

The Use of Public Libraries in New Brunswick 2010 to 2018

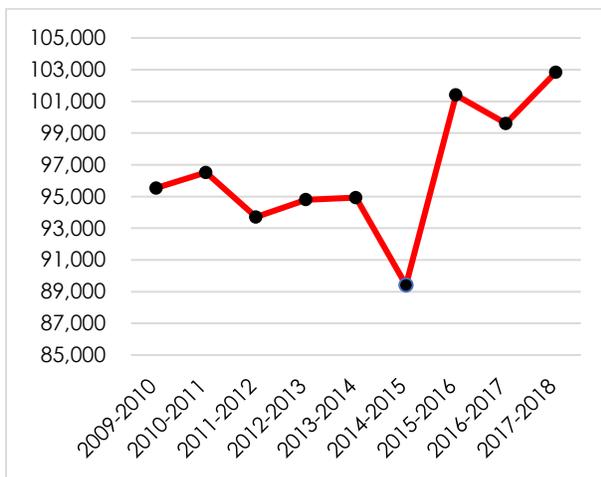
Can public libraries remain relevant in an era of lightning-fast Internet access, Kindle e-books, and Amazon Prime's 2-day book deliveries? Most New Brunswickers admit to loving their public libraries, but how many actually use them?

Studies show that public libraries provide valuable social capital within their communities. They bring people together, create trust, provide information, and contribute to overall communal well-being. Yet, libraries are increasingly pressured to demonstrate their value and their usefulness to the public.

We examine the use of public libraries in NB from 2010 to 2018 by looking at borrower trends – how many library cards are being used (“active borrowers”) and how many items are being checked out (“physical” and “electronic circulations”).

Active borrowers' demand for NB public libraries grew by **8%** from 2010-2018. Since 2015, the number of active borrowers has been increasing in the South of the province (**13%**), especially in Moncton, Saint John, and Fredericton (**19%**).

Active Borrowers in NB, 2010-2018



KEY FINDINGS

- There has been remarkable stability and growth in the use of NB libraries
- Disruptions to library services (i.e., closure, renovations) did not lower demand for library services
- Library use significantly increased between 2015/2016, likely as a result of
 - More flexible ways of providing library cards
 - Eliminating overdue fees for children
 - Opening all public libraries on Saturdays (and some on Sundays)

While we find this positive trend is driven by population growth in the South, demand for libraries in the North remains constant, despite slow population growth and a suffering economy.

The number of physical circulations has decreased over time, but the launch of the province's electronic library led to an increase in the total volume of circulations (**2%**). Despite this, the public still borrows primarily physical materials.

Overall, the growth and steady demand for Public Library services in NB is remarkable, given the technological and social changes taking place throughout the province.

(For access to the full report, go to <https://www.unb.ca/nbirdt/>.)