Yavapai Library Network

Providing Exceptional Library Services in Yavapai County

A STUDY OF SHARED SERVICES & EFFICIENT USE OF TAXPAYER DOLLARS

Yavapai, located at the geographic center of Arizona, stretches out over 8,000 square miles, encompassing portions of the Sonoran Desert in a basin to the south and rising in elevation to the north in transition to the Colorado plateau. The over 200,000 residents who live in Yavapai County are distributed among rural communities, some as small as a few hundred people. Roughly 20% of the population live in Prescott, the largest city and county seat of Yavapai County.

This mix of broad geography, small population, and limited financial resources create challenges to providing high-quality information technology and education infrastructure for the community. In similar rural settings across the United States, public libraries and schools operate in geographic and professional isolation, drawing on the limited resources of their locality.

The **Yavapai Library Network (YLN)**, a consortium of 42 academic, public, school, and special libraries, was established in 1985 to meet funding and geographic challenges by pooling investment in infrastructure and staff. These shared services are both better and more cost effective than individual libraries could provide on their own:

- **Patrons of member libraries have access to a shared collection with more than 1 million items** - the equivalent of a library serving a much larger county or a medium-sized city.

- **Libraries in YLN benefit from state-of-the-art technology infrastructure and highly skilled IT staff**. These shared resources are provided at a lower cost and with less effort than if each member library managed its IT department independently.

- **YLN creates a community of library staff across the County** who share ideas, solve problems together, and focus on a common mission and set of values.

As shown on the following pages, the savings to tax payers are real. YLN helps libraries achieve cost efficiencies through shared resources and staff and economies of scale.

YLN saves tax payers about $3 million per year. For every dollar invested in YLN, member libraries receive between at least $6.68 and $9.29 in direct benefits.

"We have a really high quality library system here and I feel obligated to support it, YLN, and my libraries, the best that I can."
Supervisor Rowle Simmons
District 1, Yavapai County Board of Supervisors

$3 MILLION

The estimated annual municipal funding that participation in YLN saves member libraries every year.

$7.98

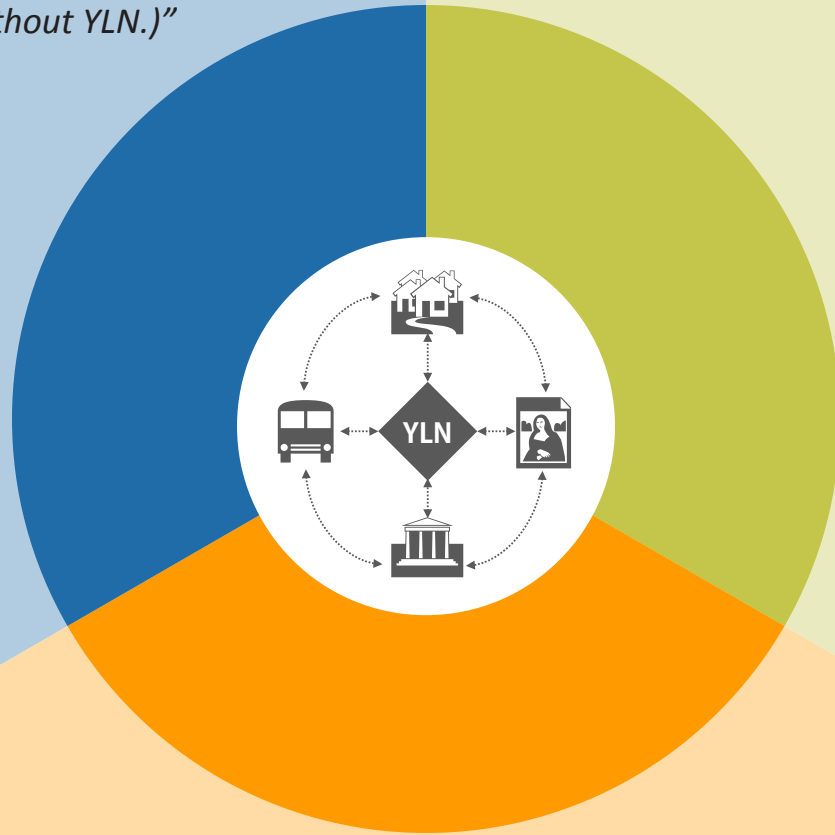*The estimated return on every dollar invested into YLN.*

Collections ACCESS

"My patrons have access to deeper, broader, and more current materials and resources (than I would have without YLN.)"

TECHNOLOGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

"I have access to more or better infrastructure and technology (than I would have without YLN.)"

YLN

Professional & Operational Collaboration & Efficiency

"I am able to perform my duties better (than I would without participating in YLN.)"

