Center for an Urban Future
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Report - April 2017

More Time in the Stacks: Library Hours in NYC Still Lag Behind Other Big Cities

CUF's third annual assessment of library hours compares New York City's public libraries with library systems in the nation's ten largest cities and New York State's ten largest counties. Although New York City's branch libraries are now open significantly more hours per week than at any point in the past decade, NYC's libraries are still open fewer hours than most of the largest library systems in the nation and large New York State counties.

by Jonathan Bowles and Avril Koblitz

New York City's branch libraries are now open significantly more hours per week than at any point in the past decade. This marks an important improvement at a time when branch libraries have become vital information portals for New Yorkers who lack the essential literacy, language. and technological skills needed to get ahead today.

Due to a $43 million increase in library operating funds, which Mayor Bill de Blasio and the City Council agreed to in June 2015, the city's libraries are now open 48.9 hours a week on average. This is up slightly from the same time last year, when the city's branches were open 48.4 hours a week, but it represents a significant increase in hours of operation from just two years ago (44.7 hours per week) and from a decade ago (39 hours per week).

Despite the considerable improvement, New York City's libraries are still open fewer hours than most of the largest library systems in the nation—including Los Angeles, Chicago, and Dallas—and most of the large counties in New York State. Meanwhile, fewer than 9 percent of the city's branch libraries are open seven days a week, a smaller share than most other major library systems in the state and nation.

The Center for an Urban Future's third annual assessment of library hours compares New York City's public libraries with library systems in the nation's ten largest cities and New York State's ten largest counties. Our main findings include the following:

- New York City is sixth among the nation's ten largest cities when it comes to library hours of operation.
- Five other large cities keep their libraries open for more hours each week than in New York: San Antonio (where libraries are open 56.5 hours per week), Los Angeles (52.9 hours), San Diego (52.7 hours), Dallas (52 hours), and

Chicago (49.1 hours).

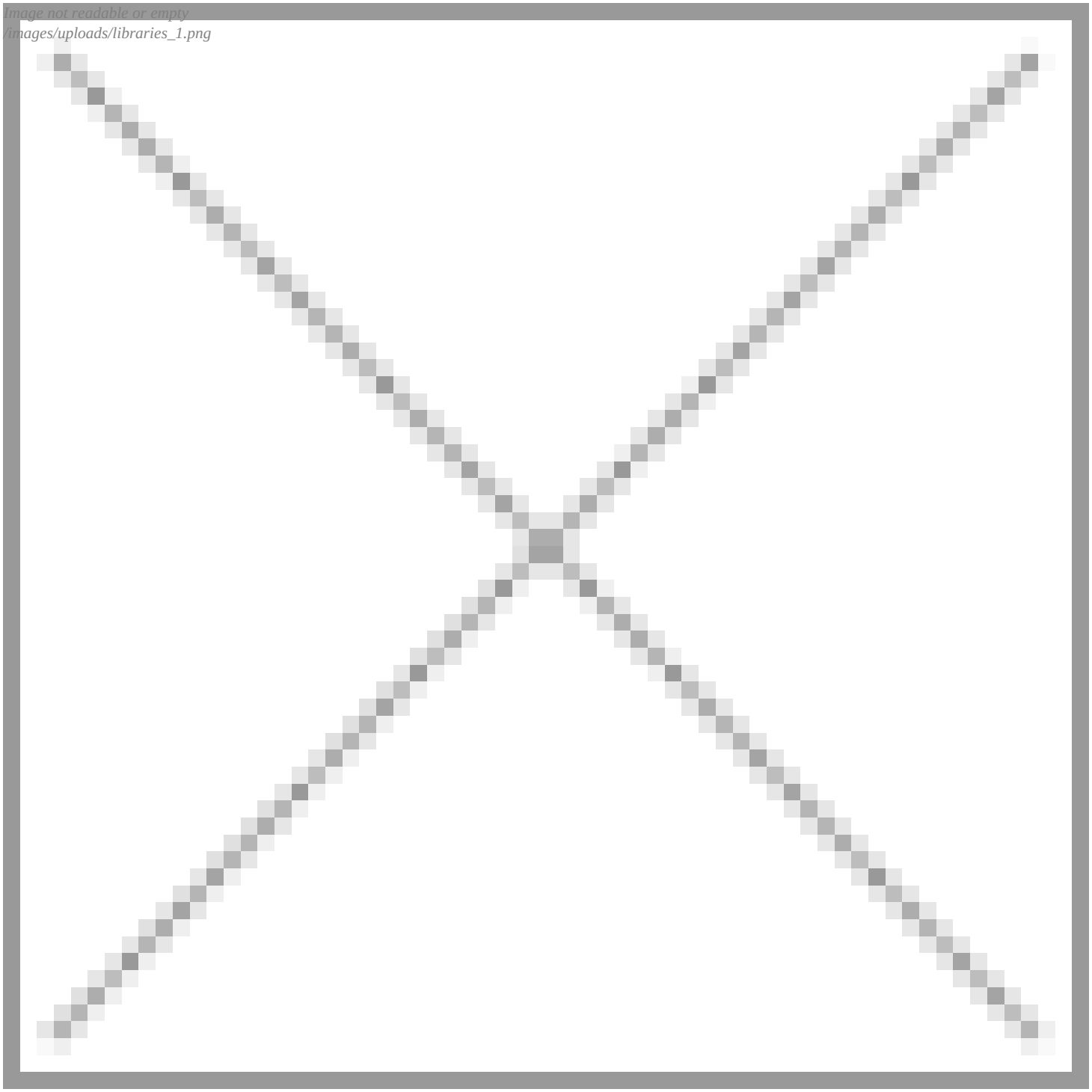
- Four cities keep their libraries open fewer hours per week than in New York: San Jose (48.4 hours), Phoenix (48.4 hours), Philadelphia (45.4 hours), and Houston (39 hours).
- New York City is seventh among the state's ten largest counties when measuring library hours of operation.
- In six other New York counties, libraries are open more hours per week than in the five boroughs: Suffolk County (64.2 hours), Nassau County (64 hours), Rockland County (60.1 hours), Westchester County (54.6 hours), Onondaga County (53.5 hours), and Monroe County (50.5 hours).
- *New York City libraries are open for more hours than libraries in three other counties: Albany County (47 hours), Broome County (46.8 hours), and Erie County (42.6 hours).*

