

Audiobooks and Public Libraries

2023
Audiobook
Survey
Report



Adult and Youth
Audio Collections
in U.S. Public Libraries

2023 AUDIOBOOK SURVEY REPORT

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METHODOLOGY

LJ/SLJ worked with representatives from the Audio Publishers Association (APA) to develop a survey about audiobooks in America's public libraries in order to understand the library perspective on formats, budgeting, licensing terms, and selection influences. Survey questions were framed for both adult and youth audio collections.

A survey invite was emailed to a random sample of library selectors and adult/youth services librarians on August 28, 2023, with a reminder to reply on August 31. Respondents were offered the chance to receive a summary of results and to be included in a drawing to win a \$100 electronic Visa® gift card. The survey closed September 10 with 490 U.S. public library responses.

The sample was screened to include only library staff who are involved in recommending/purchasing audiobooks for their library. Respondents were branched to a line of either adult or children's/YA questioning based on their responses. The data was cleaned, tabulated, and analyzed by the *LJ/SLJ* research department. The data is unweighted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Takeaways:

- Digital audio handily out-circulates physical audio for both adults and children. Physical audiobooks are more popular with children/young adults than with adults.
- The trend over the last year shows that the majority of libraries have seen circulation increases for digital audio and decreases for physical audio.
- Most libraries plan to continue collecting physical audio over the next two years. Only 4 to 5 percent had eliminated physical audio purchases as of August 2023.
- Audiobooks' share of the total library materials budget hovers around ten percent. A general trend is not apparent regarding movement of this percentage over the last few years. Approximately a third of respondents report that audiobooks' share had decreased, about a third say it had increased, and the remaining third say its share didn't change.
- The percentage of audiobook budgets devoted to fiction and nonfiction mirrors the circulation breakdown of fiction and nonfiction for both adults (80%/20%) and children (90%/10%).
- Libraries estimate that a quarter of adult audiobook borrowers are exclusive to the format. Youth are more likely to borrow multiple formats.
- When deciding to purchase an audiobook for the library, selectors consider patron requests, professional reviews, and the popularity of the book and/or the author's previous book most often.
- Patrons' most essential factors when deciding on an audiobook to borrow are the popularity of the book and the specific title. The author is third most important to adult borrowers and availability ranks third among young people.

- Narrator may not be a primary factor when patrons decide to check out an audiobook, however many open-ended comments suggest that the narrator has a huge impact on patrons' enjoyment and whether they finish listening to an audiobook. AI-voiced audiobooks would negatively influence a library's decision to purchase.
- Very little library programming is currently centered around audiobooks.

ADULT VS. CHILDREN'S/YA AUDIOBOOK COMPARISONS

	Adult Audiobooks	Children's/YA Audiobooks
Physical vs. Digital Circulation	29% physical/71% digital	38% physical/62% digital
Physical vs. Digital Spending	35% physical/65% digital	41% physical/59% digital
Fiction vs. Nonfiction Circulation	79% fiction/21% nonfiction	89% fiction/11% nonfiction
Fiction vs. Nonfiction Spending	80% fiction/20% nonfiction	90% fiction/10% nonfiction
Audiobooks' Share of Total Materials Circulation	13.6%	9.2%
Audiobooks' Share of Total Materials Budget	10.6%	8.2%
Exclusive Audio Borrowers (do not borrow other materials)	26%	12%
Percent of Audiobook Collection in Languages other than English	2.3%	2.5%

Digital Audio Licensing Models

One copy/one user is the licensing model used most often (for 60% of public library audiobooks). Metered access applies to about 20 percent of audiobooks, simultaneous use to about 11 percent, and pay-per-use to 8 percent. The licensing model most preferred by librarians is evenly split between one copy/one user and simultaneous use.

Adult Audiobook Collections and Circulation

Audiobooks comprise about 14 percent of public libraries' total adult materials circulation. Format-wise, digital audio accounts for nearly three-quarters of adult audio circulation. Slightly more libraries have adult audiobooks on CD (99%) than digital audiobooks (96%) in their collections. Over a third also have Playaways available.

Over eighty percent of libraries report that their digital audio circulation increased over the last year (and 43 percent say that circulation increased *significantly*). At the same time, nearly two-thirds of libraries report that circulation of physical audio has decreased (26 percent *significantly* decreased).

Fiction comprises about 80 percent of adult audiobook circulation. Mysteries, general fiction, and thrillers/suspense are the most popular audiobook genres. Biography/memoir stands out as the most popular nonfiction audiobook subject (probably because they are often narrated by the author). History and self-help follow as the next most popular audiobook subjects.

Sixty-one percent of respondents carry audiobooks recorded in languages other than English, but these amount to only 2.3 percent of libraries' total adult audiobook collections.

Adult Audiobook Spending Trends

Respondents estimate that 10.6 percent of their library's total adult materials budget is devoted to audiobooks. Thirty-nine percent say the share devoted to audiobooks has increased over the last few years while 31 percent report a decrease. The increases are most pronounced in large and urban libraries.

The split between physical and digital audiobook spending for adults is 35% physical and 65% digital. Four percent of respondents currently only purchase digital audio and another 10 percent have plans to eliminate physical audiobook spending within the next two years.

Eighty percent of the adult audio titles libraries buy is fiction, with the remaining 20 percent spent on nonfiction. This exactly matches circulation patterns of fiction and nonfiction.

Children's/YA Audiobook Collections and Circulation

Audiobooks comprise 9 percent of libraries' total children's/YA materials circulation.

Digital audiobooks for children/young adults are available in 94 percent of libraries. Nearly as many, 92 percent, have audio on CD including book & CD sets. Seventy-one percent carry children's print books with integrated ready-to-play audio, and just over half have Playaways for youth to borrow. Audiobook circulation by format breaks down to 62% digital and 38% physical.

Two-thirds of libraries report that digital youth audio circulation increased over the last year (24 percent say that circ increased *significantly*). About half of libraries report that circulation of physical audio for children/young adults decreased, while over twenty percent reported an increase.

Fiction comprises 89 percent of children's/YA audiobook circulation.

Sixty-six percent of respondents carry audiobooks for children/young adults in languages other than English, averaging 2.5 percent of libraries' total children's/YA audiobook collections.

Children's/YA Audiobook Spending Trends

Respondents estimate that 8.2 percent of their library's total children's/YA materials budget is devoted to audiobooks. Twenty-nine percent report that this percentage has increased over the last few years, while 35 percent report a decrease. The decreases are most pronounced in small libraries.

The split between physical and digital audiobook spending for children/young adults is 41% physical/59% digital. Five percent do not purchase physical audio for children/young adults at this time and 13 percent have plans to eliminate physical audiobook spending within the next two years.

Nine-in-ten of the children's/YA audio titles libraries buy is fiction, with the remaining 10 percent representing nonfiction. This is very similar to the circulation split for children's/YA fiction versus nonfiction.

Adult Audiobook Listeners

Respondents estimate that about a quarter of adult audiobook borrowers are exclusive to the format and do not borrow other library materials. Patron groups that adult audio collections particularly support are commuters and those with low vision/blindness.

Children's/YA Audiobook Listeners

Respondents estimate that 12 percent of children's/YA audiobook borrowers are exclusive to the format and do not borrow other library materials. Patron groups that respondents feel their children's/YA audio collections particularly support are struggling readers, reluctant readers, and emerging readers.

Audiobook Promotion

The main methods libraries use to promote their audiobook collections are through catalog search results, website promotion, signage or displays in the library, and librarian-to-patron recommendations/listening advisory. Nearly nine percent of libraries have hosted programming that is audiobook specific in the last year. Many responded that they only select book club picks that have an audio version available.

Library Selection Criteria: Adult Audiobooks

Librarians depend primarily on patron requests, professional review sources such as *LJ*/*SLJ*, vendor newsletters/websites, word of mouth from peers/colleagues, and consumer media to help them make adult audiobook selection decisions. Print book popularity and the popularity of an author's previous title also factor heavily in purchase decisions. Awards won, cost, positive reviews, and narrator influence about half of audiobook selectors when making audiobook purchasing decisions.

Only 14 percent of respondents say that the narrator has a large impact on whether they select an adult audiobook or not. A third would reject a title with a non-human voiced narrator, and another 37 percent would only select such a title if no other narrator choice is available.

Library Selection Criteria: Children's/YA Audiobooks

The resources youth services librarians rely on to make audiobook selections for children and young adults include professional review publications, word of mouth from peers/colleagues, publishers' enewsletters/websites, and vendors' enewsletters/websites. Patron requests, age appropriateness, print book popularity, and award winners are also important factors.

Only 10 percent of respondents say that the narrator has a large impact on whether they select a children's/YA audiobook or not. Thirty percent would reject a title with a non-human voiced narrator, and another 41 percent would only select such a title if no other narrator choice is available.

Patron Audiobook Selection Criteria

In a single answer question probing what patrons care about most when selecting an audiobook, the popularity of the title and specific title came out on top. The author and subject/genre can also be influential on adult patrons' borrowing decisions. Availability plays a large part in borrowing decisions for children's/YA titles. Only 5 percent thought the narrator had the biggest impact on patron audiobook choice.

However, the narrator does factor into borrowing decisions; librarians estimate that 72 percent of adult borrowers and 66 percent of children's/YA borrowers take the narrator under consideration when making audiobook borrowing decisions. In the optional comments section, multiple librarians reiterated that the narrator does have an impact, with many adult listeners having their favorites. The narrator can also be the deciding factor whether a patron listens to an entire audiobook or not.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The sample is comprised of 490 respondents working in U.S. public libraries. Small libraries serving populations under 25K make up 45 percent of the sample, medium-sized libraries serving 25K-99K make up 26 percent, and the remaining 29 percent work in large libraries serving over 100,000 people. In terms of metropolitan status, 46 percent serve small town/rural areas, 44 percent serve suburban areas, and 17 percent serve urban areas (this question accepted more than one answer to accommodate large regional systems). The Midwest is the U.S. region with the most responses (36%), followed by the Northeast (26%), the South (21%), and the West (17%).

All respondents are involved in the audiobook selection process for their library, but collection development is the primary job responsibility for 39 percent of the sample. Over a third of respondents exclusively select audiobooks for adults while 22 percent exclusively select for youth. The remaining 41 percent make audiobook recommendations/selection decisions for both adults and children/young adults (and were branched to either the adult or children's/YA line of questioning in the survey).

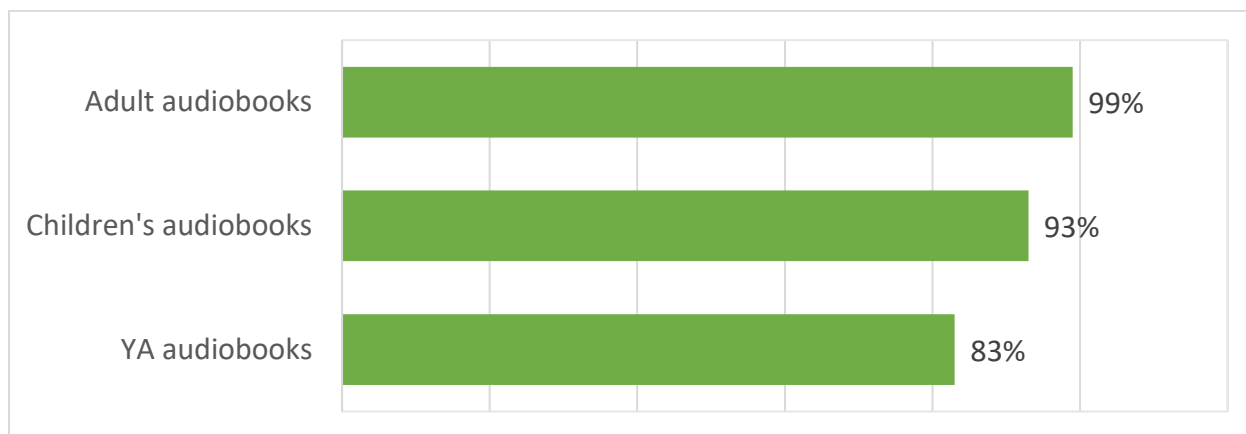
A third of libraries in the sample license/acquire audiobooks for their library independently, without getting access through a regional library cooperative or consortium. Over half rely on a combination of consortium access and independent acquisition/licensing. The largest libraries are most likely to exclusively acquire/license independently.

DATA ANALYSIS

INTENDED AUDIENCES FOR AUDIOBOOKS

In our sample, 99 percent carry adult audiobooks, 93 percent carry children's audiobooks, and 83 percent carry audiobooks for young adults. (The actual percentages at all U.S. public libraries are probably lower, as only respondents involved in the selection of audiobooks were gated through to answer this survey.)

