

E-BOOK PRICING

A Crisis for Public Libraries

Public libraries play an essential role as a **dynamic place for innovation and opportunity**. As digital technologies become increasingly inseparable from the ways that people learn, work, and interact, public libraries' abilities to afford access to e-books, e-audiobooks and other e-content like streaming movies are more important than ever.

Urban Libraries Council members serve about 200 cities and counties, representing 30% of the U.S. population. Many urban libraries spend 50% or more of their collections budgets on licensed content.



The Outsized Cost of E-books for Libraries

A typical license for a digital book costs libraries **\$55 for a 2-year license, limited to checkout by a single user**. This purchase price significantly exceeds the average consumer price of \$13 for an eBook and \$27 on average for the physical book, according to Readers First.

ULC libraries have seen an average 19% increase in electronic circulation for 2023 to 2024, which is up 8% from the change between 2022 to 2023.

Digital Content and Public Libraries

- Physical books are owned by the library, while **most digital content is licensed** for a limited time, much like a subscription.
- While some publishers have subscriptions that are sustainable for libraries, major publishers have **unreasonably high prices** that far exceed the print equivalent and consumer prices.
- With **rising public demand**, public libraries are forced to shift a greater share of their funding to digital books, spending less on other resources as well as reducing their ability to build a balanced collection of authors and materials.
- Libraries are also **essential to the publishing industry**, from increasing literacy rates, creating lifelong readers, to purchasing millions of books, and local and national author promotion and discovery.

What is Needed



A Seat at the Table

With five big publishers controlling the most in-demand titles, ULC and its members need conversations between libraries and publishers to develop sustainable approaches. Libraries do have models developed with independent and mid-size publishers that are sustainable.

How Local Government Can Help



Collaborate on Responsible Approaches

We want to involve local government leaders and library trustees in the conversation and discussion on responsible approaches, as taxpayer dollars fund the significant price difference between e-books and audiobooks.

Who We Are | Urban Libraries Council

The Urban Libraries Council is dedicated to strengthening and advancing the essential role of public libraries as a dynamic place for innovation, education and opportunity. We connect public libraries and drive transformative change to enrich the lives of individuals and urban communities across North America.

ULC identifies significant challenges facing today's changing urban communities and develops new tools and techniques to help libraries achieve stronger outcomes in education, workforce and economic development, and digital equity.

