

# RESOURCE SHARING FOR ALL MONTANANS

Montanans want convenient access to content, services, and information to achieve their personal, educational, and professional goals. **In 2024, Montana's 119 public libraries and branches recorded 3.2 million visits, amounting to the equivalent of 3 visits per state resident.** Add to this statistic the number of students, educators, researchers, and specialized groups that used **Montana's 560 school libraries, 60 specialized libraries, 21 academic libraries, and 7 tribal college libraries** and the impact of Montana's network of libraries is significant.

However, Montana libraries' ability to offer the same high library services to all Montanans are hampered by financial barriers, disproportionate resources, and geography. With adequate funding, the libraries of Montana can meet the information needs of all Montanans. Meeting this demand was also the intent of the Legislature when they revised 22-1-328 in 2009. This statute states:

*22-1-328. Statewide interlibrary resource-sharing program. The commission shall establish a statewide interlibrary resource-sharing program. The purpose of the program is to administer funds appropriated by the legislature to support and facilitate resource-sharing among libraries in Montana, including but not limited to public libraries, public library districts, libraries operated by public schools or school districts, libraries operated by public colleges or universities, tribal libraries, libraries operated by public agencies for institutionalized persons, and libraries operated by nonprofit, private medical, educational, or research institutions.*

No such appropriation exists, creating an unfunded mandate for the State Library. To ensure that all libraries across Montana can serve their communities regardless of their community's size or location, they need a funded interlibrary resource-sharing program.

# INTERLIBRARY RESOURCES

## A COHESIVE SYSTEM

Online educational resources, digital statewide catalog software, and a courier delivery service work together as a cohesive, cost-effective resource-sharing system to connect Montanans with the information they need, no matter their community's size or location.



# SHARED SYSTEM GREATER EFFICIENCY

The financial data below reflects FY 2025 investments in resource sharing programs. Most of these programs are projecting a 10% increase in costs for FY 2026. Notably, the courier program has negotiated a new vendor contract resulting in a 20% cost increase, attributed to rising fuel prices and more delivery stops over the previous contract signed in 2018.

| Resource Sharing Program  | MSL State Funds | State % of total | Local Funds* | Local % of total | MSL Federal Funds | Federal % of total | Total FY 25 Investment |
|---|-----------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Montana Shared Catalog  | \$101,310       | 13%              | \$457,699    | 57%              | \$248,763         | 31%                | <b>\$807,772</b>       |
| OCLC Group Services   | \$101,161       | 21%              | \$311,409    | 64%              | \$75,679          | 16%                | <b>\$488,249</b>       |
| Montana Courier Program   | \$0             | 0%               | \$114,042    | 90%              | \$12,537          | 10%                | <b>\$126,579</b>       |
| Montana History Portal  | \$0             | 0%               | \$17,000     | 10%              | \$153,189         | 90%                | <b>\$170,189</b>       |
| Montana Library2Go (Libby app)                                  | \$0             | 0%               | \$450,969    | 96%              | \$20,000          | 4%                 | <b>\$470,969</b>       |
| Montana K-12 Overdrive (Sora app)                               | \$0             | 0%               | \$64,240     | 100%             | \$0               | 0%                 | <b>\$64,240</b>        |
| Treasure State Academic Information & Library Services (TRAILS) | \$0             | 0%               | \$2,836,121  | 99%              | \$34,034          | 1%                 | <b>\$2,870,155</b>     |
| E-Resources   | \$0             | 0%               | Unknown      | 100%             | \$0               | 0%                 | <b>Unknown</b>         |
| Resource sharing support staff                                  | \$17,973        | 11%              | \$0          | 0%               | \$152,881         | 89%                | <b>\$170,854</b>       |

\*Local includes all funds contributed by participating libraries, which may come from a variety of sources. Tribal college libraries pay for their TRAILS subscriptions using Title III grants, Tribally Controlled Community College (TCCC) funds, and IMLS Native American Basic Grants.