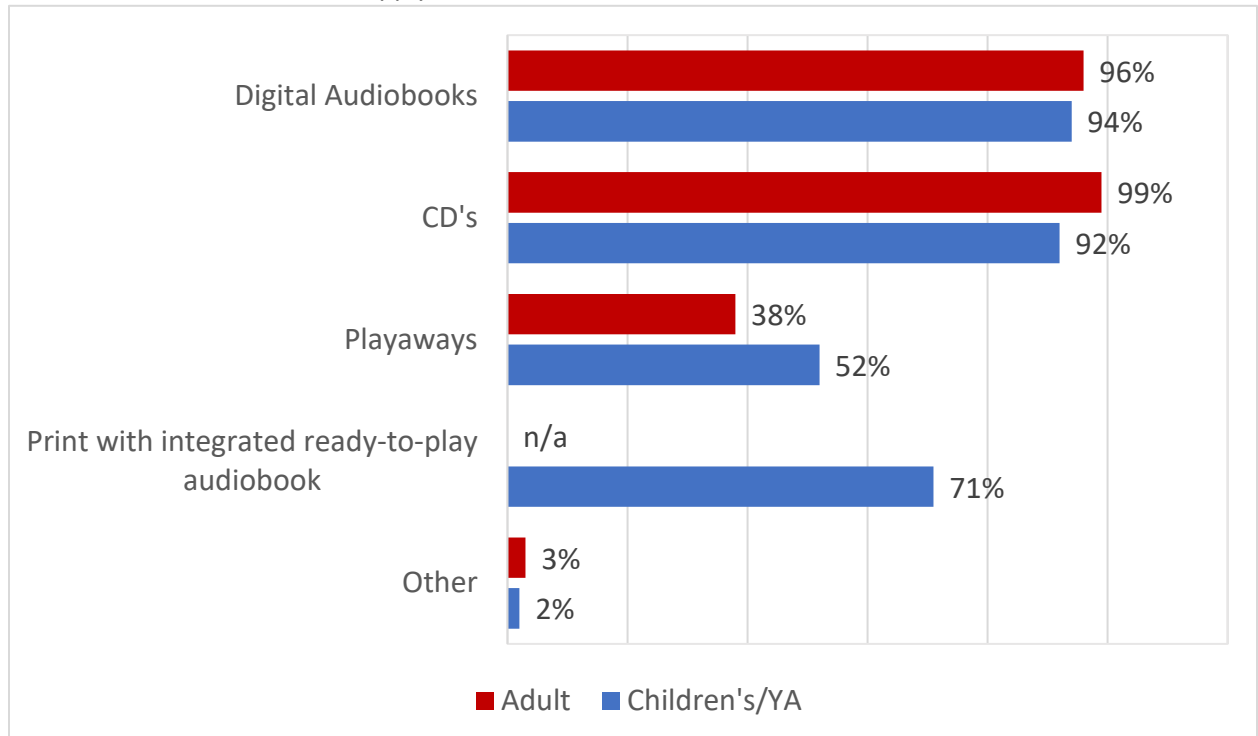
Figure 1. Q5. What types of audiobooks does your library currently offer? Check all that apply. Base = Total sample



AUDIOBOOK FORMATS OFFERED

Almost all public libraries in the sample carry audiobooks on CD (99%) as well as digital audiobooks (96%) for adults. Thirty-eight percent carry Playaways for adults. Children's and young adult audio collections have a little more format choice. More than nine-in-ten have digital audio and print book/CD sets for children. Seventy-one percent carry print books with integrated ready-to-play audio and over half have Playaways for kids.

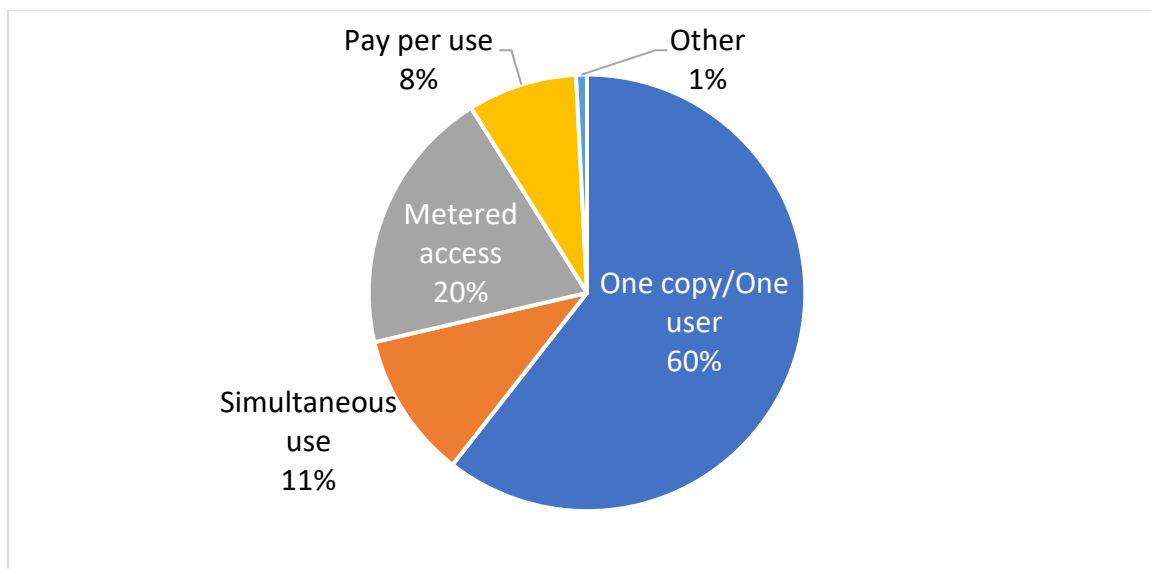
Figure 2. Q11a &b. Which [adult or children's/YA] audiobook formats does your library currently have available? Check all that apply.



DIGITAL AUDIO LICENSING MODELS IN USE

The “One Copy/One User” licensing model applies to an average of 60 percent of public libraries’ digital audiobooks. Metered access applies to 20 percent, simultaneous use to 11 percent, and per-per-use to 8 percent.

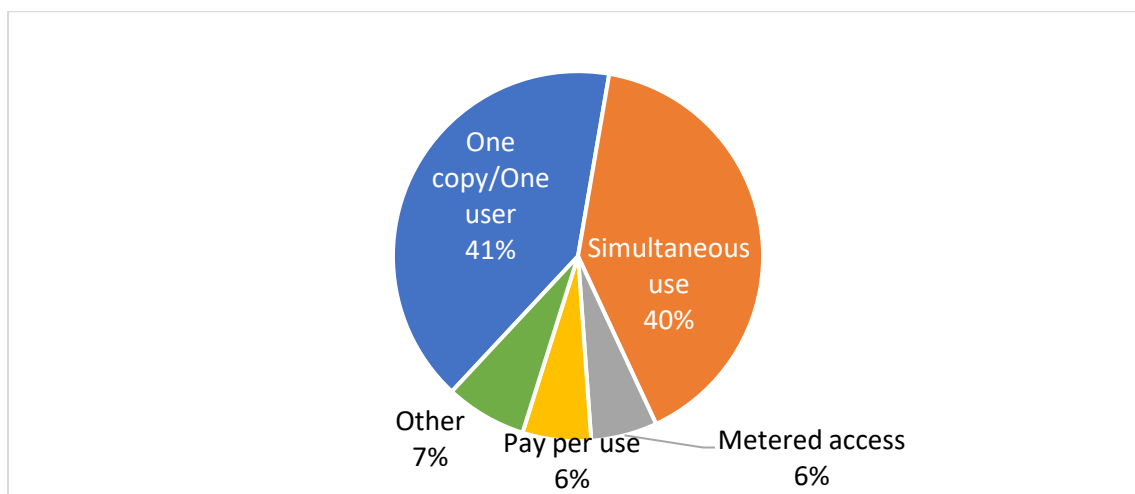
Figure 3. Q9. In percentage terms, please estimate how the licensing models below apply to your library’s digital audiobook collection? Base = Total Sample



PREFERRED DIGITAL AUDIO LICENSING MODEL

Asked which licensing model is most preferable, one copy/one user model (41%) and simultaneous use (40%) virtually tied as the top answer. Small town/rural libraries tended to prefer simultaneous use while urban and suburban libraries fell more in the one copy/one user camp.

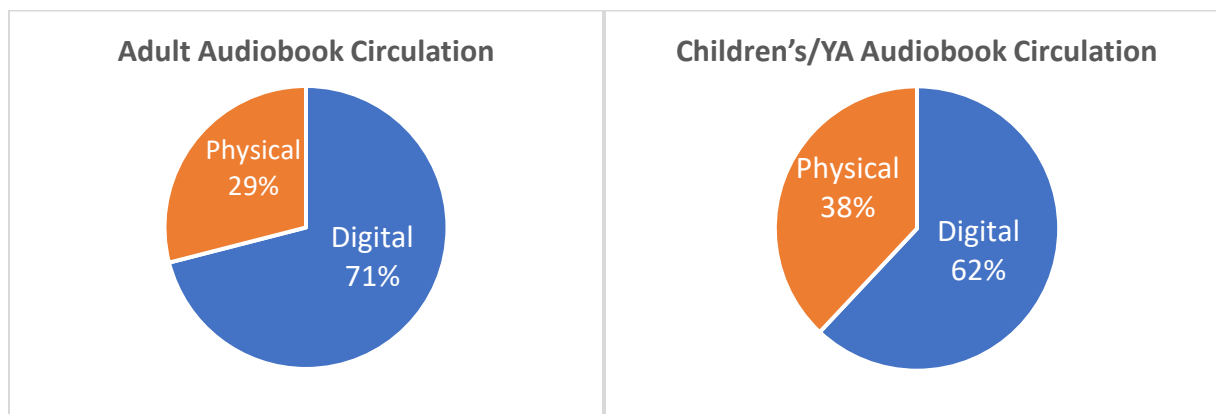
Figure 4. Q10. What digital audiobook licensing model do you most prefer? Base= Total Sample



PHYSICAL VS. DIGITAL AUDIOBOOK CIRCULATION

Digital audiobook circulation outpaces physical about three-to-one. Seventy-one percent of adult audiobook circulation comes from digital collections, as does 62 percent of children's/YA audiobook circulation. As shown in Figure 2, there are more physical audio options available for children that are easy for small hands to manipulate, therefore it makes sense that physical audio circs higher for kids.

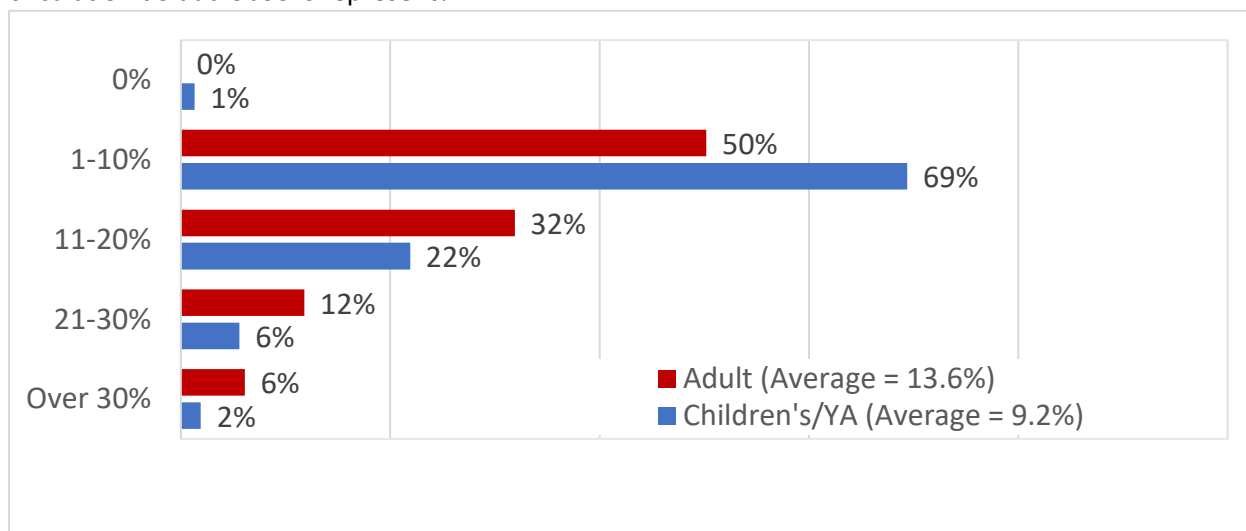
Figure 5. Q12 a& b. Please estimate the percentage of your library's total [Adult or Children's/YA] audiobook circulation that comes from digital audiobooks versus physical audio.



AUDIOBOOK CIRCULATION AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CIRCULATION

As a percent of libraries' total adult circulation, audiobooks represent 13.6 percent, on average. Almost 18 percent of respondents report that audio makes up over twenty percent of their total circulation. Audiobooks comprise a smaller percentage of libraries' total children's/YA circulation, averaging 9.2 percent. Large library systems and urban libraries report the highest contribution of audio to circulation.

Figure 6. Q13a & b. Approximately what percent of your library's total [adult or children's/YA] circulation do audiobooks represent?

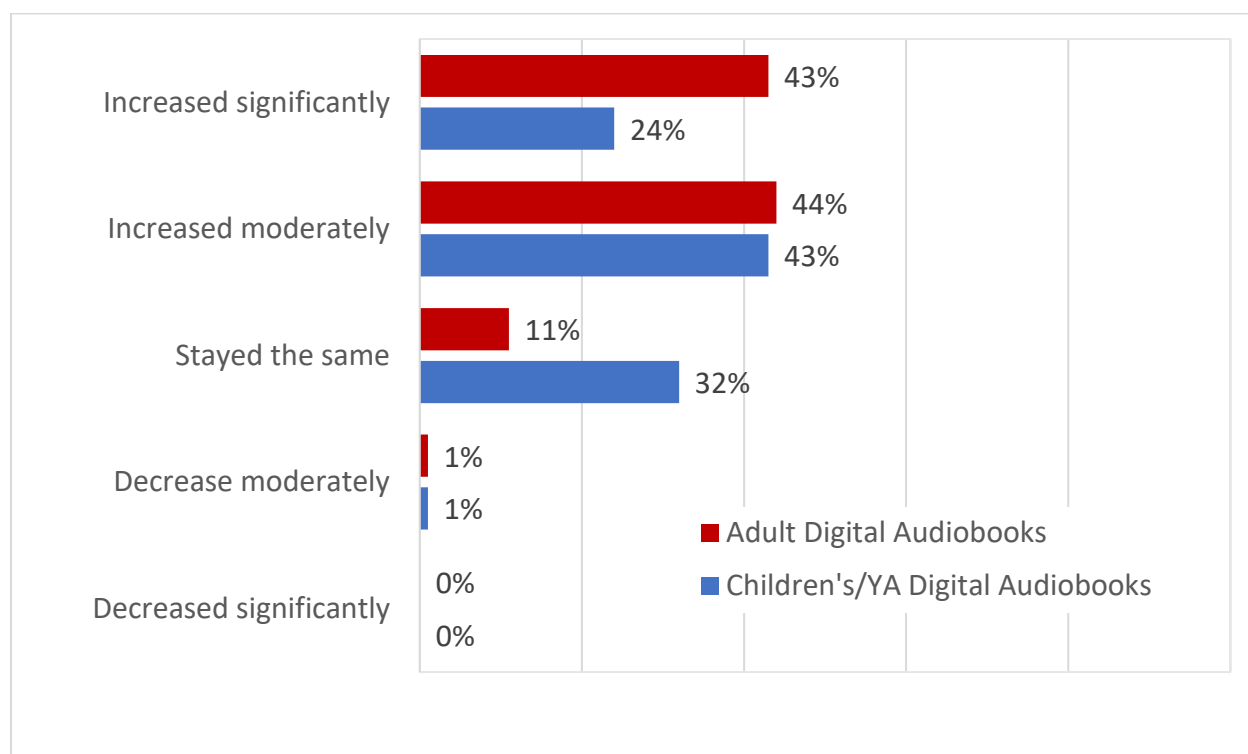


CHANGE IN DIGITAL AUDIOBOOK CIRCULATION

Forty-three percent of respondents report that adult digital audiobook circulation has increased significantly over the last year, with another 44 percent reporting a moderate increase. Only one percent reported a decrease in digital audiobook circulation for adults. Large and urban libraries saw the largest uptick in digital audio circulation for adults.

