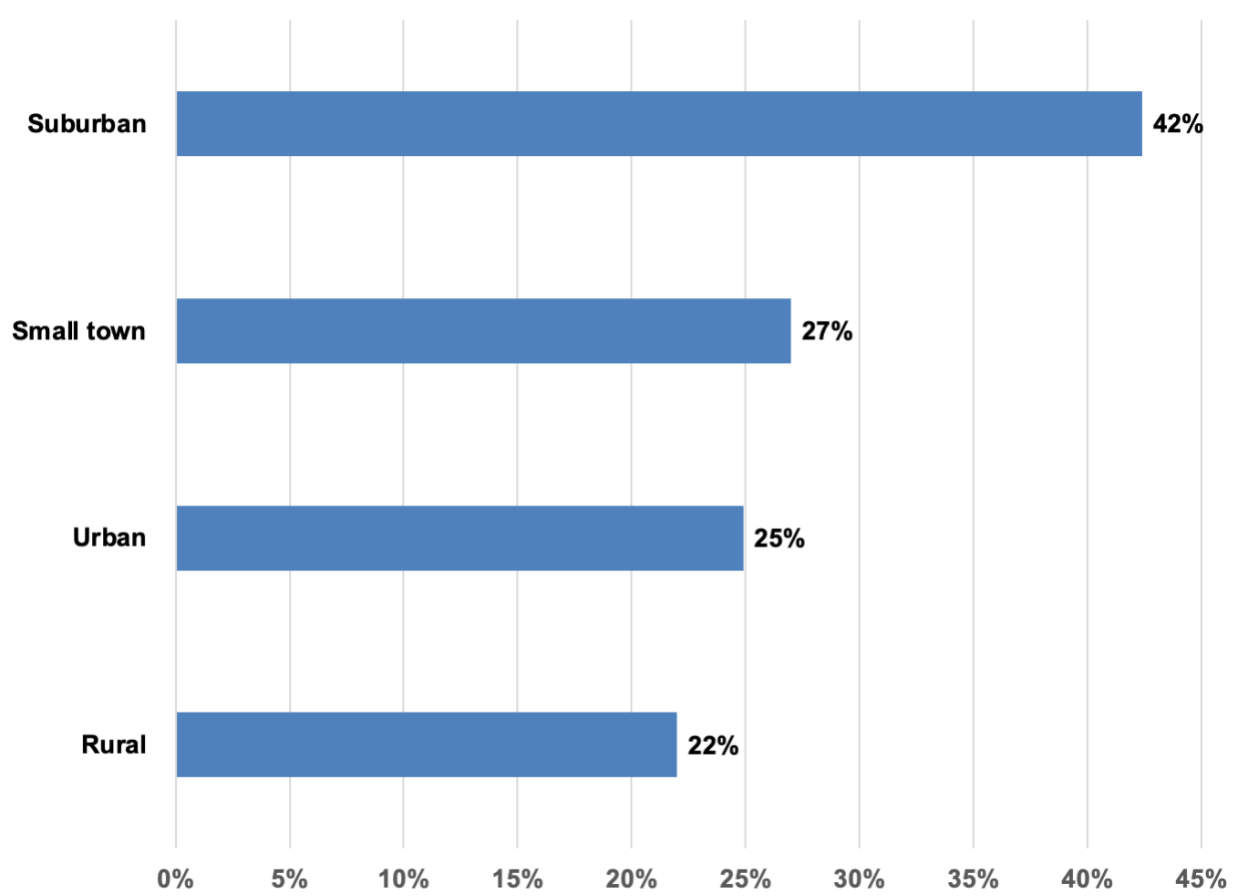


Figure 43. Where is your library located? —All Respondents

