

Dear Boise Library Board of Trustees, Library Staff,

I was pleased to watch the discussion that was part of the last meeting of the Library Board of Trustees and Boise Library Staff on January 14th.

I'm glad that a central part of this discussion is a review of library coverage across the city of Boise and the question: what should our service distance goal be?

Prior to launching a petition to the City of Boise for a library branch in West Boise in 2023, I conducted research very similar to the questions that are being asked now. It was plain to see that citizens on the west edge of Boise are farther from a library (Boise or otherwise) than other parts of Boise. However, I was unsure if my assumption of a 2-mile radius was realistic compared to peer cities. Within Boise, citizens in almost every part of the city reside less than 2 miles from a library. However, I wondered, is Boise uniquely populated with many libraries? Do people in other cities usually live farther than 2 miles from their closest public library branch?

To answer this question, I found a list of 6 cities with a population close to Boise's, of 235,000 residents. I selected cities from different regions of the US without any preference or foreknowledge of which cities have good public library systems. Then I looked up the locations of public libraries in these cities, plotted them on a map and added a 2-mile radius around each library branch.

I published this research at: <https://www.citizensforalibrary.org/west-boise/how-does-library-coverage-compare-in-similar-cities/>

Please review this for yourself. What I learned is that while there are places in other cities where people are farther than 2 miles from a library, this is not the norm. Many cities have library branches providing overlapping access using a 2-mile radius.

In the past week, I've also updated this page to link to an updated, interactive version with adjustable service radius, showing all the previously mentioned cities and two additional cities that were cited to me as comparable, peer cities to Boise, Lincoln, NE and Reno, NV: <https://www.citizensforalibrary.org/west-boise/library-coverage-in-similar-cities/>

Please take a look, play around with different map types: satellite view shows more clearly where people live (but then the city borders disappear). You can see what adjusting the radius looks like in different places.

Of the 9 cities surveyed and shown on this map, here is how I would rank their library accessibility:

1. Norfolk, VA

Norfolk has more library branches than any other city I surveyed. Many parts of the city are within comfortable walking distance of a library branch. The only area > 2 miles is in the NW corner of the city where the naval base is. Their main library was recently redesigned and rebuilt as a large, beautiful building with the assistance of a very large private donation. The only downside I see of Norfolk's libraries – a few of the branches are older, smaller buildings.

2. Spokane, WA

Spokane has a fantastic, recently updated library system. Voters approved a levy for 77 million in 2018, of which a significant part went towards a main library remodel, but which also built new branches and made some updates to every branch in the city. It doesn't have as many branches as Norfolk, but in addition to excellent regular library coverage it has the 'Hive', which features technology and aims to be a hip gathering place. In addition to the branches, it also boasts several kiosks, making access even closer. (These kiosks are not shown on the map I created; only full library branches are on the map).

3. Garland, TX

Garland is a suburb of Dallas TX, which itself boasts 30 library branches. Garland has 4 libraries, vs, Boise's 5, but the city is only 67% as large as Boise in terms of area. It has a 4 square mile residential area in the SW corner of the city > 2 miles from a library.

4. Fremont, CA

Fremont has more libraries closer together than Spokane, but it has a residential area of the city in the foothills, centered on Mission Blvd, more than 2 miles from a library. The Irvington Library was recently closed, but as a new library is planned in the area, I left it on the map. The residential area near the Tesla factory, Warm Springs in the SW corner, is also lacking close library access.

5. Glendale, AZ

Between Foothills Library and the Glendale Main Library, there is a 1.8-mile-long stretch farther than 2 miles from a library. In all, there are about 9 square miles of populated area in this part of the city, but these residents are still closer to a library branch than the West Boise library desert.

6. Reno, NV

Reno has a larger population, at 280k residents. Reno has 8 libraries in its library system. Reno has a spread out, spidery shape. There are 4 areas of Reno farther than 2 miles from a library. None of these appear to have the same population as West Boise's library dead zone, so the ROI on addressing them would be lower.

7. Boise, ID

In West Boise we have a 1 to 3 mile by 4-mile area more than 2 miles from a library. About 7 square miles. Include Meridian and it's a 3 by 4-mile area, about 12 square miles. There are 4 other parts of Boise where citizens reside more than 2 miles from a library, but their population is much lower. See

<https://www.citizensforalibrary.org/west-boise/areas-with-poor-access/>

8. Lincoln, NE

Lincoln has 8 libraries in its library system, spread over 102 square miles, serving 300,000 residents. Much of the city has very good library coverage, but there is a sizable area (about 12 square miles) in the SE corner of Lincoln more than 2 miles from a library. If this SE corner had a library branch it would certainly be ranked higher on this list.

9. Scottsdale, AZ

While Scottsdale has 4 public libraries, it has 184 square miles, compared to Boise's 84 square miles. Much of Scottsdale is not populated, but there are still many residential areas more than 2 miles from a library, ranking it at the bottom of this list.

Thanks again for your commitment to serve the citizens of Boise and promote literacy, education, lifelong learning, and even free entertainment via our library system in Boise!

Mark Salisbury