Digital audiobook circulation for children and young adults also increased over the last year, but not quite as dramatically. Twenty-four percent reported a significant increase, while 43 percent reported a moderate increase. Again, only one percent reported a decrease in children's/YA digital audiobook circulation.

Figure 7. Q14a & b. How has your [adult or children's/YA] audiobook circulation changed in the last year for digital audiobooks, if applicable?

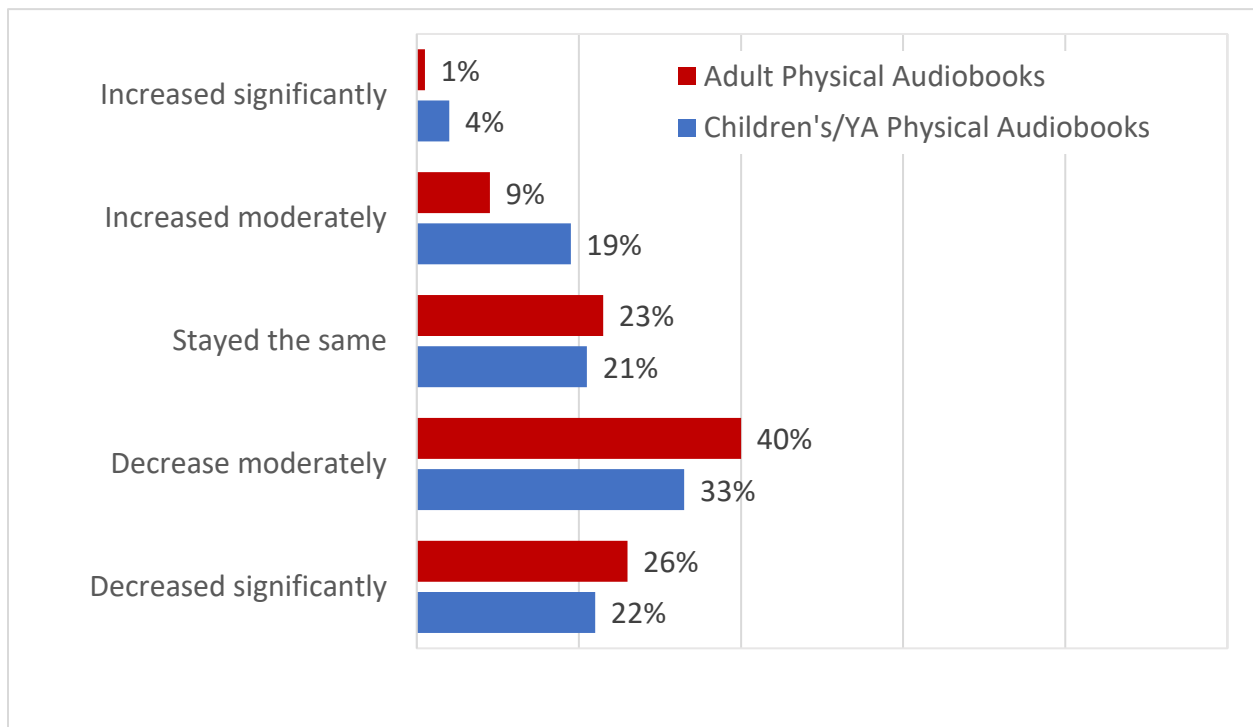


CHANGE IN PHYSICAL AUDIOBOOK CIRCULATION

Over a quarter of respondents say that adult circulation for physical audiobooks decreased significantly in the last year, with another 40 percent indicating circulation decreased moderately. Only about 10 percent said physical adult audiobook circulation increased.

Similarly, 22 percent say that physical children's/YA audiobook circulation decreased significantly over the last year, and 33 percent say it decreased moderately. On the other hand, a net 23 percent experienced a circulation increase.

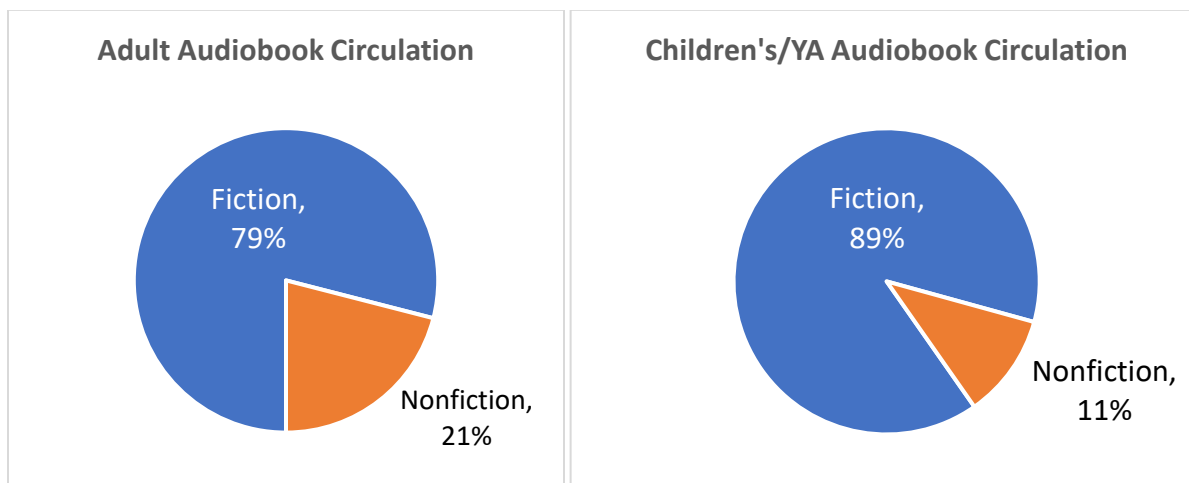
Figure 8. Q14a & b. How has your [adult or children's/YA] audiobook circulation changed in the last year for physical audiobooks, if applicable?



FICTION VERSUS NONFICTION AUDIOBOOK CIRCULATION

Audiobook circulation for both adult and children's/YA audiobooks skews toward fiction. The average percentage breakdown of adult audiobook circulation is 79% fiction vs. 21% nonfiction, and the average children's/YA breakdown is even more lopsided: 89% fiction and 11% nonfiction.

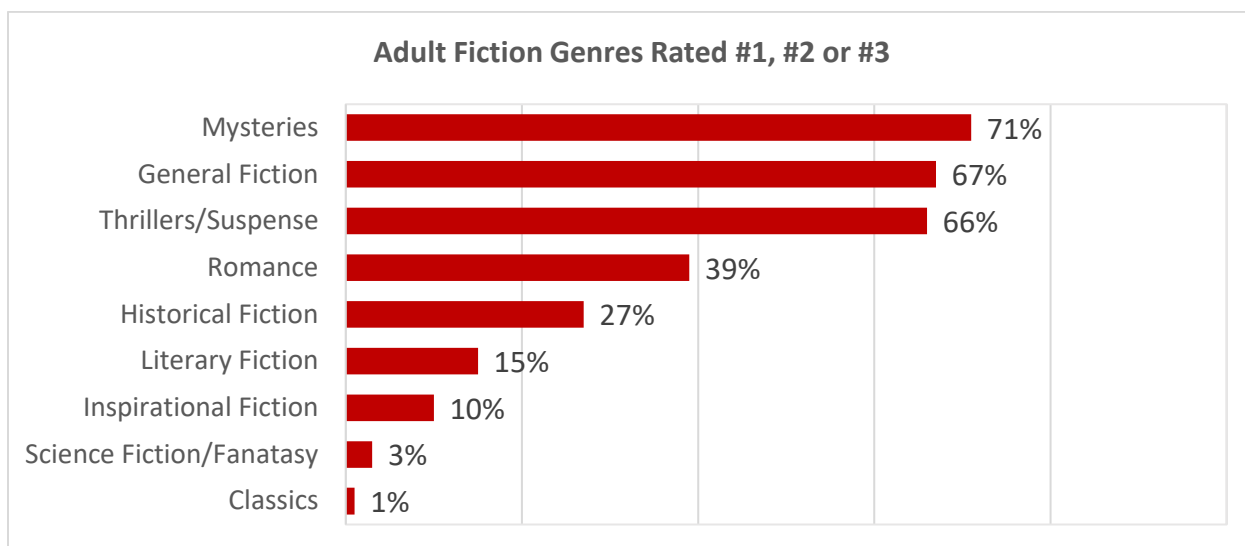
Figure 9. Q15a & b. Please estimate how your [adult or children's/YA] audiobook circulation breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction.



MOST POPULAR ADULT FICTION GENRES

Mysteries, general fiction, and thrillers/suspense received the most selections as the three most popular adult audiobook fiction genres. Ranking only the number one selections puts the top three in a slightly different order: General fiction (33%), mysteries (28%), and thrillers/suspense (18%).

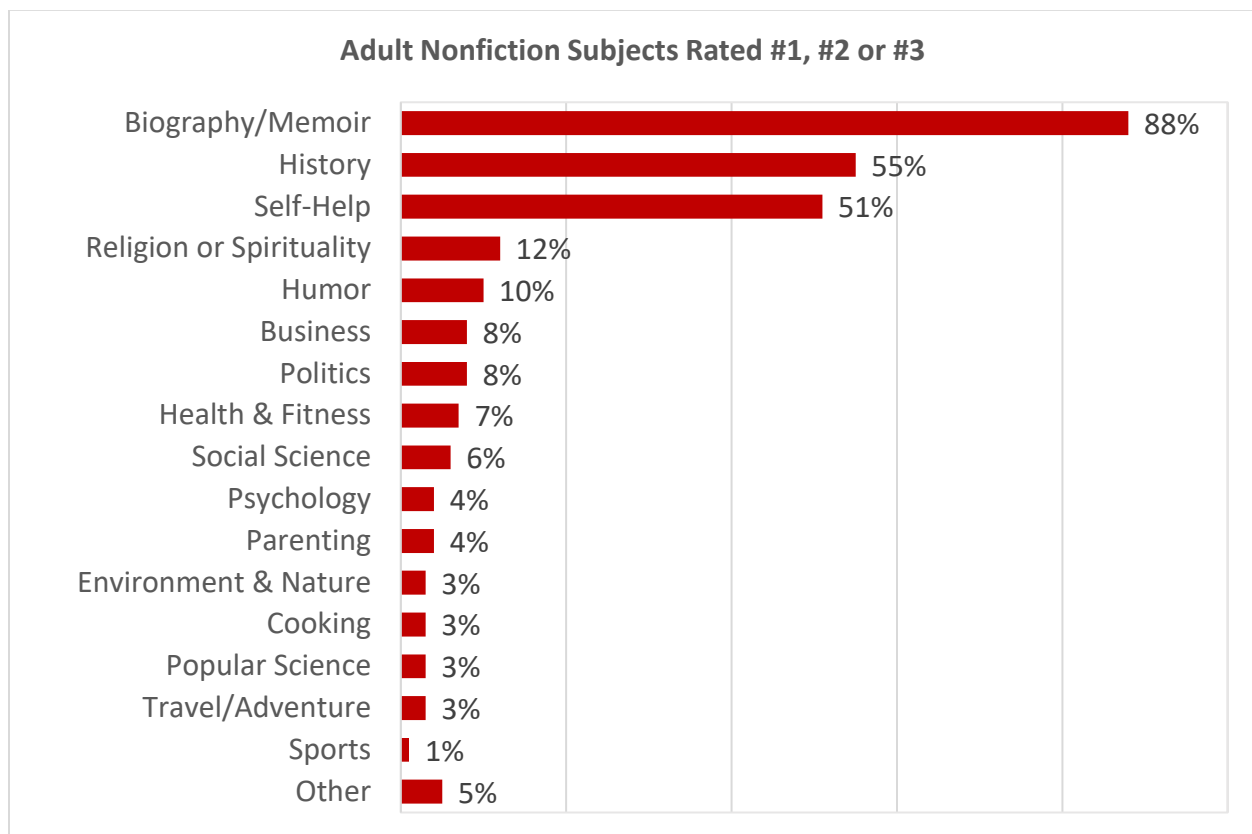
Figure 10. Q16. What three fiction genres are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library? Base = Adult audiobook selectors



MOST POPULAR ADULT NONFICTION SUBJECTS

Biography/Memoir stands out as the most popular nonfiction audiobook subject—88 percent put it in their top three and 64 percent named it as their number one subject. History and self-help round out the top three nonfiction audio subjects.