# LIBRARY RESOURCES FOR ALL MONTANANS

| Resource Sharing Program | Program Description  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Montana Shared Catalog   | The Montana Shared Catalog's most critical resource is a digital card catalog that supports cataloging, circulation, and inventory and helps automate daily operations. It includes a website and mobile app for patrons to search and place holds on books. Montana Shared Catalog sub-groups let Montanans find books locally or statewide. Member libraries also benefit from cost savings through group purchasing and operational support from five MSL staff. Items: 3 million, Checkouts: 4.6 million. <b>Total libraries: 202. Public: 100 (84%), School: 90 (16%), Tribal: 5 (71%), Special: 7 (12%). An additional 8 "satellite" locations are also served by the MSC. These are kiosks that don't have permanent staff.</b> |
| OCLC Group Services      | OCLC connects over 60,000 libraries worldwide, offering software that streamlines cataloging and enables libraries to request, locate, and share books and journal articles with each other. OCLC services help enhance the Montana Shared Catalog by providing tools that help librarians more efficiently and accurately catalog materials. It also allows Montanans to find and receive more rare items not available within our state. MSL's two resource sharing support staff manage this program. <b>Total libraries: 258. Public: 117 (98%), School: 108 (19%), Academic: 16 (76%), Tribal: 7 (100%), Special: 10 (17%).</b>   |
| Montana Courier Program  | The Montana Courier Program gives Montanans access to books and library materials statewide through a cost-effective and efficient bulk delivery system. By funneling interlibrary loan items through sharing groups and distribution hubs, the courier makes it possible for libraries of all sizes to participate in resource sharing. Last year, public library patrons borrowed 508,107 books from outside their local communities, with many of these delivered by the courier. The courier transported 16,779 crates, each holding about 50 books. MSL's two resource sharing support staff manage this program. <b>Public Libraries: 55 (46%). Direct Courier Service: 19 (16%).</b>  |
| Montana History Portal   | The Montana History Portal is an online source for digital collections relating to Montana's cultural heritage and history. Many Montana libraries, museums, archives, and cultural institutions add materials to this collection. Contents include maps, copies of photographs, rare books, historic documents, diaries, oral histories, audio and video clips, paintings, illustrations, and art. This program is supported by two MSL staff (one position vacant in FY 25). Page Visits: 1.47 million, Items: 100,132, Collections: 244. <b>Total contributors: 111. Counties represented: 44 (79%)</b>   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Montana Library2Go (Libby app)                                  | <p>MontanaLibrary2Go offers more than 50,000 ebooks and audiobooks, with over 70,000 copies available for download to phones, tablets, and other devices. Over the past decade, this widely used service has grown steadily, and now 30% of all public library checkouts in Montana are digital titles. This is a popular service for Montanans on the go, but also very popular with patrons living miles away from their nearest library. The collection includes contemporary, classic, and bestsellers for patrons of participating Montana libraries. Selections are based on requests, wait lists, and use trends. MSL's two resource sharing support staff manage this program, along with a team of 10 volunteers from local libraries. FY 25 Checkouts: 1.65 million, Unique Users: 56,290, Waitlist Items: 766,024. Average Wait: 64 days. Waitlist 1+ years 11%, 6+ Months: 12%, 3+ Months:13%, Less than 3 months: 64%. <b>Total libraries: 130. Public: 115 (97%), Academic: 9 (43%), Tribal: 6 (86%)</b></p> |
| Montana K-12 Overdrive (Sora app)                               | <p>The Montana School Library Digital Collection is a shared ebook and audiobook collection using Overdrive's Sora app, which is specifically designed for K-12 schools. Sora allows titles to be discovered based on age, grade, and reading levels. This is accessible in school, but also remotely from home or on the go. This program is not currently supported/funded by MSL. FY 25 Checkouts: 158,956, Unique Users: 10,696, Waitlist Items: 36,952. <b>School libraries: 132 (24%)</b></p>  |
| Treasure State Academic Information & Library Services (TRAILS) | <p>The Treasure State Academic Information and Library Services (TRAILS) consortium negotiates discounted subscriptions to research databases, professional resources, and journals on behalf of Montana's academic institutions statewide. MSL is a member and offers research databases to state employees. Public and school libraries are also eligible to participate in selected group subscriptions negotiated by TRAILS, such as Heritage Quest or Ancestry Library genealogy databases. <b>Total libraries: 25. Academic: 17 (81%), Tribal: 7 (100%), Special: 1 (2%). Select group subscriptions Public: 11 (9%)</b></p>   |
| E-Resources   | <p>Providing access to online educational resources such as reference tools, academic journal databases, and periodicals would greatly enhance collections in schools and public libraries. MSL maintained a contract for a limited suite of resources for all Montana libraries until those contracts were terminated in 2015 due to declines in coal severance tax funds. Currently those libraries that can afford their own contracts offer these types of e-resources. <b>Public libraries: 44 (37%), All other types: unknown.</b></p>   |
| Resource sharing support staff                                  | <p>Staff are essential for managing contracts for interlibrary resources, training, and assisting libraries throughout Montana. The FY 25 funds reported account for two MSL positions dedicated to OCLC, MontanaLibrary2Go, and the courier program. Other resource sharing projects have additional MSL staff, including five for the Montana Shared Catalog and two for the Montana History Portal (one currently vacant), whose costs are reported separately within the project totals above.</p>   |

