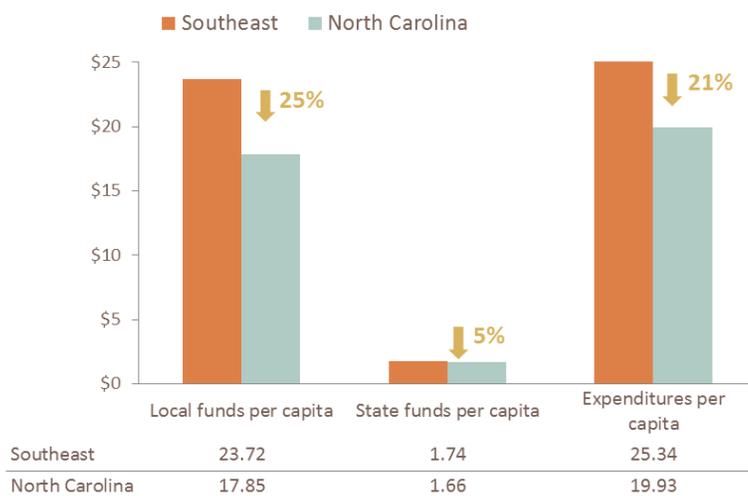Americans strongly value the role of public libraries in their communities for providing access to resources, promoting literacy, and improving the overall quality of life.[1] Public libraries provide programming to address workforce development and educational needs – from job search assistance to early literacy. They broaden opportunities for people of all ages through access to information and technology, and provide critical resources for individuals, families, local businesses, and non-profits.[2]

Figure 1

Comparison of funding and expenditures

	Local funds per capita	State funds per capita	Expenditures per capita
Southeast	23.72	1.74	25.34
North Carolina	17.85	1.66	19.93

In June 2013 the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) released the most recent statistics for the national public library survey, FY2011. While the IMLS' comprehensive report has yet to be released as of May 2014, the State Library analyzed the national dataset to see where North Carolina stands among peers in FY2011.

Figure 2

Comparison of library staffing

	Number of librarians per 25K population	Number of FTE per 25K population
Southeast	3.62	9.64
North Carolina	1.85	7.40

As illustrated in Figure 1, compared to the average for Southeastern[3] US states, North Carolina public libraries received 25% less local funding and 5% less state funding per capita in FY2011. This is a smaller difference in state funding per capita than the prior year, but a larger deficit in local funding. The state's libraries in turn spent 21% less per capita (compared to the prior year's 14%) than the average for the region.
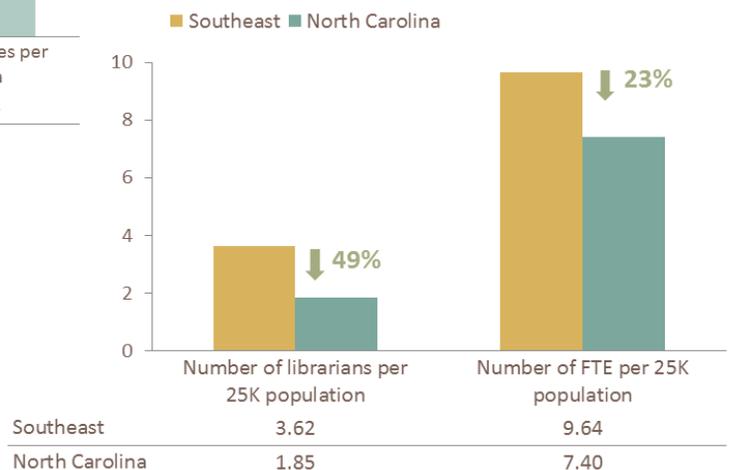
Figure 2 shows that compared to the Southeast average, North Carolina public libraries had 49% fewer librarians per capita and 23% fewer FTE per capita than peers – slightly worse than last year. The state ranked 4th from the bottom of all 50 states in FTE per capita and 3rd from the bottom in staff expenditures per FTE.
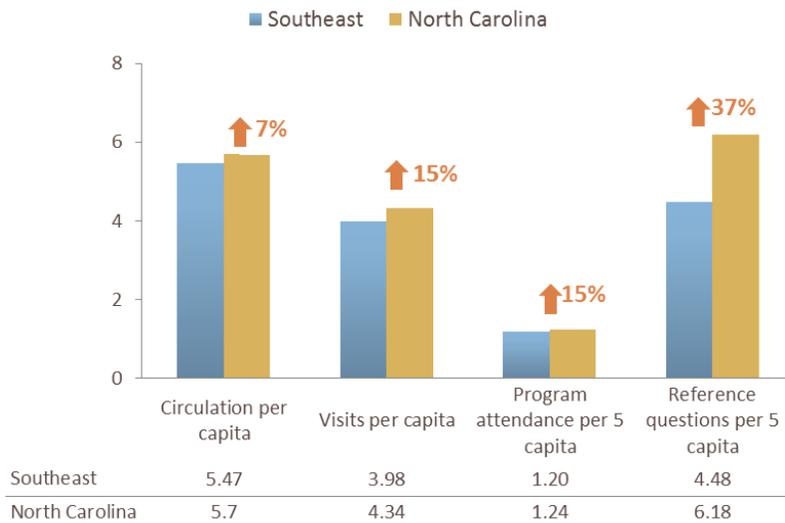
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[1] Pew Research Center, December 2013, "How Americans value public libraries in their communities."