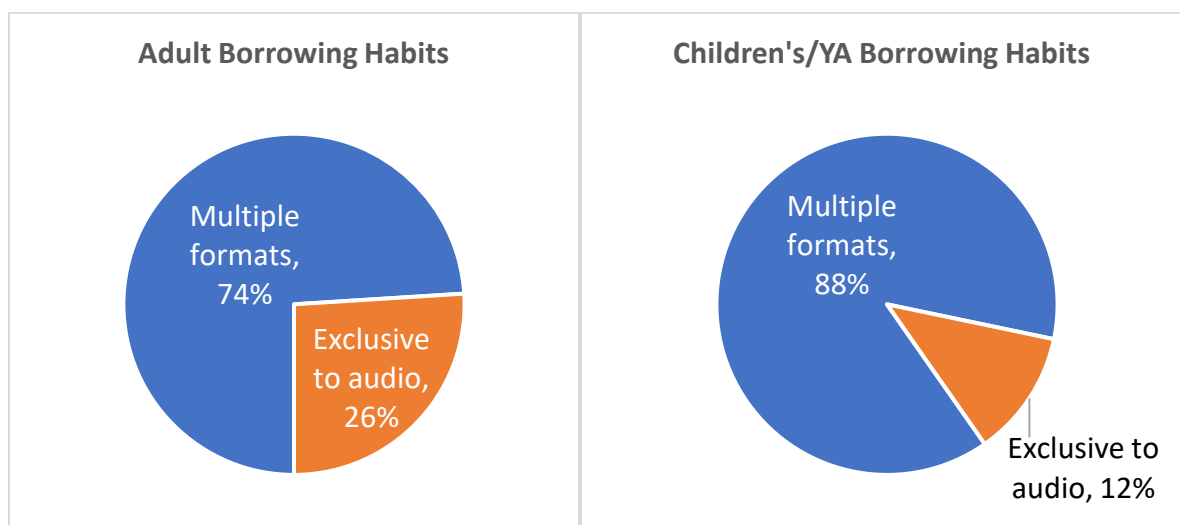
Figure 11. Q17. What three nonfiction subjects are most popular with adult audiobook borrowers in your library? Base = Adult audiobook selectors



EXCLUSIVE AUDIO BORROWERS

Respondents estimate that 26 percent of adult audio borrowers and 12 percent of children's/YA audio borrowers are exclusive to audio and do not borrow other library materials.

Figure 12. Q18a & b. Thinking about your library's [adult or children's/YA] audiobook borrowers, what percentage would you estimate exclusively borrow audiobooks and what percent borrow other formats as well (e.g., ebooks, print books, etc.)?

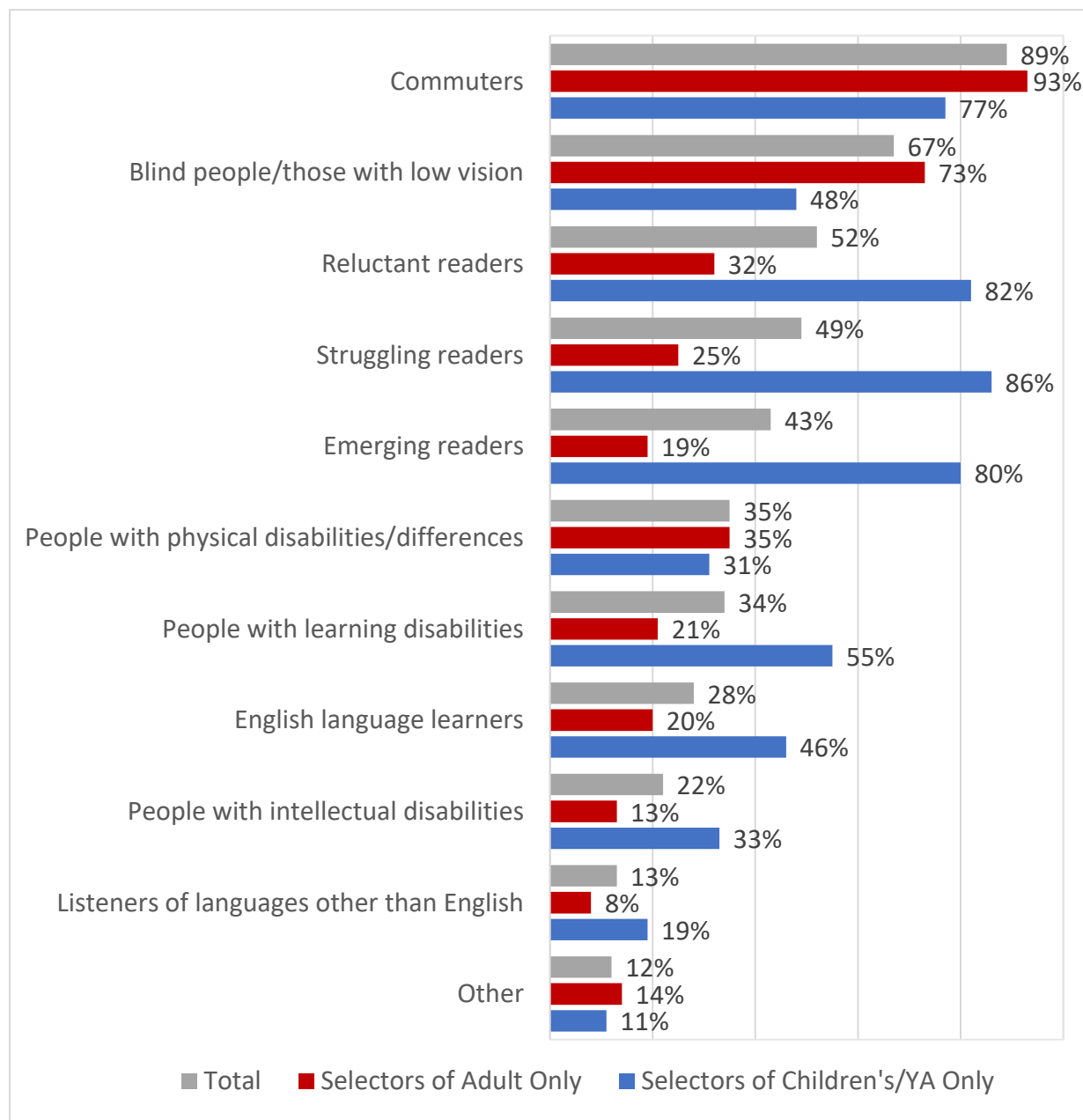


LIBRARY CUSTOMERS SUPPORTED BY AUDIOBOOK COLLECTION

All respondents were asked this question, but the responses from selectors of exclusively adult or children's/YA materials vary. Based on the total sample, the three main groups that library audio collections support are commuters, blind people/those with low vision, and reluctant readers.

Adult selectors put people with physical disabilities and/or differences in their top three, pushing reluctant readers down one rung. Children's/YA selectors say their audio collections mostly support struggling readers, reluctant readers, and emerging readers.

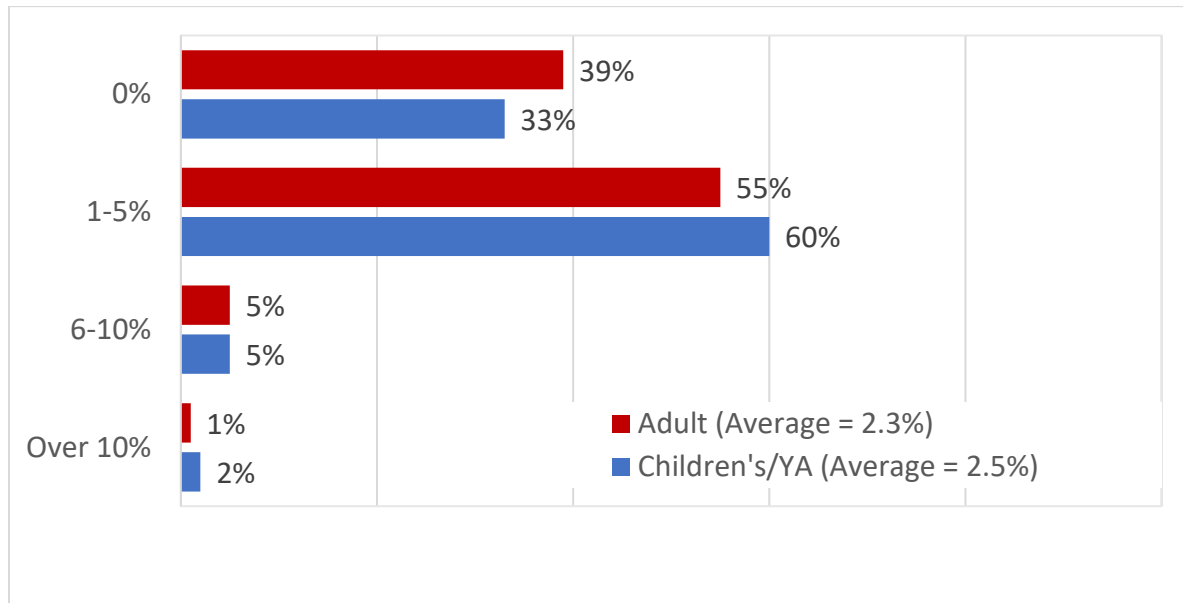
Figure 13. Q19. Would you say your audiobook collection particularly supports any of the following patrons? Check all that apply.



PERCENT OF AUDIO COLLECTIONS IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH

The percent of public libraries that carry adult audiobooks in languages other than English is 61 percent, while the percentage for children's/YA audiobooks is slightly higher: 67 percent. However, as a percentage of the entire audio collection, libraries do not carry many. Only 2.3 percent, on average, of adult audiobook collections are available in languages other than English. Children's/YA titles in other languages have a similar average: 2.5 percent.

Figure 14. Q20a & b. Approximately what percent of your [Adult or Children's/YA] audiobook collection is represented by titles recorded in languages other than English?

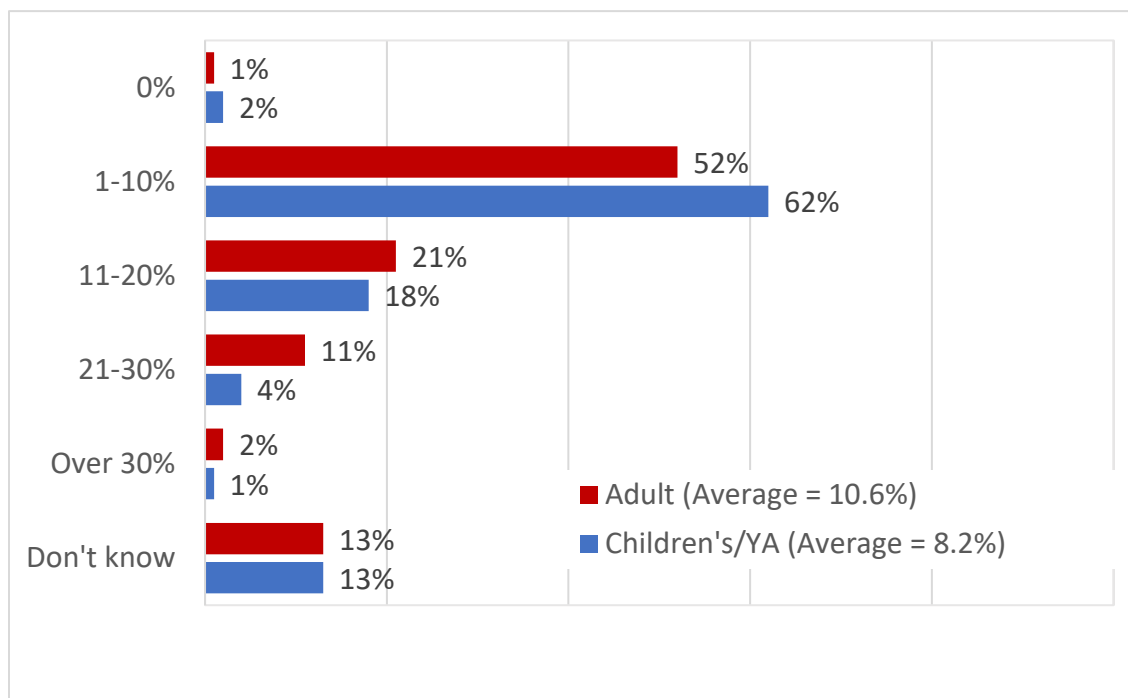


PERCENT OF MATERIALS BUDGET DEVOTED TO AUDIO

The share of public libraries' total adult materials budget devoted to audiobooks (in all formats) averages 10.6 percent (median: 8.3%). Large libraries serving over 100,000 people devote the largest share to adult audio (14.2%) and small libraries the smallest share (9.0%).

The percentage of children's/YA materials budgets devoted to audio is slightly lower at 8.2 percent (median 7.0%). The children's/YA percentage doesn't vary as much by library size, ranging from 9.1 percent for large libraries to 7.5 percent for small libraries.

Figure 15. Q23a & b. Approximately what percent of your library's total [Adult or Children's/YA] materials budget is devoted to audiobooks (in all formats)?