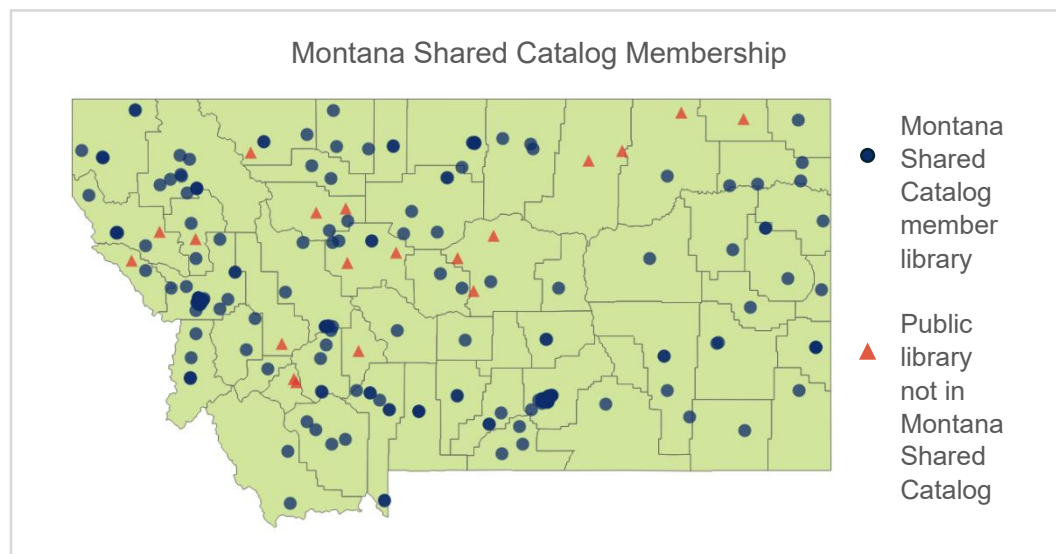
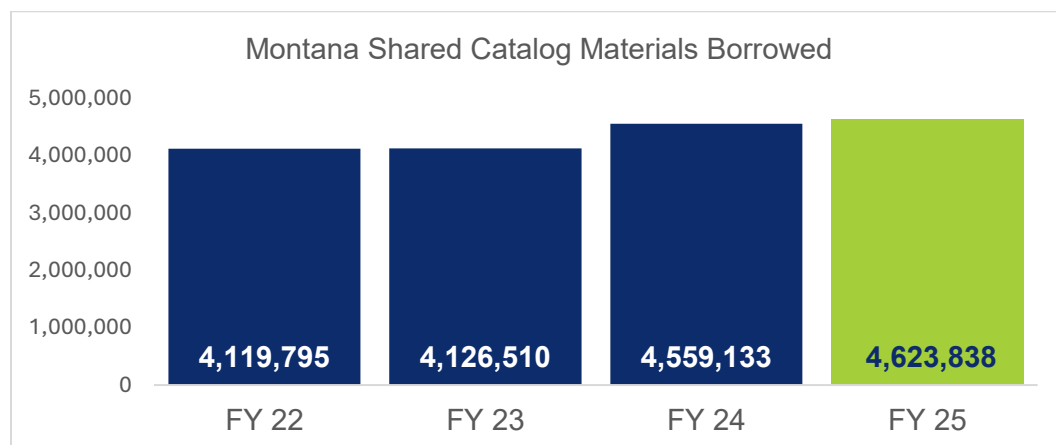
# KEY PROGRAM USE STATISTICS

These use statistics reflect use and demand where the services are available. Due to financial barriers, disproportionate resources, and geography these services are not available statewide and/or are insufficient to meet patron demand.

## Montana Shared Catalog Materials Borrowed

The Montana Shared Catalog is a digital card catalog that allows library patrons to request books with a simple click, whether they're browsing the shelves in their local library or searching from home. Through the catalog, Montanans access a shared collection of over 3 million books every day. By connecting 202 member libraries and 8 satellite (kiosk) locations statewide, the Montana Shared Catalog delivers cost savings and an expansive catalog to communities from Plentywood to Dillon and Eureka to Ekalaka, with over 4 million checkouts each year.