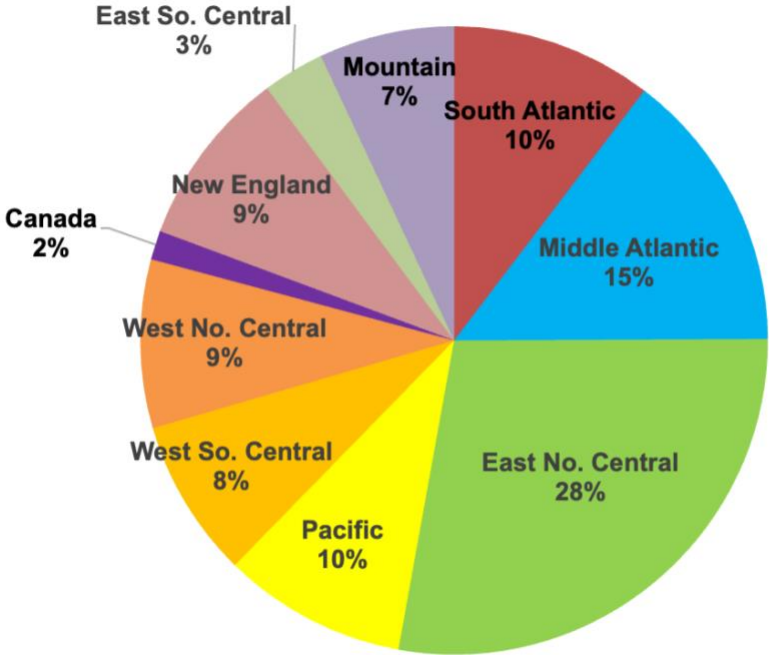


Figure 44. What is your involvement in the collection development process for your library’s