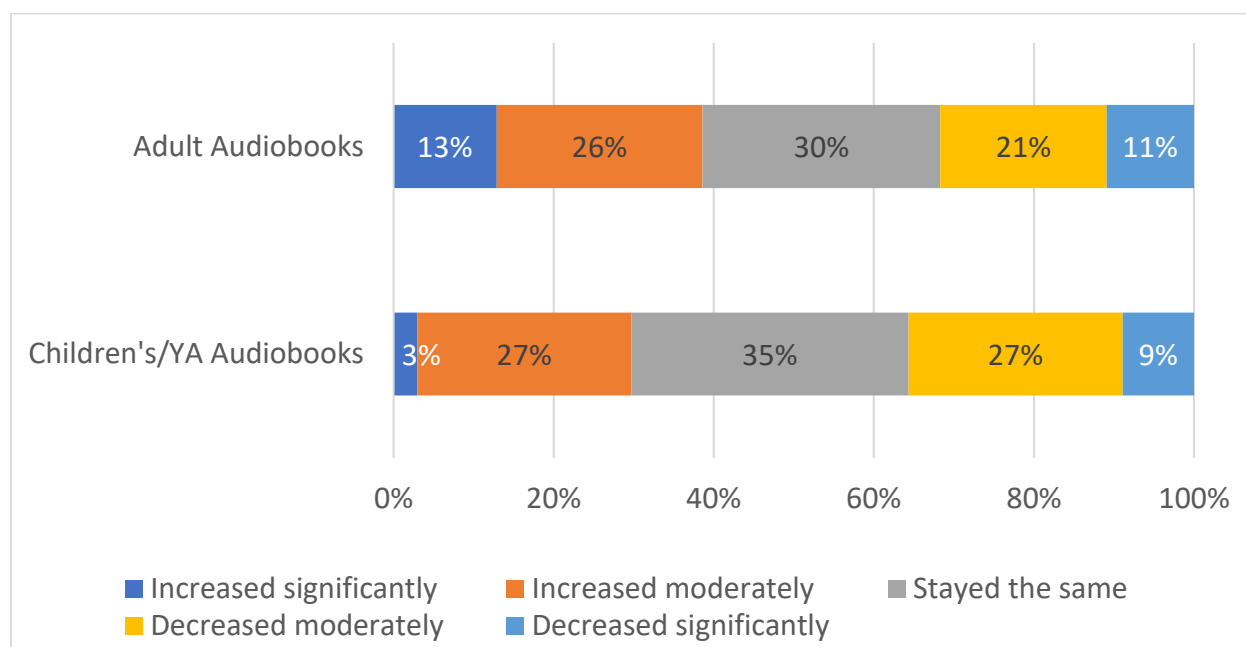


CHANGE IN SHARE OF MATERIALS BUDGET DEVOTED TO AUDIOBOOKS

Over a third of respondents report that the share of the materials budget devoted to adult audiobooks has increased, with 13 percent reporting a significant increase. At the same time, 32 percent reported a decrease in the share devoted to audio, 11 percent saying it was a significant decrease.

When it comes to children's/YA audio, more libraries reported a decrease than an increase in the share of the total materials budget (36 percent reported a decrease and 30 percent reported an increase).

Figure 16. Q24a & b. Over the last few years, has the share of total materials budget devoted to [adult or children's/YA] audiobooks changed?

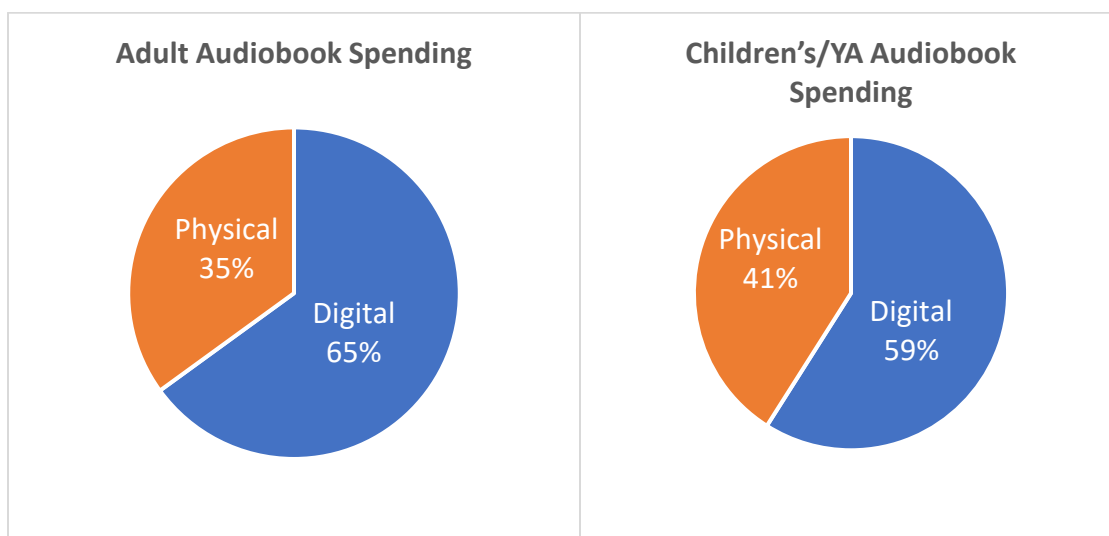


PHYSICAL VERSUS DIGITAL AUDIOBOOK SPENDING

The majority of spending for adult audiobooks skews toward digital audio, but a good percentage is still devoted to physical audio. Sixty-five percent of the total audio budget goes toward licensing digital titles, while 35 percent is spent on physical audio. Four percent of libraries exclusively purchase digital audio for adults.

The digital/physical audiobook split is less pronounced for children's/YA titles. Libraries devote 59 percent of their total audiobook spending to digital titles and devote 41 percent to physical audio. Five percent do not buy physical audio for children at all.

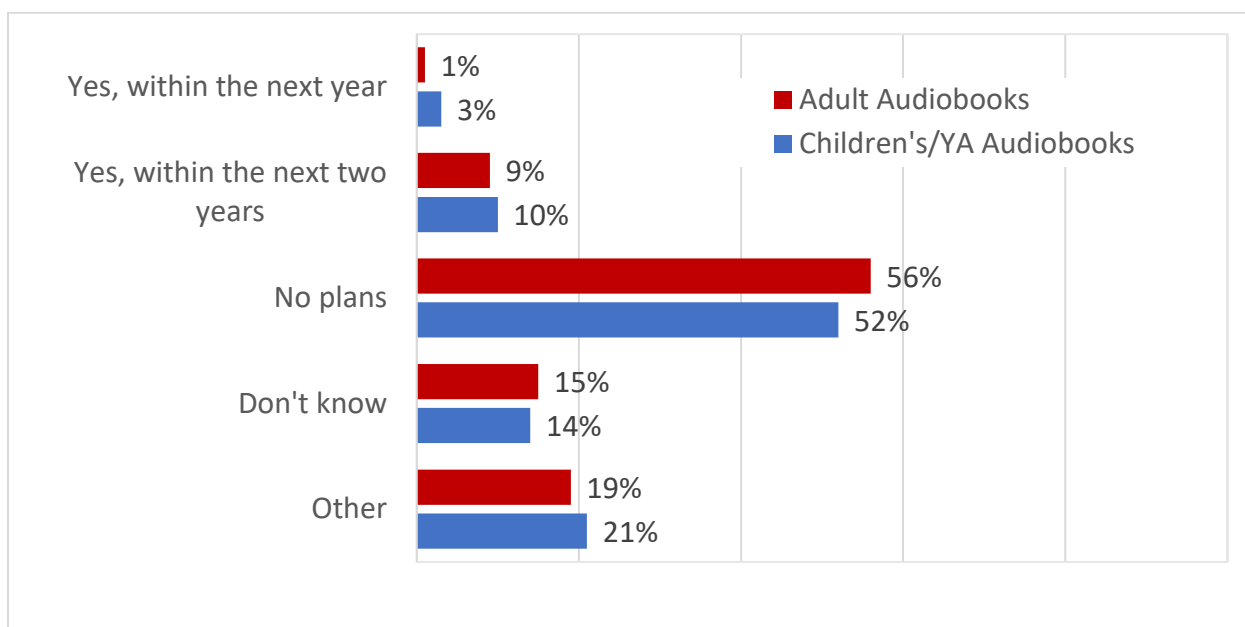
Figure 17. Q Q25a & b. What percent of your library's [adult or children's/YA] audiobook spending would you estimate goes toward physical audiobooks versus digital audiobooks?



PLANS TO ELIMINATE PHYSICAL AUDIO PURCHASING

Over half of libraries say they have no immediate plans to eliminate physical audio purchasing, while 10 percent plan to eliminate physical audio for adults over the next two years and 13 percent plan to eliminate children's/YA in the same time period. The open-ended responses to this question reveal that rather than using a specific timeline, libraries are slowly phasing out physical audio for adults in response to demand. On the children's side, libraries indicate that CDs may be phased out over time, but integrated audio is going strong.

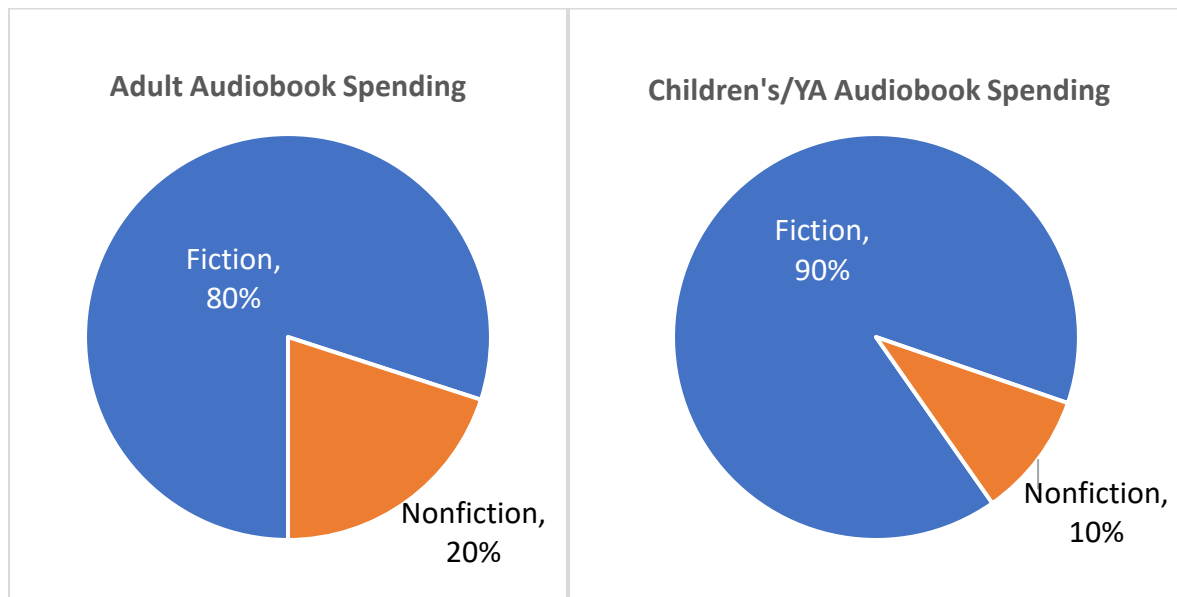
Figure 18. Q26a & b. Does your library have plans to eliminate physical audiobooks for [adults or children] in the near future?



FICTION VERSUS NONFICTION AUDIOBOOK SPENDING

Adult audiobook spending breaks down to approximately 80 percent fiction versus 20 percent nonfiction. Children's/YA audio spending weights a little heavier on the fiction side, with a 90 percent fiction/10 percent nonfiction split. These fiction/nonfiction audio spending trends line up almost exactly with the corresponding circulation trends shown in Figure 9.

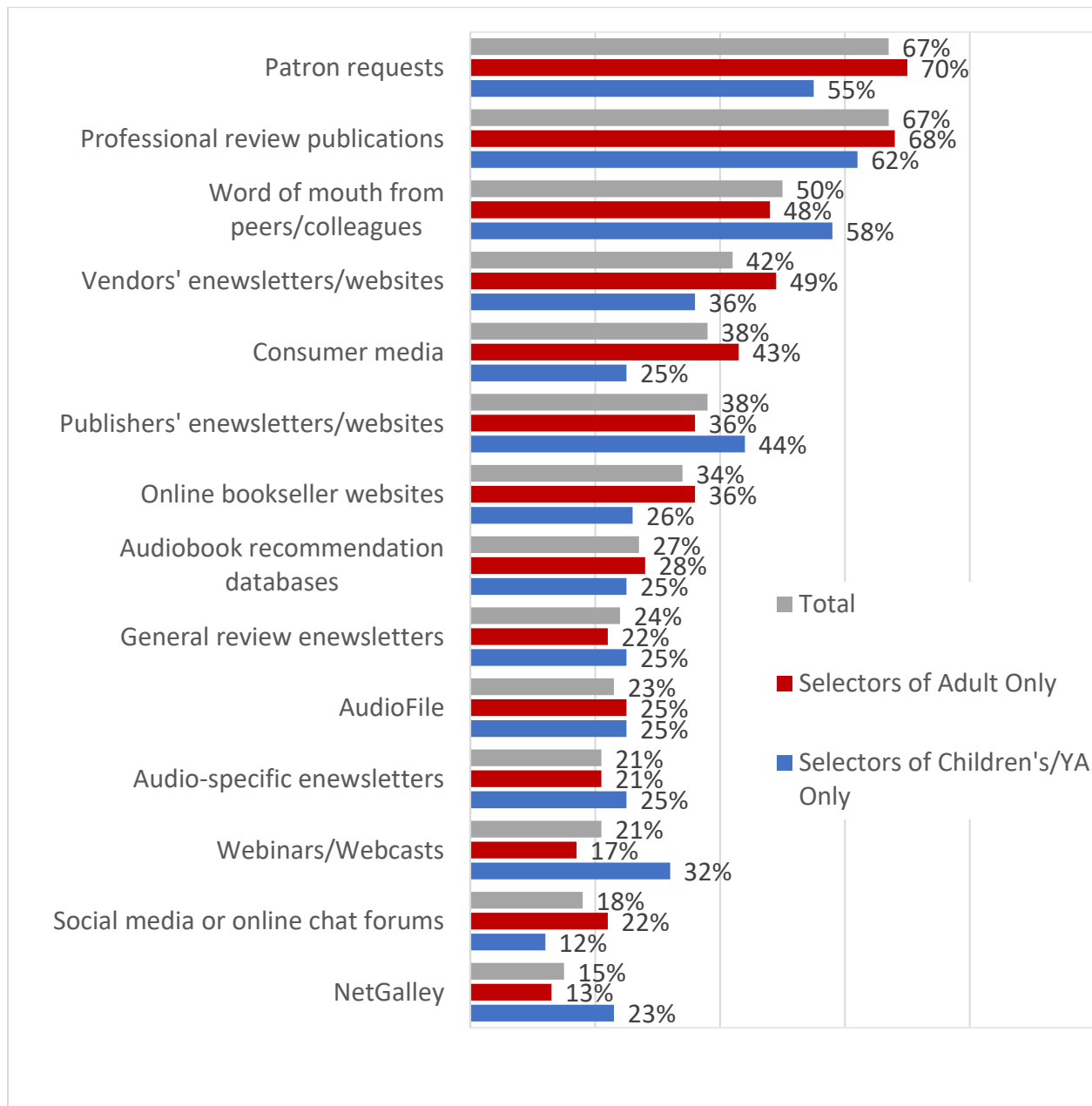
Figure 19. Q27a & b. Please estimate how your [adult or children's/YA] audiobook spending breaks down in terms of fiction versus nonfiction.



