

"Big Heads" Library Materials Budget Survey Now on ARL Website

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The Library Materials Budget Survey (LMBS), an important source of information on library materials budget trends among large research libraries, is now available via the [ARL Office of Scholarly Communication website](#). The LMBS began in 1986/87 within the ALCTS/CMDS/Chief Collection Development Officers of Large Research Libraries Discussion Group (CCDO, also known self-mockingly as "Big Heads"). I have compiled the CCDO's survey since 1996.

The membership of Big Heads, or the CCDO group, consists of the 40 largest university research libraries in North America, as well as the Center for Research Libraries, the Research Libraries of the New York Public Libraries, the Smithsonian Libraries, and the three U.S. national libraries--Library of Congress, National Agricultural Library, and National Library of Medicine. The website represents a cooperative effort among ARL's Office of Scholarly Communication, the ARL Statistics and Measurement program, and the compiler of the CCDO survey. This collaboration began two years ago when ARL created an interactive web form to assist in the gathering of data.

The data collected with the CCDO survey are different from and complementary to the data collected in the annual ARL Statistics related to library materials expenditures. The CCDO survey collects and analyzes more detailed information related to the sources of funds, how library materials budgets are constructed, and how the funds are being spent, broken down by certain types of materials, broad subject areas, and other categories. The Definitions section of the website defines each category of the survey and can be used as a guide to library materials budget terminology.

The survey is more informal and dynamic than the ARL Statistics, with more frequent additions and changes in categories to reflect emerging budgetary concerns. Furthermore, some of the figures included in the survey are not easily obtained and are "best estimates." But the CCDO group feels that best estimates are useful in documenting trends. Other differences between these two surveys are highlighted on the website.

The website includes annual Narrative Summary Reports from FY1996 to the present, and Detailed Historical Spreadsheets for each category from the year that the data were collected. The comparative information in the CCDO surveys has frequently been cited in budget justification statements among members of the discussion group.

The most closely watched categories and the first to be tracked in the survey are base budgets and the annual increases to them. The base budget represents a relatively stable, agreed-upon figure between the university and the library that is the basis for long-range budget planning. The base budget changes incrementally, ideally each year to reflect the cost of library materials and basic changes in programs.

During the 1990s, library materials base budgets did expand but not as rapidly as in previous decades and certainly did not keep up with inflation for library materials. The [chart of annual average percentage increases to base budgets covering 1988/89-1999/2000](#) demonstrates that for the CCDO group annual increases were regular and significant. The overall average for the 12-year period was 6.1% per year. The two institutions with the highest and lowest base increases were both state institutions. The one with the largest increases changed radically from year to year and totaled more than 100% for the period surveyed. The one with the smallest increases (and actual decreases in some years) only increased by

just under 20% for the entire period, barely enough to cover the inflation rate for serials for two years. Thus, while budgets did not technically "shrink" in the 1990s, the loss of "buying power" and the inability to keep up with new programs was substantial for some but less so for others.

The survey also shows that during the second half of the 1990s, when annual increases to the base were less than in the first half of the decade, the availability of "one-time funds" or annual supplements to the base budget increased. While this made long-range planning more difficult because of this "short-term" funding pattern, it helped keep overall expenditures up. Some institutions were forced to use these temporary increases to cover a portion of their serials expenses, generally considered a "fixed cost," to avoid more severe cancellations. While this practice violated traditional library materials budget principles, such risk-taking in budgeting for collections is now more common.

Categories added to the survey in the mid-1990s include Electronic Resources and Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery. These two categories are difficult to track because some institutions do not fund these expenses entirely or at all from their library materials budgets, on which the CCDO survey focuses exclusively. Some institutions use the access budget for these categories. Furthermore, electronic resources in some state institutions, such as those in Ohio and California, are acquired primarily with statewide funds not reflected in a library's own budget. Given these caveats, both of these categories are rising significantly in the library materials expenditures. Expenditures for binding, an indicator of trends in the physical collection, however, have remained stable.

As noted above, as a mechanism to track trends, the CCDO survey is more informal and subject to change than the ARL Statistics. Another aspect of its informality is that corrections can be submitted after the results have been posted and group members are encouraged to supply missing data in the historical spreadsheets. So look for revised spreadsheets as well as future annual reports.

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