audiobooks? — All Respondents

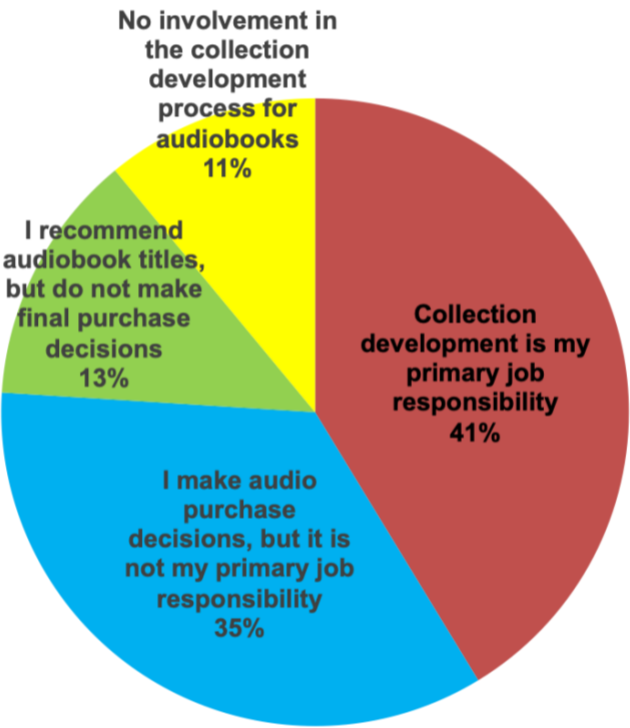
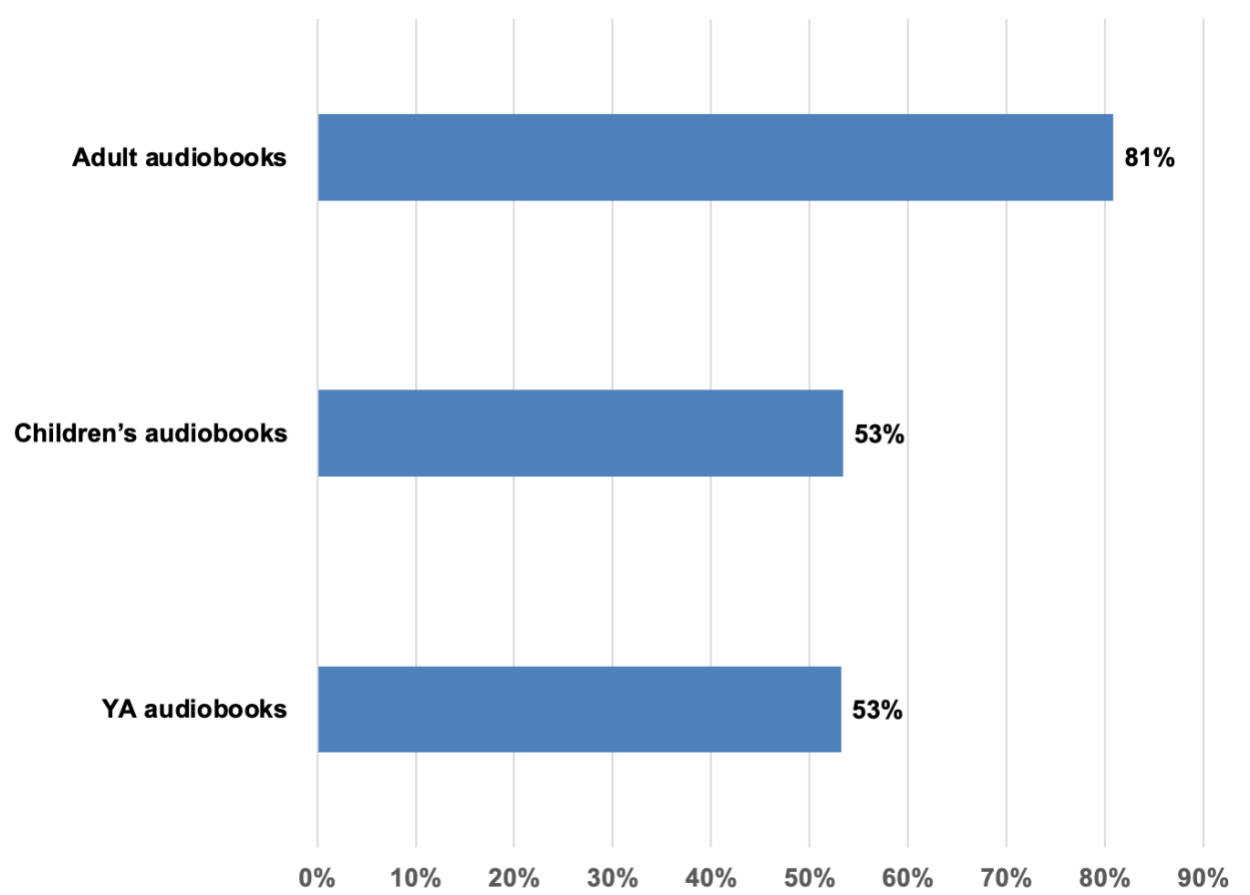