RESOURCES USED FOR AUDIOBOOK SELECTION

The resources that librarians most rely on to help them make audiobook selection decisions are patron requests (67%), professional review publications such as *Library Journal* (67%), word of mouth from colleagues/peers (50%), and vendor newsletters/websites (42%). Selectors of adult audiobooks mostly favor professional reviews and patron requests. Children's/YA audio selectors prioritize professional reviews, word of mouth from peers/colleagues, and then patron requests.

Figure 20. Q28. What resources do you use to help you make audiobook selection decisions? Check all that apply.

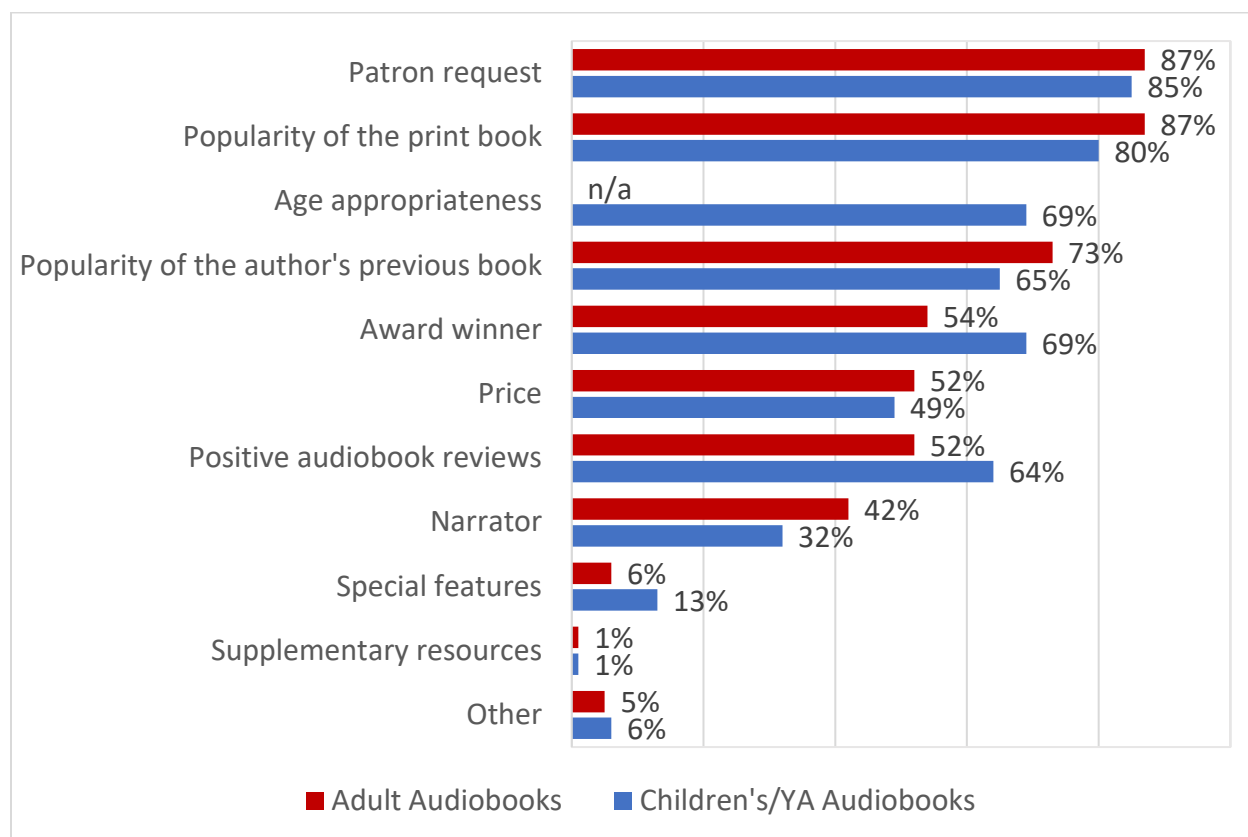


ADDITIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE AUDIOBOOK PURCHASES

Other factors also influence audiobook purchase decisions. The main factor is patron request (in a repeat of what was learned in the last question). For audio selectors, the popularity of the print book is equally as important, and the popularity of the author's previous title also factors into decision making.

Patron request is most important to children's/YA audio selectors, followed by popularity of the print book, with age appropriateness and award winners vying for third place.

Figure 21. Q29a & b. What are some important factors that influence your audiobook selection decisions for the library? Check all that apply.

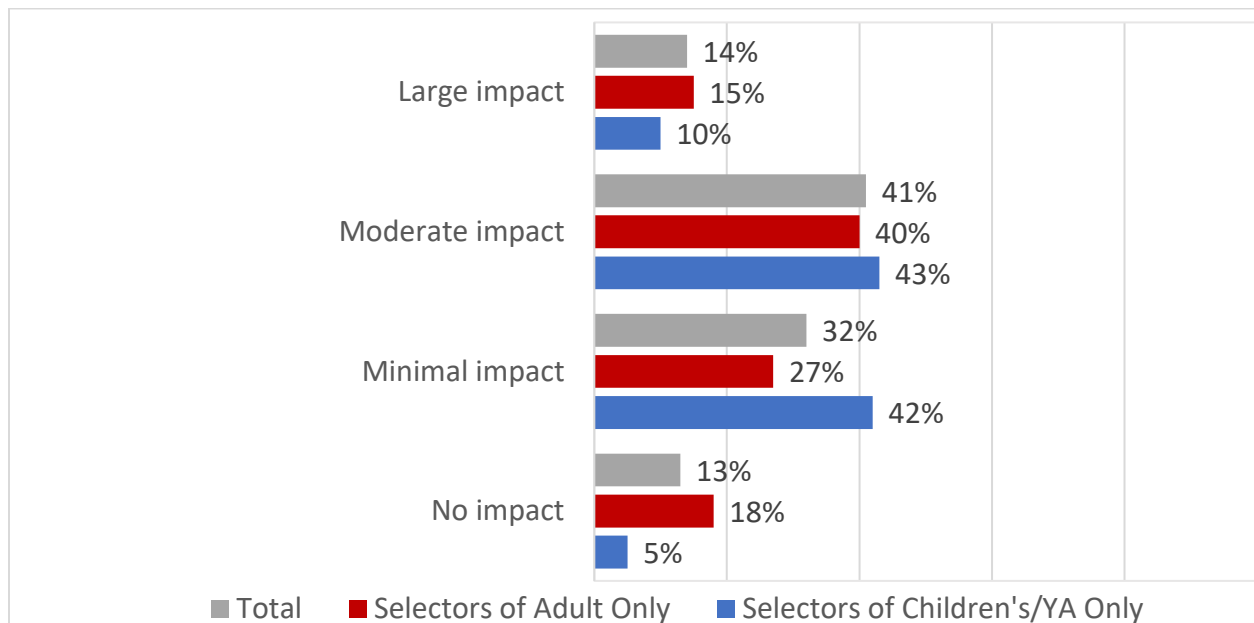


IMPACT OF NARRATOR ON LIBRARY AUDIOBOOK SELECTION

Forty-one percent of all respondents say that the narrator has a moderate impact on their audiobook selections for the library, and another 14 percent say narrator has a significant impact. Thirteen percent say the narrator does not influence their buying decisions and the remainder, 32 percent, say the narrator has minimal bearing.

Selectors of children's/YA audiobooks say that the narrator is less likely to have a large impact on their purchasing decisions, but it is more likely to have some impact overall.

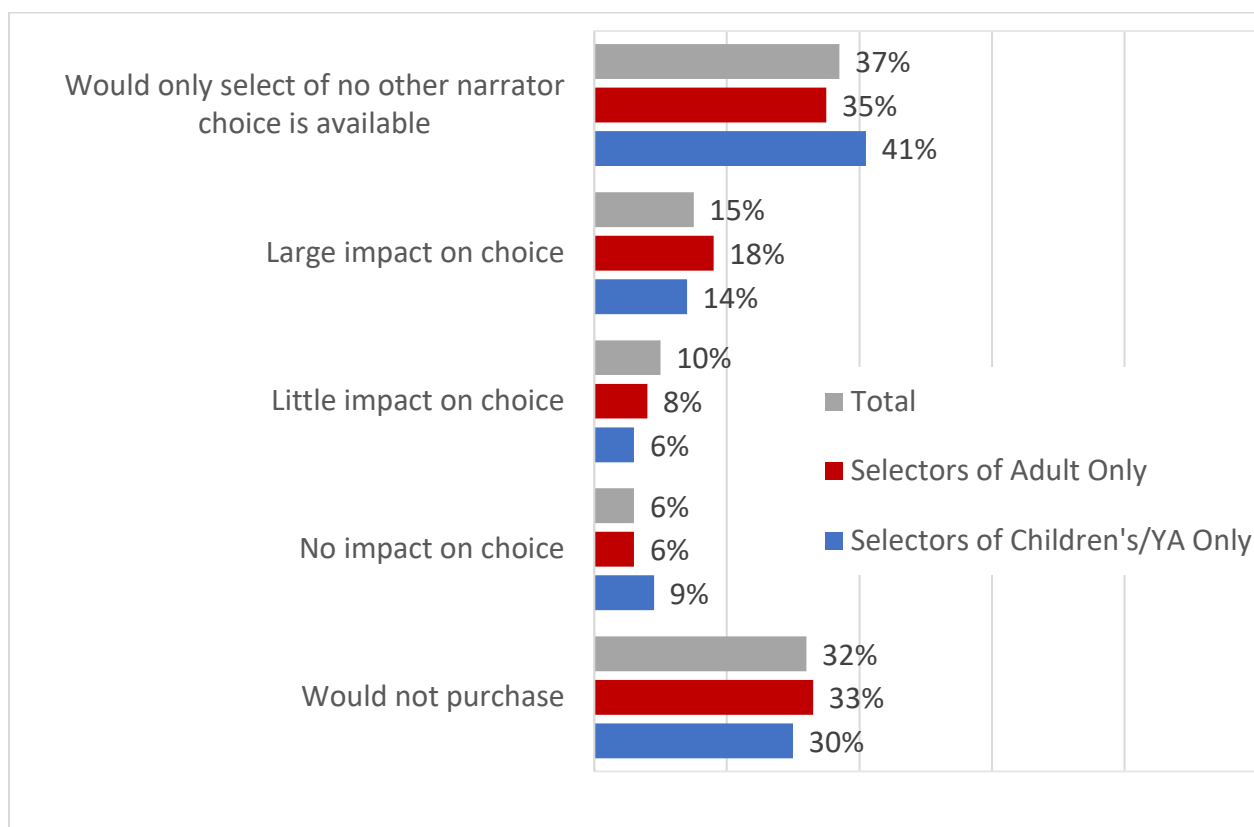
Figure 22. Q30. How much impact does narrator have on your audiobook selection for the library?



REACTION TO NON-HUMAN VOICED NARRATOR

Thirty-seven percent of respondents would only purchase an audiobook with a non-human voiced narrator for the library if no other choice was available. Another third, 32 percent, would be influenced to not purchase at all. Only about 16 percent thought a non-human voiced narrator would have little to no impact on their audio purchasing decisions.

Figure 23. Q31. Would a non-human voiced narrator influence your library's decision to obtain an audio title?

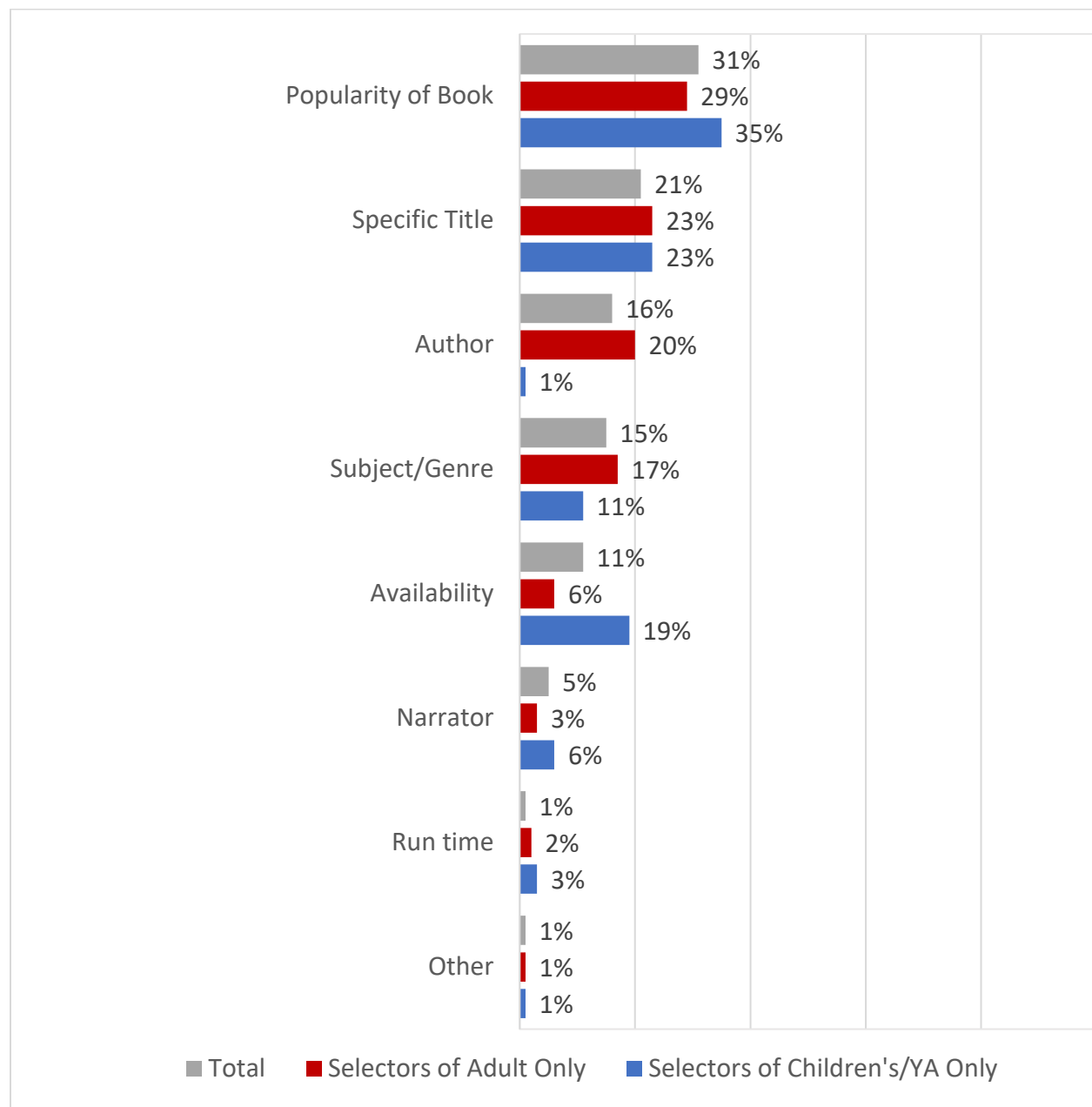


MOST IMPACTFUL SELECTION CRITERIA FOR PATRONS

Overall, librarians feel the popularity of the book is the most important selection criteria for patrons, followed by the specific title they are looking for. The author, subject/genre, and availability are next in importance, with narrator and run time factoring the least into borrowing decisions.