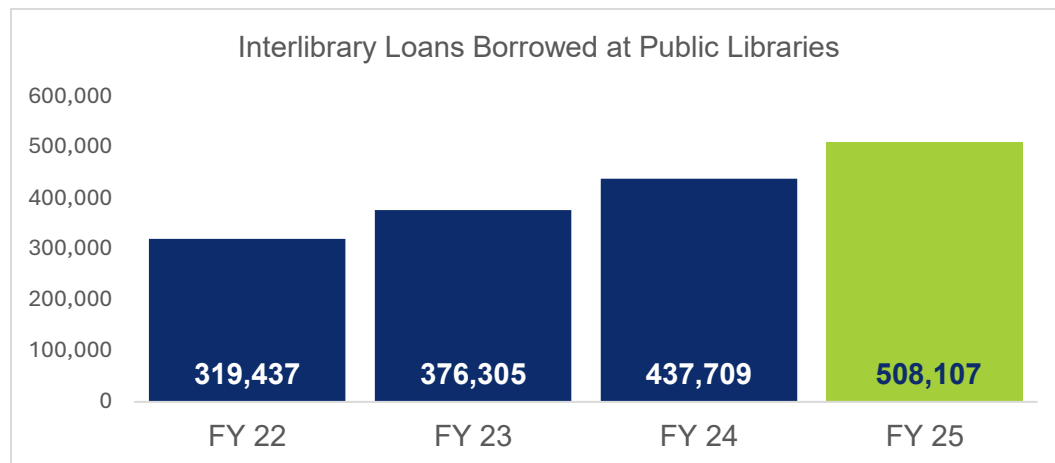
Nineteen public libraries find the cost to join the MSC prohibitive. While large school districts like Billings and Missoula participate, only 16% of schools are currently members.



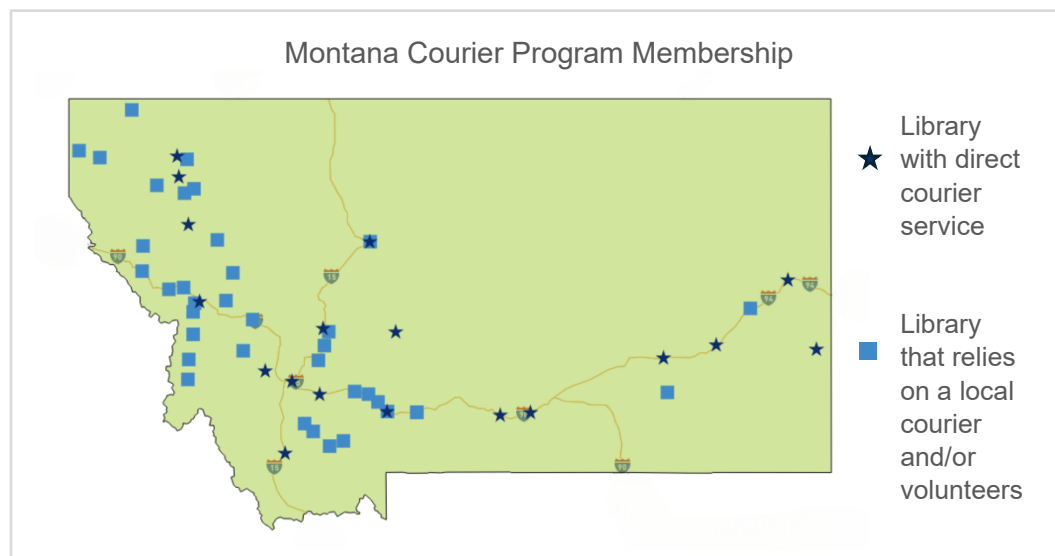
## Interlibrary Loans Borrowed at Public Libraries

When a patron at a Montana public library needs a book that isn't available locally, the library borrows that book from another library. Libraries use shared digital card catalogs, either the Montana Shared Catalog or the nationwide OCLC catalog, to locate and request the item. Once found, the book is delivered to the patron's home library by courier service or through the mail. Last year, Montanans received over half a million books using this system.

Currently, only 19 libraries have direct courier service. Another 36 rely on a mix of volunteers and local couriers to pick up materials from designated hub locations. Many libraries do not have access to courier delivery at all. This is especially true in north central and northeastern Montana, where libraries are completely unserved. Without courier access, these libraries must mail books to borrow and lend materials with other libraries.



\*FY 2025 data preliminary as public libraries will verify their final ILL data Oct/Nov 2025.