ACCESS TO DEEPER, BROADER, & MORE CURRENT COLLECTIONS

The Yavapai Library Network transforms small libraries across rural Yavapai County into the equivalent of major city libraries, providing patrons convenient access to over 1.2 million books, magazines, and multi-media items, as well as numerous expensive online resources. Through YLN's transit system, users of one YLN member library may request items held by other member libraries, giving them access to the "collective collection" of all member libraries. Such requests represented about 10% of YLN's total circulation in 2012/13, with almost 250,000 items moved from one library to another for use by a patron. In addition to books, CDs, DVDs, journals, and the like, patrons of YLN member libraries have shared access to many online databases.

This means that residents of rural Yavapai County, many of whom live an hour or more away from the nearest bookstore, have convenient access to a collection on par with those held by the Albuquerque or Pima County Libraries, or big city libraries such as the Oakland and Austin City Library Systems.

Collection sharing allows member libraries to target their expenditures on more specialized items relevant to their individual library patron base. This benefits all patrons of YLN by increasing the depth of the shared collection. Each library type brings complementary and unique assets to the table:

- **Public libraries** tend to have the largest and most diverse collections, including a wide breadth of literature and popular non-fiction books. Public libraries are also likely to have significant collections of entertainment materials, including movies, music, and games.
- **K-12 libraries** focus on fiction and non-fiction for children, including books for early readers and English language learners. They have extensive children's literature collections and carry large quantities of some items which can serve an entire classroom or grade level.
- **Academic libraries** feature textbooks, technical resources, and scholarly journals, some of which would not be carried by a typical public library.
- **Special libraries and collections** are contributed by museums, medical institutions, and law libraries. While these collections tend to be the least diverse, they also include rare or even out-of-print and other unique resources. Such items may have limited appeal, but they are immensely valuable to some patrons.

The YLN collection is also more up-to-date than most individual library collections, with partners across the network contributing to new purchases.

Access to the shared collections is of particular value to some members, lending credibility to libraries with smaller individual collections or particularly limited or specific collections. For charter school libraries, this prestige can translate to the financial bottom line, as a robust library can help encourage enrollment.

Ultimately, resource sharing can be looked at as a mechanism through which better-resourced libraries support libraries and communities with limited access to resources. This public service promotes a positive social agenda by supporting literacy and access to life-changing and life-enhancing resources and information for library patrons throughout Yavapai County.

MORE ROBUST & USER-FRIENDLY TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Libraries are first and foremost about access to information. A library's "Integrated Library System" or ILS is the software which allows it to track and manage items, and enables its patrons find and check these items out. YLN has established a shared state-of the-art ILS, which is used by all network member libraries.

In some cases, this meant upgrading libraries from insufficient or obsolete systems, and in other cases, from no ILS at all. Many Yavapai County libraries could not afford to purchase and manage these systems on their own given their limited staff resources. YLN staff help troubleshoot and provide ongoing assistance through a convenient ticketed IT Help Desk system. Member libraries can submit a ticket 24/7 and be assured that their issue will be resolved promptly and professionally.

By sharing ILS infrastructure and its expert staff across the Network, YLN provides this critical functionality in a cost-efficient manner, avoiding the need for costly and duplicative investments in infrastructure and IT staff positions at each individual library. YLN assumes responsibility for capital IT planning for member libraries and provides a predictable, reliable level of maintenance service. This allows individual member budgets to be focused on direct program or collections needs, while ensuring that they continue to have access to the most up-to-date technology. Without the Network, individual libraries would be challenged to plan and budget for their technology needs, especially when they involve large capital outlays.

While the value of many of these shared technology services is directly quantifiable in terms of avoided costs, YLN's technology and infrastructure also provide other less tangible benefits to members of the Network and its patrons. YLN goes beyond technical functionality and cost-efficiency, ensuring that the technologies it deploys across member libraries are very user-friendly and consistent for patrons. This includes the user interfaces that greet patrons at libraries

across the Network and the patron authentication software that allows library cards to work at all member libraries.

Several representatives of member libraries interviewed for this report cited the peace of mind that comes with knowing that their ILS infrastructure is well-maintained and that expert assistance is only a call away. Members of YLN consistently laud the responsiveness and level of customer service they receive via YLN's technology support. They cited the benefit of working with the same support staff, by stating that they are knowledgeable about the systems and invested in the YLN mission. Several contrasted that experience with a more typical vendor-client relationship.

> "[Our school library] wouldn't have as much credibility without the Network. Libraries need to evolve to stay relevant. It's not enough to just provide a collection of books any more. The library also provides media access and technology as part of its services. This is something we wouldn't be able to do efficiently or effectively without the Network."
>
> **Dr. Mary Halvorson, Tri-City College Prep**

STRONGER PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION & OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

YLN serves as a hub for professional collaboration and provides formal and informal structures by which member libraries can advance their skills and access additional operational capacity when needed. This assistance may come from YLN staff members themselves, or by tapping into the community of library staff that are connected through the Network.