Librarians feel the popularity of the book and availability are more important to kids/teens than to adults. The author appears to be more important to adults than to kids/teens.

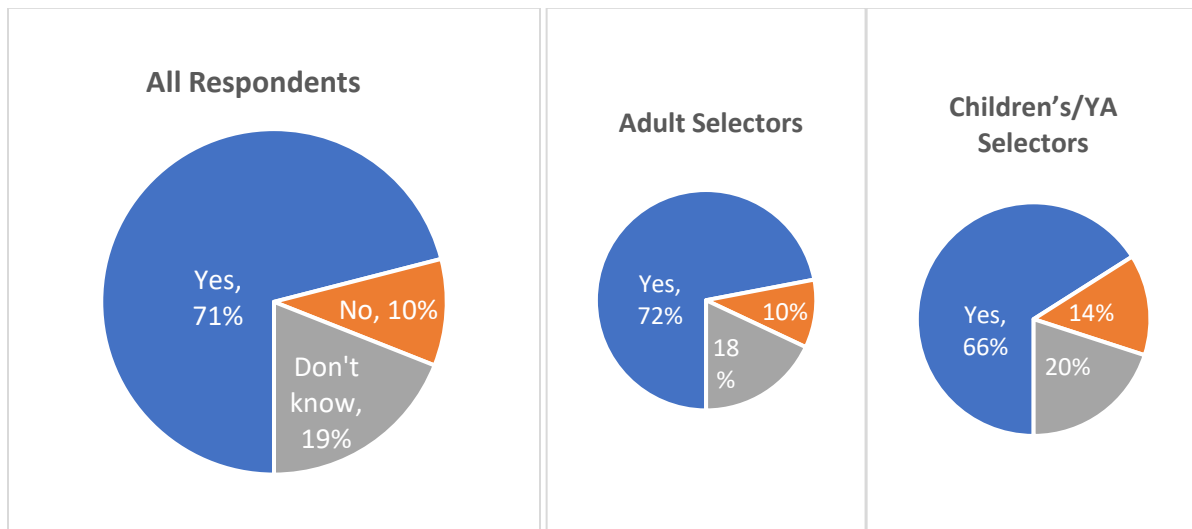
Figure 24. Q32. What do you think patrons care about most when selecting an audiobook? Please select only one answer.



NARRATOR IMPACT ON PATRON AUDIO SELECTION

While narrator might not have the largest impact on patron audiobook selection, the narrator does factor into borrowing decisions. Librarians estimate that 72 percent of adult borrowers and 66 percent of children's/YA borrowers take the narrator into consideration when making audiobook borrowing decisions.

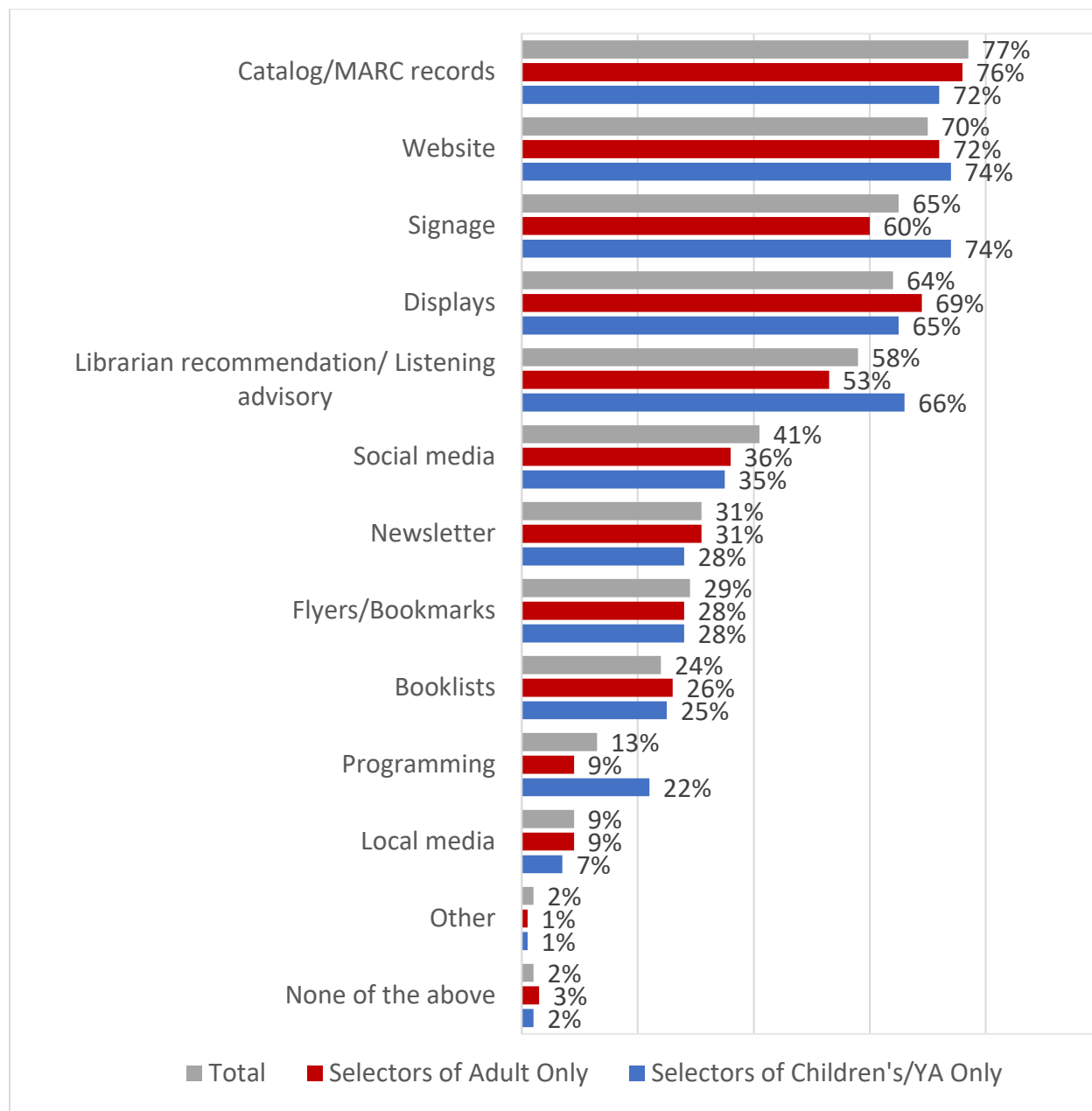
Figure 25. Q33. Do you think the narrator has an impact on patrons' audiobook selections?



LIBRARY AUDIOBOOK PROMOTION

Libraries promote their audiobook collections primarily through catalog searches, on their website, and via signage and displays in the library. Signage, listening advisory, and programming stand out as promotional methods used more for children's/YA audio collections than for adult collections.

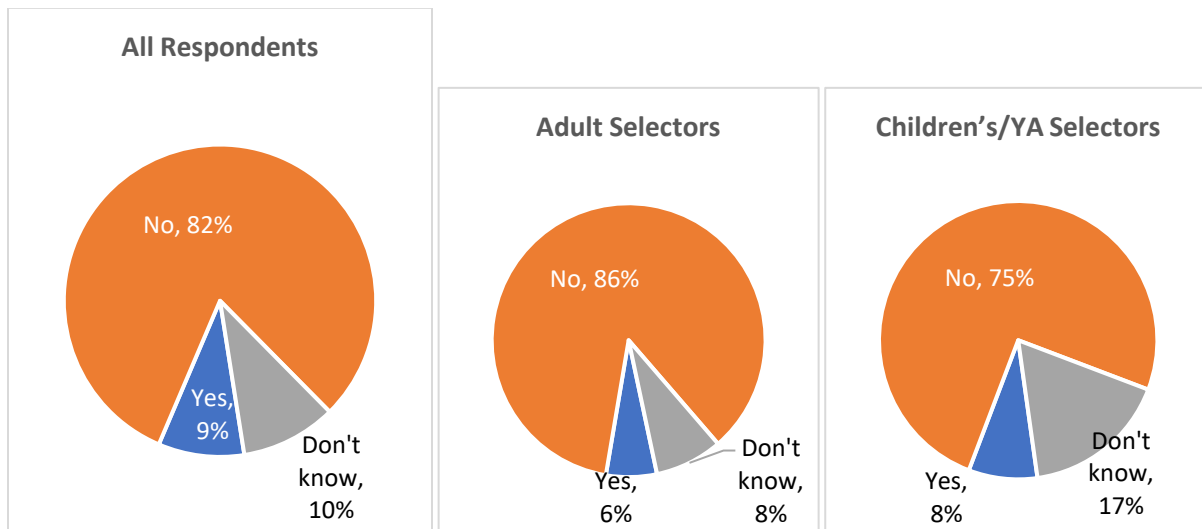
Figure 26. Q21. How does your library promote its audiobook collection to the public? Check all that apply.



LIBRARY AUDIOBOOK-SPECIFIC PROGRAMMING

Fewer than 10 percent of libraries have offered programming that is audio-specific for adult or young patrons in the last year. Those that have hosted audio-centric programming cited listening book clubs, classes to demonstrate how to download audiobooks, and listening to a book while doing crafts.

Figure 27. Q22. In the last year, has your library hosted any programming that is audiobook specific or involved your library's audiobook collection?



SELECTION OF GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT LIBRARY AUDIOBOOKS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bad narrator can kill a story in its tracks. I've seen it over and over on computer read or a monotone voice and the whole family will give up on it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few customers have told me that when a narrator is not clearly understandable, they lose interest.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI is an abomination. I've listened to several and they don't sound like real humans. They don't have the warmth and nuance. I will never purchase them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All audiobook circulation has declined, but children's audiobooks still get the most use.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although people may take a chance on an audiobook with an unknown narrator, the narrator will fall upon deaf ears if the quality of their reading is subpar. I have often heard people say they quit listening to a book after 10 minutes (or even less) if the narration is not engaging enough.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although we haven't had any specific programming related to audiobooks, I have tried to only purchase children's audio that we also own the book of to promote circulation. Most of the people taking out children's audio are families, particularly homeschooling in this area, so they are more likely to borrow something that has a book version, as well. We have eliminated YA audio at this time due to a lack of circulation. Adult audio does well but has decreased since the pandemic. Digital circulation has increased significantly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audiobook listeners seem more open to trying a variety of genres because it is narrated by their favorite narrator. Narrators also can make or break a listening experience and if patrons don't like the narrator, they won't listen to the book. We have a lot of families who listen to audiobooks on road trips or together as a family. Playaway audiobooks, Wonderbooks/Vox and digital audio has all grown in popularity as patrons want something they can listen to together or something that can appeal to multiple kids, i.e. a Playaway for each child.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CD audiobooks are more popular with our older population until we show them how to use LIBBY or HOOPLA, then they move to that. As they get new cars without cd players, they then switch to digital. Narrators are very important -- full cast audio is always popular but an uninteresting narrator can kill a story! Kudos to Julia Whelan, Marin Ireland and Michael Urie!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CD players are no longer common so popularity is going with availability of the player. Marked increase in downloadable audio since Covid.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulation of audio is dwindling, but we have a large number of seniors that request them, so we will continue to purchase.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know some patrons in our Library System like to listen to specific narrators but for most patrons, they do not have a narrator preference.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand for our books on cd has been declining, and so we do not focus on promoting this collection as much.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to get the die-hard BOCD users to try downloadables. If vendors could help create pathways that would be nice. Also had an idea for circulating refurbished ipods or ipod