Figure 45. Do you make purchase decisions or recommendations for adult, young adult (YA), or children’s audiobooks? —All Respondents



Appendix B. Methodology & Questionnaire

Methodology

LJ/SLJ worked with representatives from the Audio Publishers Association (APA) to develop a survey about audiobooks in America's public libraries in order to understand the library perspective on formats, budgeting, licensing terms, and selection influences. Survey questions were framed for both adult and youth audio collections.

A survey invite was emailed to a random sample of library selectors and adult/youth services librarians on September 11, 2024, with a reminder to reply on September 20. Respondents were offered the chance to receive a summary of results and to be included in a drawing to win a \$100 electronic Visa® gift card. The survey closed October 21, 2024 with 486 U.S. public library responses.

The sample was screened to include only library staff who are involved in recommending/purchasing audiobooks for their library. Respondents were branched to a line of either adult or children's/YA questioning based on their responses. The data was cleaned, tabulated, and analyzed by the LJ/SLJ research department. The data is unweighted.

Questionnaire

1. What type of library do you work in?

Public library

School (K-12) library ([thank and terminate survey](#))

College/University library ([thank and terminate survey](#))

Other type of library ([thank and terminate survey](#))

Do not work in a library ([thank and terminate survey](#))

2. What is the population served by your library?

Under 10,000

10,000 to 24,999

25,000 to 99,999

100,000 to 499,999

500,000 or more

Don't know

3. Where is your library located? [[dropdown list of states](#)]

4. How would you characterize the area where your library is located? [[accept more than one answer for large systems](#)]

Urban

Suburban

Small town

Rural



5. What types of audiobooks does your library currently offer? Check all that apply.

- Adult audiobooks
- YA audiobooks
- Children’s audiobooks
- We have no audiobooks [Thank and end survey]

6. What is your involvement in the collection development process for your library’s audiobooks?

- Collection development is my primary job responsibility
- I make audio purchase decisions, but it is not my primary job responsibility
- I recommend audiobook titles, but do not make final purchase decisions
- No involvement in the collection development process for audiobooks [Thank and end survey]

7. [If make purchase decisions or recommendations] Do you make purchase decisions or recommendations for adult, young adult (YA), or children’s audiobooks? Check all that apply.

- Adult audiobooks [If adult, ask the questions about adult collections]
- YA audiobooks [If YA & not adult, ask questions about children’s/YA collections]
- Children’s audiobooks [If Children’s and not adult, ask questions about children’s/YA collections]

8. Does your library independently license/acquire audiobooks or does it receive access through a regional or state library cooperative/consortium?

- Independently license/acquire audiobooks
- Get audiobook access through a regional library cooperative
- Both

9. In percentage terms, please estimate how the licensing models below apply to your library’s digital audiobook collection?

- _____ % One copy/one user
- _____ % Simultaneous use
- _____ % Metered access
- _____ % Pay per use
- _____ % Other, please specify: _____

10. What audiobook licensing model do you most prefer for new releases and what is your preference for backlist titles? Please check only one answer in each column.

	New Releases (within 18 mos. of initial release)	Backlist Titles (more than 18 mos. past initial release)
One copy/one user		
Simultaneous use		
Metered access		



Pay per use		
Other, please specify: _____		



11a & b. Which [adult or children's/YA] audiobook formats does your library currently have available? Check all that apply.

	Adult audiobook formats	Children's/YA audiobook formats
Digital audiobooks		
CDs (including book and CD sets for children)		
Preloaded audiobook players (e.g., Playaways, Yoto Players, etc.)		
Children's print books with integrated ready-to-play audiobook (e.g., Vox Books, Wonderbooks)		
Other, please specify:_____		

12a. Please estimate the percentage of your library's total ADULT audiobook circulation that comes from digital audiobooks versus physical audio.

_____ % digital audiobooks

_____ % physical audiobooks

12b. Please estimate the percentage of your library's total CHILDREN'S/YA audiobook circulation that comes from digital audiobooks versus physical audio.

_____ % digital audiobooks

_____ % physical audiobooks

13a & b. Approximately what percent of your library's total [adult or children's/YA] circulation do audiobooks represent?

0%

1-10%

11-20%

21-30%

Over 30%, please specify:_____

14a & b. How has your [adult or children’s/YA] audiobook circulation changed in the last year? Please answer for both digital and physical audiobooks, if applicable.

	Increased significantly	Increased moderately	Stayed the same	Decreased moderately	Decreased significantly	n/a
Digital audiobooks						
Physical audiobooks						

15a. Please estimate how your adult audiobook circulation breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction:

_____ % Fiction audiobooks
_____ % Nonfiction audiobooks

15b. Please estimate how your children’s/YA audiobook circulation breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction:

_____ % Fiction audiobooks
_____ % Nonfiction audiobooks

16. What three fiction genres are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library?

- Classics
- Fantasy
- General fiction
- Historical fiction
- Horror
- Inspirational fiction
- Literary fiction
- Mysteries
- Romance
- Science Fiction
- Thrillers/Suspense
- Other Fiction, please specify: _____

17. What three nonfiction subjects are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library?

- Biographies
- Business
- Cooking
- Environment & Nature
- Health & Fitness
- History
- Humor



Memoirs
Parenting
Poetry
Politics
Popular Science
Psychology
Religion or Spirituality
Self Help
Social Science
Sports
Travel/Adventure
True Crime
Other Nonfiction, please specify: _____

18a & b. Thinking about your library's [adult & children's/YA] audiobook borrowers, what percentage would you estimate exclusively borrow audiobooks and what percent borrow other formats as well (e.g., ebooks, print books)?