[2] Swan, D. W., et al. (2013). Public Libraries Survey: Fiscal Year 2010 (IMLS-2013–PLS-01). Institute of Museum and Library Services. Washington, DC. http://www.imls.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/PLS2010.pdf

[3] States in the "Southeast" are defined by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis' regions. The Southeast includes: *Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia*.

Figure 1

Comparison of usage

■ Southeast   ■ North Carolina

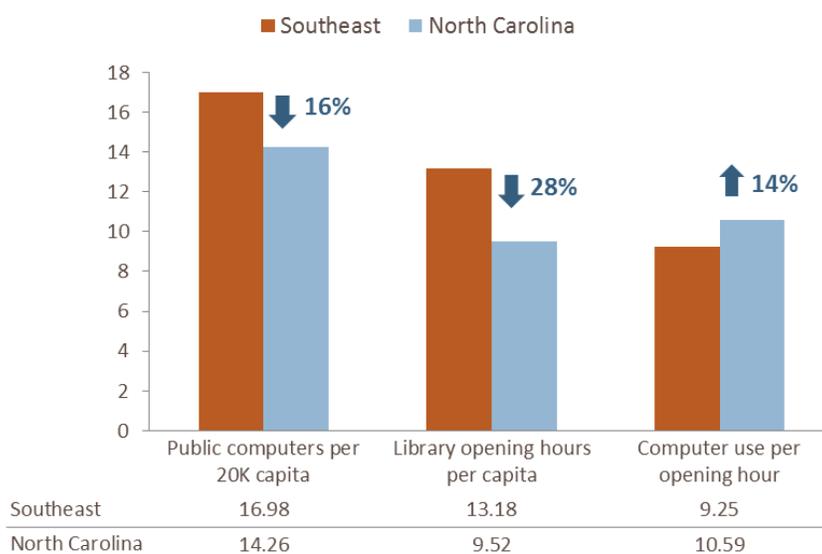|	Circulation per capita	Visits per capita	Program attendance per 5 capita	Reference questions per 5 capita
Southeast	5.47	3.98	1.20	4.48
North Carolina	5.7	4.34	1.24	6.18

While North Carolina's public library funding and staffing were poorer than the regional average, our public libraries again experienced more library visits per capita, circulated more materials per capita, answered more reference questions per capita, and had higher library program attendance per capita (Figure 3). North Carolina ranked 5th out of all US states in the number of reference questions per capita, despite combined library facility opening hours per capita 28% lower than regional peers and 9th from the bottom of all US states.

Public computers and Internet access are essential services provided by libraries to their communities, allowing people to search for jobs, gain basic digital literacy and computing skills, conduct research and homework assignments, perform online training, and access computer software. Public libraries are the only source of free computing and Internet access in 70% of North Carolina communities.[4] In FY2011, North Carolina ranked 42th of all 50 states in the number of library

Figure 2

Comparison of computing

■ Southeast   ■ North Carolina

	Public computers per 20K capita	Library opening hours per capita	Computer use per opening hour
Southeast	16.98	13.18	9.25
North Carolina	14.26	9.52	10.59

computers available to the public per capita, and compared to the Southeast average North Carolina libraries had 16% fewer computers available to the community. Despite weaker funding, fewer computers, and 28% fewer opening hours per capita than the regional average, North Carolina libraries experienced 14% more computer use per opening hour, 9% more computer use per available computer, and 30% more computer use per computer per opening hour than Southeastern peers.

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[4] Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study (2011-2012). http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011_2012