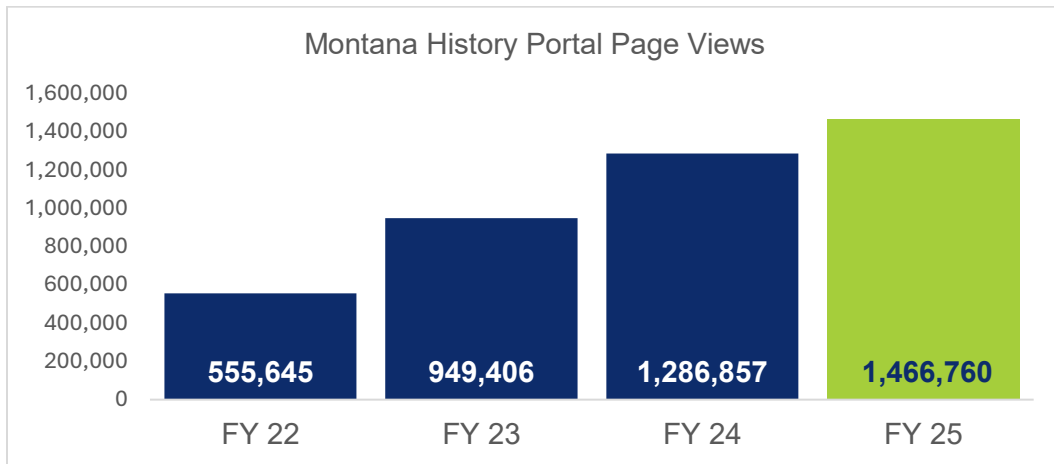
## Montana History Portal Page Views

The Montana History Portal migrated to a new web platform at the beginning of FY 2022 which allows 111 contributors such as museums, archives, and libraries in 44 counties to share digital content about Montana's history and culture. This interactive website has seen increased use



each year by students, educators, and the public, reaching a new peak in FY 2025 with nearly 1.5 million page views.

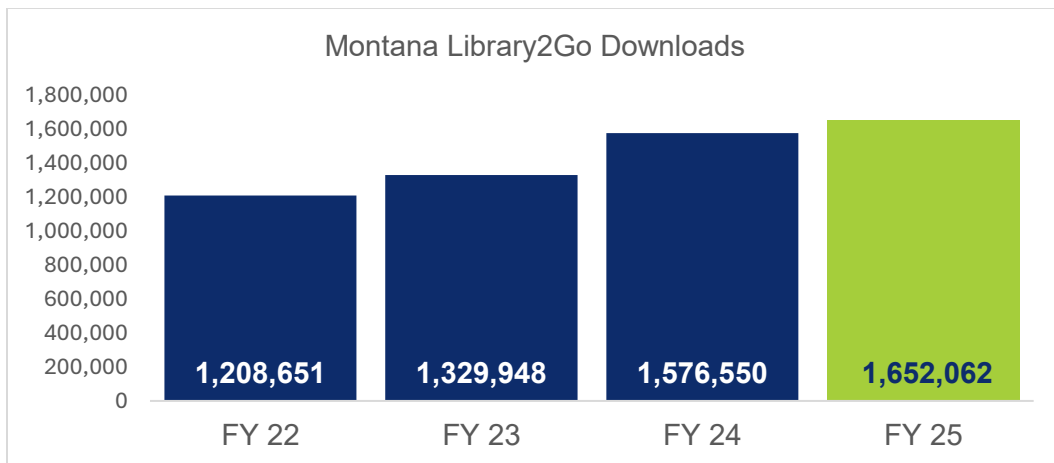
Twelve Montana counties are still not represented through collections in the Montana History Portal. As a result, history and cultural resources from these areas are not as accessible to Montanans.



## Montana Library2Go (Libby App) Downloads

MontanaLibrary2Go, affectionately known as the Libby app by many Montanans, is your library in your pocket. With just a tap, you can borrow the latest bestselling novels while relaxing at home, flip through magazines while waiting for an appointment, or listen to audiobooks during the very long days of harvest. Whether you're in a bustling city like Billings or a tiny town like Dutton, Libby puts tens of thousands of books at your fingertips.

Demand for ebooks continues to far outpace what is available. Last year patrons placed 766,024 holds on the Libby app, meaning they joined a waitlist for books already checked out by other readers. The average wait to borrow a popular title is now over 60 days.



More Montana State Library program data can be found on the library's [Dashboard page](#).