**Common Public Library Funding Myths**

**Myth:** My library has plenty of money—it just opened a new computer lab.

**Reality:** Many public libraries receive local, state and federal grants to pay for everything from renovations to specific programs. These dollars cannot be used for anything but what’s specified in the grant.

**Myth:** Why would my library need money? We passed a levy only a few years ago.

**Reality:** Operating levies and referendums usually aren’t indefinite and often expire within five to ten years. Your library may be renewing the current levy or asking for additional funding based on future need or to offset cuts in state or federal funding.

**Myth:** Libraries have too many employees—can’t they save money by letting some of them go?

**Reality:** There is a lot that goes on at a library besides what patrons see—such as planning, purchasing, cataloging, training, marketing, maintenance and community partnership activities. Also, keep in mind that many of the helpful people you see stacking books or assisting with classes are volunteers.

**Myth:** A new library building means that the library has loads of money in its budget.

**Reality:** Most libraries have a capital budget, for maintenance or expansion projects, and an operating budget, for staff salaries and other operating expenses. Also, the money used to build the new library was probably a combination of a separate levy, donations and grants.

**Myth:** Now that libraries have e-readers and other Internet-based technology, they can downsize to save money.

**Reality:** All of the new technology now available through your local library costs money and, often, creates many ongoing charges—and the need for more technology-savvy staff. Also, access to this technology has increased library traffic, making it even more important to maintain and evolve the library building and staff skills.

**Myth:** Public library funding is the state’s responsibility.

**Reality:** While state money does help support local libraries, these dollars can be inconsistent and prone to cuts—and for most libraries, a very small portion of the overall budget. Local dollars make up the majority of budgets for almost all American public libraries.

**Myth:** The busier the library, the more money it receives.

**Reality:** Unfortunately, library funding is not based on use or demand. Most libraries work on annual budgets based mainly on city or county allocations, or property tax allocations.

**Myth:** The federal government funds U.S. public libraries.

**Reality:** Actually, the vast majority of library budgets come from local sources—state and federal dollars usually make up the smallest portion.

**Myth:** I’m already funding the library by paying my late fees and purchasing items at book sales.

**Reality:** Late fees and book sale dollars provide a very modest contribution to libraries and support replacement of materials lost or items not returned. Fees and fines are not sufficient to support operating or program activities.

**Myth:** Every public library in the U.S. is funded in the same way.

**Reality:** Even though all public libraries are funded by some combination of local, state and federal dollars, the mix is unique. To learn more about how your library is funded, contact your local library.

**Myth:** Libraries use private donations for extras.

**Reality:** Some do, but many libraries across the U.S. report that they are also starting to use non-tax revenue, such as donations, to help pay for critical budget items like staff salaries and collections.

**Myth:** If I do not vote in support of a library operating levy or referendum, other funding from the state or federal government will make up the difference for my library.

**Reality:** When a library or library system loses a local operating levy or referendum, it can mean cuts in programs, staffing and collections or closing its doors. In the majority of cases, there is no mechanism for state or federal funding to supplement local support.