YLN provides many structured opportunities for professional learning and development. The most visible way it does this is to provide training to its members.

These trainings cover topics of interest to the professional librarian, such as new national cataloging standards or website development. YLN also facilitates professional user groups focused on topics such as circulation, youth services, and cataloging. These groups bring together staff members with a common interest from different libraries and with varying levels of skill and experience. The user groups create opportunities to learn from each other, share experiences, and collaboratively solve problems.

YLN serves as a gathering point for organizations with a similar mission, and individuals with similar values. Interviewees described YLN as a values-driven community, working to promote literacy and education in the region and helping to maintain quality libraries in rural outposts. There is a sense of camaraderie and pride associated with being part of a broader community that focuses on this valuable work. Within this community, informal networking among peers has facilitated the sharing of job postings, hiring staff, sharing resources such as excess collections, and general problem solving.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES
Embry Riddle Aeronautical University
Prescott College
Yavapai College
Yavapai College Prescott
Yavapai College Verde

SPECIAL LIBRARIES
Sharlot Hall Museum & Archives
Arizona Archaeological Society Collection*
Ecosa Institute*
Highlands Center for Natural History*
The Phippen Museum*
Smoki Museum Research Library*
VA Medical Center Library*
Yavapai County Law Library*

*Non-member that includes resources in the YLN catalog.

K-12 LIBRARIES
Bradshaw Mountain High School
Camp Verde Unified School District
Chino Valley Unified School District
Mayer Unified School District
Mayer Elementary School
Mayer High School
Mingus Union High School
Orme School
Prescott Unified School District
Abia Judd School
Granite Mountain Middle School
Lincoln Elementary School
Miller Valley School
Prescott High School
Prescott Mile High Middle School
Taylor Hicks School
Washington Traditional School
Tri-City College Prep High School

PUBLIC LIBRARIES
Camp Verde Community Library
Chino Valley Public Library
Clark Memorial Library
Cottonwood Public Library
Jerome Public Library
Prescott Public Downtown Library
Prescott Valley Public Library
Sedona Public Library
Village of Oak Creek
Yavapai County Free Library District
Ash Fork
Bagdad
Beaver Creek/School
Black Canyon
Congress
Cordes Lakes
Crown King
Dewey Humboldt
Mayer
Seligman
Wilhoit
Yarnell
YCFLD Central Office

"The best [aspect] of being part of the Yavapai Library Network is that we can all collaborate to benefit from each other's services and resources."

Yvonne Kimball, Dewey-Humboldt Town Manager

THE QUANTIFIABLE BOTTOM LINE: COST SAVINGS & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The preceding pages describe both quantifiable and non-quantifiable benefits that YLN provides member libraries, strengthening their ability to serve their users and the broader Yavapai County community. Here we focus on those services that are quantifiable by identifying cost savings and the return on the community's investment in the Network.

EXHIBIT 1: Summary of Estimated Annual Value of Quantifiable Benefits Provided to Library Members by YLN, Fiscal Year 2013

	TOTAL ANNUAL BENEFIT (LOW)	TOTAL ANNUAL BENEFIT (HIGH)
Collections Access	$ 2,343,974	$ 2,874,991
Technology & Infrastructure	$ 512,482	$ 1,091,606
Professional Collaboration & Operational Capacity	$ 14,553	$ 29,281
TOTAL ESTIMATED ANNUAL BENEFITS	$ 2,871,009	$ 3,995,879

Source: YLN, 2014; BERK, 2014. Note: Figures do not add due to rounding.

Once we have quantified the value of benefits, we can compare YLN's operating costs to identify what it would cost individual libraries to provide comparable services. In doing so, we see that ***YLN's shared services model saved tax payers $3 million in 2012/13.***

We can also compare the total benefits provided by the Network (between at least $2.8 and $3.9 million in 2012/13) to its operating costs for the same time period ($430,000). This comparisons shows that the return on investment ratio for YLN is between 6.7 and 9.3 to 1. Stated another way, ***for every dollar invested in YLN, member libraries receive between at least $6.68 and $9.29 in direct benefits***.

EXHIBIT 2: Summary of Total Cost Savings for and Return on Investment to Taxpayers by YLN, Fiscal Year 2013

	LOW	HIGH
Total Estimated Annual Benefits	$ 2,871,009	$ 3,995,879
Total Expenditures	$ 430,046	$ 430,046
COST SAVINGS	$ 2,440,963	$ 3,565,833
RETURN ON INVESTMENT	$6.68	$9.29
AVERAGE	$7.98	

Source: YLN, 2014; BERK, 2014. Note: Figures do not average precisely due to rounding.

These estimates of cost savings and return on investment are conservative in that they include the Network's full costs, but only relative to benefits that can be easily measured. The less tangible benefits described in the preceding sections are not included, meaning that the full value provided by YLN may be considerably greater than we can quantify.