_____ % exclusively borrow audio

_____ % borrow multiple formats

19. [Ask all] Would you say your audiobook collection particularly supports any of the following patrons? Check all that apply.

Commuters/Travelers
English language learners
Listeners of languages other than English
Emerging readers
Struggling readers
Reluctant readers
Blind people/those with low vision
People with learning disabilities
People with intellectual disabilities
People with physical disabilities and/or differences
Auditory learners
Multitaskers (e.g., crafters, runners, etc.)
Seniors
Other, please specify: _____



20a & b. Approximately what percent of your audiobook collection is represented by titles recorded in languages other than English?

	Adult audiobooks	Children's/YA audiobooks
% of audio collection in languages other than English	0%	0%
	1-5%	1-5%
	6-10%	6-10%
	11-15%	11-15%
	16-20%	16-20%
	Over 20%	Over 20%

21. How does your library promote its audiobook collection to the public? Check all that apply.

Website
 Signage
 Librarian recommendations/Listening advisory
 Displays
 Catalog/MARC records
 Cloud library shelves (e.g., Libby, Hoopla, etc.)
 Social media
 Flyers/Bookmarks
 Newsletter
 Booklists
 Programming
 Local media (e.g., newspaper blurbs, ads)
 None of the above
 Other, please specify: _____
 None of the above

22. In the last year, has your library hosted any programming that is audiobook specific or involved your library's audiobook collection?

Yes, briefly explain: _____
 No
 Don't know

23a&b. Approximately what percent of your library's total [ADULT/CHILDREN'S/YA] materials budget is devoted to audiobooks (in all formats)?

0%
 1-10%
 11-20%
 21-30%
 Over 30%, please specify: _____



24a&b. Over the next year, how do you expect the share of total materials budget devoted to [ADULT & CHILDREN'S/YA] audiobooks will change?

Increase

Decrease

Stay the same

25a & b. What percent of your library's [ADULT/CHILDREN'S/YA] audiobook spending would you estimate goes toward physical audiobooks versus digital audiobooks?

_____ % physical audiobooks

_____ % digital audiobooks

26a & b. [If CDs or Playaways in Q11] Does your library have plans to eliminate physical audiobooks for adults or children in the near future?

	Adult audiobooks	Children's/YA audiobooks
Yes, within the next year		
Yes, within the next two years		
No plans		
Don't know		
Other, please specify:		

27a. Please estimate how your adult audiobook spending breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction:

_____ % Fiction audiobooks

_____ % Nonfiction audiobooks

27b. Please estimate how your children's/YA audiobook spending breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction:

_____ % Fiction audiobooks

_____ % Nonfiction audiobooks

28. What factors influence your audiobook selection decisions for the library? Please check all that apply.

Audiobook recommendation database

Audio-specific newsletters

Award winners (Audies, etc.)

Narrator

Patron request

Positive audiobook reviews

Publishers' newsletters/websites

Special features (e.g., musical accompaniment, full cast, sound effects, etc.)

Supplementary resources (e.g., photos, downloads, additional materials, etc.)

Vendors' e-newsletters/websites

Other, please specify: _____

29. How much impact does narrator have on your audiobook selection for the library?

Large impact

Moderate impact

Minimal impact

No impact

30. Would a non-human voiced narrator influence your library's decision to obtain an audio title?

Would only select if no other narrator choice is available

Large impact on choice

Little impact on choice

No impact on choice

Would not purchase

31. What do you think patrons care about most when selecting an audiobook? Please select only one answer.

Author

Availability

Narrator

Popularity of book

Run time

Specific title

Subject/Genre

Other, please specify: _____

32. Do you think the narrator has an impact on patrons' audiobook selections?

Yes

No

Don't know

33. [Optional] Please use the space below for any comments you may have about library audiobooks or your response(s) to this survey.

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Yes, LJ/SLJ may print my name

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