<p>touches (do they still exist?) to encourage media phobic users, but can't figure out how to make it work.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital audiobooks are becoming much more popular, but we still provide the physical CD audiobooks due to circulation. When there is wait time to access digital audiobooks, frustration and disappointment is expressed by patrons. Oftentimes digital audiobooks are the only option for patron needs due to no longer owning CD players or having them in their cars. The author may be the first determining factor when patrons are seeking audiobooks, or they may have a specific title in mind, but the narrator makes or breaks the audiobook. The narrator plays a very important role in the quality of the audiobook.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital is more popular than physical. Many customers say that the narrators make a difference on if they continue listening to book.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't assume that everyone has internet access. Many of my patrons don't have a computer/tablet/smartphone or don't know how to use it (and don't want to). Some of my other patrons live in dead zones where there is no reliable cell service and there is no access to cable. Also the dial up internet that is available is garbage and unusable for downloading.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downloadable audiobooks account for the vast majority of my audiobook usage; between Hoopla and Cloud Library is expensive but we're serving a lot of people. A mix of spending models is good; narrators are very important, likely will keep physical audiobooks for a period of time but I suspect they'll get phased out sooner or later.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding Spanish titles on Overdrive for children is very difficult.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally patrons are not concerned by who the narrator is but will stop listening if they find the voice annoying or irritating.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George Guidell had a voice like butter. He is the only narrator I have had patrons ask for. When the author reads their own work especially in Biography (like Sinead O'connor's recent book), it is much more popular
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am an audiobook freak and go through about 5 a week and use them when cooking, cleaning, doing a hobby, or waiting for somebody.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am the selector for our library's physical Children's/YA audiobook collections. Our digital audiobooks are available through Overdrive, with one budget for Adult, YA, and Children's, and that selection process is in the hands of another librarian.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe the physical format will be around for a few more years. Some people are unwilling/unable to go digital. People do get attached to certain narrators because of the quality of the narration - they would pick the narrator no matter what genre the book was.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do believe the narrator is important and can sway a patron's decision to listen to a book. Famous actor-narrators or well-spoken authors are particularly popular. I suppose if a computer-generated voice (AI) could sound good and not like a robot, it might work, but I think it would be difficult to get the nuances right and would require a lot of direction and checking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't purchase digital materials. The only physical audio format that is growing are WonderBooks.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't think children have as big of a preference towards specific narrators, while adults do have those that they enjoy. Playaways have increased greatly in popularity at our library recently which has affected our physical audiobook circulation. Kids looking at Playaways are usually not looking for a specific title, but just browse what's available at the moment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't think many of my patrons actively search for a certain narrator when selecting audiobooks; but I think if they start to listen to one, if they do not like the narrator they will stop and return the book.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have a SMALL book budget, so don't purchase many Audio books. I get a rotating supply from our consortium (CKLS) every 6 weeks or so.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I haven't listened to any non-person narrated audiobooks, so I am not sure how they sound. I do know that the ones narrated by humans can be very subjective - some folks want to listen to books read by a certain narrator! I've stopped listening to ones that I didn't like (because of the narration/voice). It can make a big difference. We are already not seeing as many of our physical audiobooks circulate among kids and teens - the CD and Playaway formats don't fit as well with their "digital" lives if they listen to audiobooks at all (in our community). Lots don't own a player for CDs (and computers/laptops/Chromebooks/etc. may not have a drive to play them). And, while many of them own headphones, they are wireless/bluetooth, so they can't plug into a Playaway (although, I guess there are adaptors for those, maybe?). So, it's a bit of a conundrum. We have not studied who exactly is checking out our teen/children's audiobooks. Might be adults!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I hear feedback from adults about their collection and which narrators they prefer for audiobooks. However, I have never received feedback on narrators for the Children's or YA collection.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know that our digital audiobooks are very popular in our library system, but I don't have access to those circ stats, the amount we spend on them, or the split between fiction and nonfiction. My knowledge is of the physical audiobooks at the libraries I manage.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I sincerely hope that <i>SLJ</i> and <i>LJ</i> make a statement that they do not support audiobooks made by AI. We are letting AI take over all of our creative works. When that happens, what will become of the arts?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I specifically buy for YA and I believe most users of this collection are checked out by adult users for their own use.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think patrons have preferences for narrators, even though most of our purchasing is based on the popularity of the print version of the book. A "bad" narrator leads patrons to bring the audiobooks back early. They'll often specify what kinds of narrators they like during readers advisory interviews.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If titles have a particular narrator, patrons will listen to it even if it is a genre they don't normally read. For instance, George Guidal. They will listen to ANYTHING he narrates and now complain about the new narrator for Anne Hillerman who reads too fast not at a native American pace or pronunciation.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am not an audiobook listener, but I know people who care a lot about the narrator in that they have favorites and do-not-likes. But a lot of the time, as the purchaser, you don't have multiple narrator options for a title - if I want the latest Lisa Jewell, I'm buying it no matter the narrator. If it's a classic work with multiple editions I can purchase, then I listen to the samples. We're a multi-branch system covering a wide geographic area that includes a good-sized city to very rural with no internet access. I also think that Sim Use, CPC, and 100-circ copy options contribute to the growth in digital circ numbers. I am deeply annoyed by Audible exclusives and wish more authors understood (or cared more, if they do understand) that those titles are rarely, if at all, available to libraries digitally. Expensive metered use is evil.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm not sure about any of the percentages for my library. I feel like I am mostly buying James Patterson audiobooks. The budget was significantly cut and I can only buy the most popular titles/authors and the majority of the time that is James Patterson.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In general I can only speak to a small portion of this survey as I only select physical children's audio materials. I think concerns that affect children's /YA audiobook selection vs audiobook selection for adults are very different. For example, families with children may choose books by length of genre whereas adults may be more invested in a particular genre (I know I prefer audiobooks narrated by Julia Whelan). On a budgetary standpoint, our overall audio spending has gone up due to a larger amount of money being spent on Vox and Wonderbooks, but we're spending less on audiobooks on CD. In general we've seen our patrons express a significant amount of interest in Vox and Wonderbooks at all reading levels.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a dying collection thanks to cars not having cd players. We still add to it, but it does not move like it used to.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is something I push with my staff to recommend to people in their 60s to become very familiar with how they work or talking books work. Sadly in 25 years I have seen too many seniors in their 80s give up reading thinking its lost to them as their vision problems like macular degeneration are so bad or they develop Alz. And their spouse is not a reader and doesn't think to ask the library staff for help. I use them with my mother who also has Alz. for 3 years and they are AMAZING as a way to relax her, entertain her and stimulate her mind at the same time. It WORKS and helps caregivers also relax. I am passionate about audio as a senior lifeline to the world that gets smaller and smaller as they age up to their 90s; loved ones and friends die, they cannot get out of their home or younger family members are too busy to visit. Audio helps many cope with loneliness and depression.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I've been tracking the physical audiobooks for the last several years and we still have patrons who are using them in their cars. In the next couple of years as CDs are not included in car options we'll see what happens!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I've been very disappointed in the level of quality control for physical audiobooks over the years. So often there are skips and/or freezes -- it's very aggravating. Furthermore, my purchasing level dropped significantly as prices began to skyrocket -- often to the point of absurdity. I don't listen to digital audiobooks, but have heard there are problems in that arena as well.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many kids in our community listen to audiobooks as they are learning to read, and then continue to listen as they grow older even if they are able to read the story. We have a very large collection, and it is checked out majority of the time because it is so popular.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More of our budget currently goes to physical audiobooks, but I feel we should allocate more to digital audiobooks. We are a part of a digital consortium for ebooks and audiobooks so that helps to where we don't have to spend as much on our own to acquire audio titles.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of our increase is due to audio enabled books (wonderbooks or vox). CDs as a format are slowly dying.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrator voice is very important to enjoyment. Some patrons search by narrator to see what else they are narrating. But always the title in demand is the most important!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrators have always been a "make or break" for audiobooks. We have had patrons who follow specific narrators, no matter the content of the book. Audiobooks with actors as narrators circulate the most. The main takeaway from this is that the quality of the narrator and production is very important.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-human narrators would only impact my purchase if it seemed like it was low-quality.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now that we have digital selections available, very few patrons utilize our physical audiobook collection. We will phase it out.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other than Adventures in Odyssey (which isn't available on Playaway) most of our audiobooks on CD's don't check out. More and more new cars are coming without CD players and fewer people have CD players in their homes. This is the main motivation behind switching to Playaways all-in-one format.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our budget and situation is such that demand for e-audiobooks routinely outstrips our budget. We buy those based on what people are putting on hold or requesting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our families love our Playaways and Wonderbooks. They are used as a reading tool for younger readers and an enjoyable activity by all children. Parents trust them as they are not "screen time" and we heavily handsell them as well as our Hoopla offerings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our library system/state handle the digital audiobooks, so I don't know anything about its budget or selection process. Nor do I know their checkout statistics.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our patrons are generally moving more toward e-audiobooks, so our physical collection will likely become more selective in the future. We would likely avoid self-published titles unless there is extremely high local interest/significance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our physical audio books have declining circulation numbers, but our integrated audio books like Wonderbooks and Vox Books are very popular.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our youth patrons like to borrow both the audio and print versions of books to listen and read along. Availability of both formats is a high consideration. We do not typically order an audiobook cd if we do not also own the print version.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrons definitely choose or do not choose a specific audiobook based on the narrator.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrons have said in the past that although they enjoy some authors, they cannot stand to listen to the audio version because of the narrator's voice. I will NOT EVER purchase audiobooks that are computer voice generated/AI. Same goes for print books.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrons may choose audiobooks based on titles, but the narrator is what they talk about. A bad narrator can ruin a book for them, and a good narrator results in audiobook promotion among patrons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrons want human narrators, not AI. Our patrons know which narrators they like and which they don't.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have stopped listening to a book because they did not like the narrator's voice.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical adult audiobooks are now a negligible percentage of all checkouts combined, physical and digital, but still have a decent turnover rate given the small budget still allotted them. Digital audio, on the other hand, is approaching half of checkouts compared to all digital activity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More and more patrons use audiobooks now, especially senior citizens.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The narrator is very important. They are conveying the whole idea of the story. They are bringing the story or theme of the book to life. The listener needs to be able to form the characters, scenes and sense of place in their minds and that is done through the narrator.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The narrator sometimes has an impact on patrons' audiobook selections (not just yes or no). Our eAudio budget has gone way up because the prices of the eAudio are going up exponentially. The prices for digital audiobooks for libraries are outrageous and the different (exploitative) licensing models makes collection development and maintenance work unnecessarily onerous and time-consuming further eating into library budgets and keeping staff from more meaningful work. Libraries are not tax funded slush funds for private industry to exploit, we're institutions that are one of the cornerstones of democracy. Cut us some slack. Legislation curbing publisher and vendor monopolistic and exploitative practices against libraries needs to be put in place. The industry is not regulating itself.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pandemic had a large effect on our physical CD book use and pushed many patrons toward e-audio. We are just starting to regain some interest in our physical browsing selection. I don't feel your survey will be truly valid unless you mention these issues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no way to know if audiobook folks take out other materials--I totally guessed on that answer. Don't we wish we knew!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To sum up... Decreasing the purchase of physical audiobooks while increasing the purchase of digital audiobooks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are definitely leaning more towards digital each year as access to cd players becomes harder. However, the digital purchase options are not fair to libraries. The price is too high for not owning the title.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are looking at phasing out physical audiobooks (esp. CDs) very gradually over time, but not suddenly or in the immediate future.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are set to discuss our libraries policies on AI work in the near future.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are slowly reducing the collection because fewer people have CD players.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We decided to add the aux cables to our Playaway collection (in both adult and kids) and that has been an excellent decision. Initially, the aux cables didn't come back (despite the nice label in the holder asking they be returned) but as patrons continue to check out Playaways and see the aux cable in every box, there are fewer missing cables. I would say that this has helped solidify Playaways as the physical format for our library (at least in the Kids Dept).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We find the cost of audiobook selection and purchasing to be prohibitive for our small library system and rely on a service like Overdrive with a consortium.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a large commuter population who still uses our physical audiobooks. All of our digital formats have increased and are likely to continue to do so.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have been reducing/eliminating children and teen audiobooks on cd or those with a book and cd in a kit. We are currently adding physical picture books with built-in players.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have discontinued purchasing physical audiobooks. I still add a few donated ones. We subscribe to 2 audiobook services: CloudLibrary (1 user per item) and hoopla (simultaneous download and pay per item). Audiobook use has exploded in the last couple of years. 90% of our patrons do digital audiobooks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have just added Wonderbooks to our collection. Our CD Audiobooks still circulate well, but I anticipate they will decrease over the next few years.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have removed single disc audiobooks or placed them inside of corresponding physical books to save shelf space. We see an increase in audiobook borrowing during summer for vacation car trips.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have seen a significant decrease in patrons checking out audiobook CDs. I no longer purchase CDs for the Children's Department since majority of young families do not use CDs. Instead I focus on purchasing Playaways (which the circulation stats have significantly increased within this year) as well as Wonderbooks and Voxbooks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We stopped purchasing physical audiobooks for children two years ago and stopped purchasing physical audiobooks for adults this year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While CD audiobook use continues to plummet (and Playaways really haven't taken off), Vox Books and Wonderbooks have become very popular and I will be adjusting my spending accordingly over the next fiscal year. Also, I do not purchase very much juvenile audiobook content for Libby because we are part of a statewide consortium that covers most of it. I buy a lot more digital YA titles than children's titles because of this.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While I think patrons mostly look for specific titles in audiobook, I know there are patrons (myself included) that have picked an audiobook specifically because of the narrator.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While our physical audiobooks are dwindling, the populations dependent on them are more desperate than ever to have them. Meanwhile, our digital audiobook circulations have exploded and now dominates a large part of our library's total budget.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While we aren't buying a lot of new audiobooks on CD, we are buying a lot of Vox Books and Wonderbooks, where the audio is built into the physical book.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While we have no concrete plans to phase out physical audiobooks completely, we do weed for non-use. Items that have gone 3-4 years without circulating are weeded quarterly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While we have no plans to eliminate children's/YA physical audiobooks we are in the process of discarding all of our adult physical audiobooks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a number of patrons who follow favorite narrators, even to the point of listening to a book in a genre they don't normally read. A good narrator can make a book come to life (e.g., Jim Dale, Barbara Rosenblatt). A less-than-good narration/production of a book can ruin it.