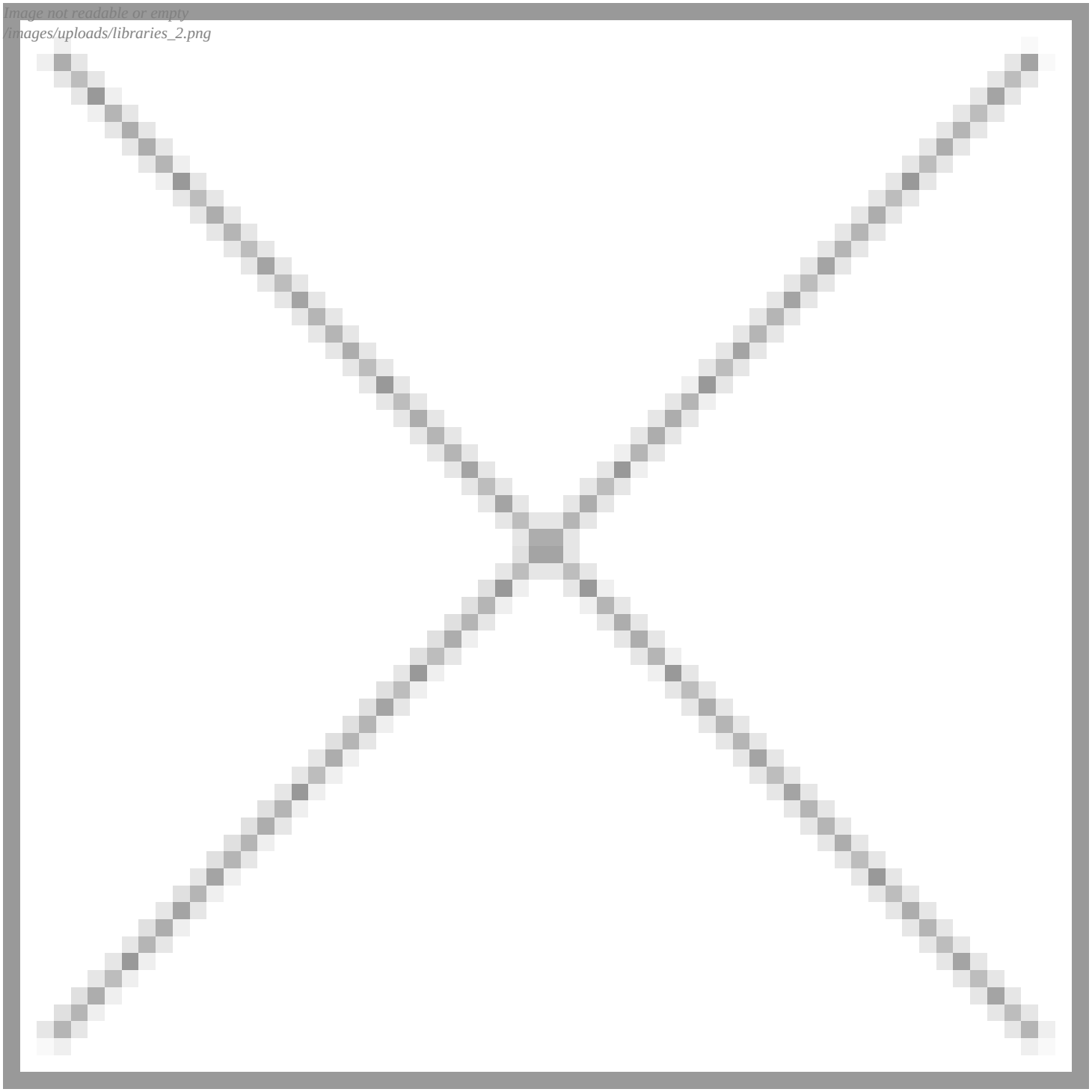
The analysis also shows that only 9 percent of New York City branch libraries are open seven days a week. This is a lower share than most of the nation's other large cities and most of the state's largest counties.

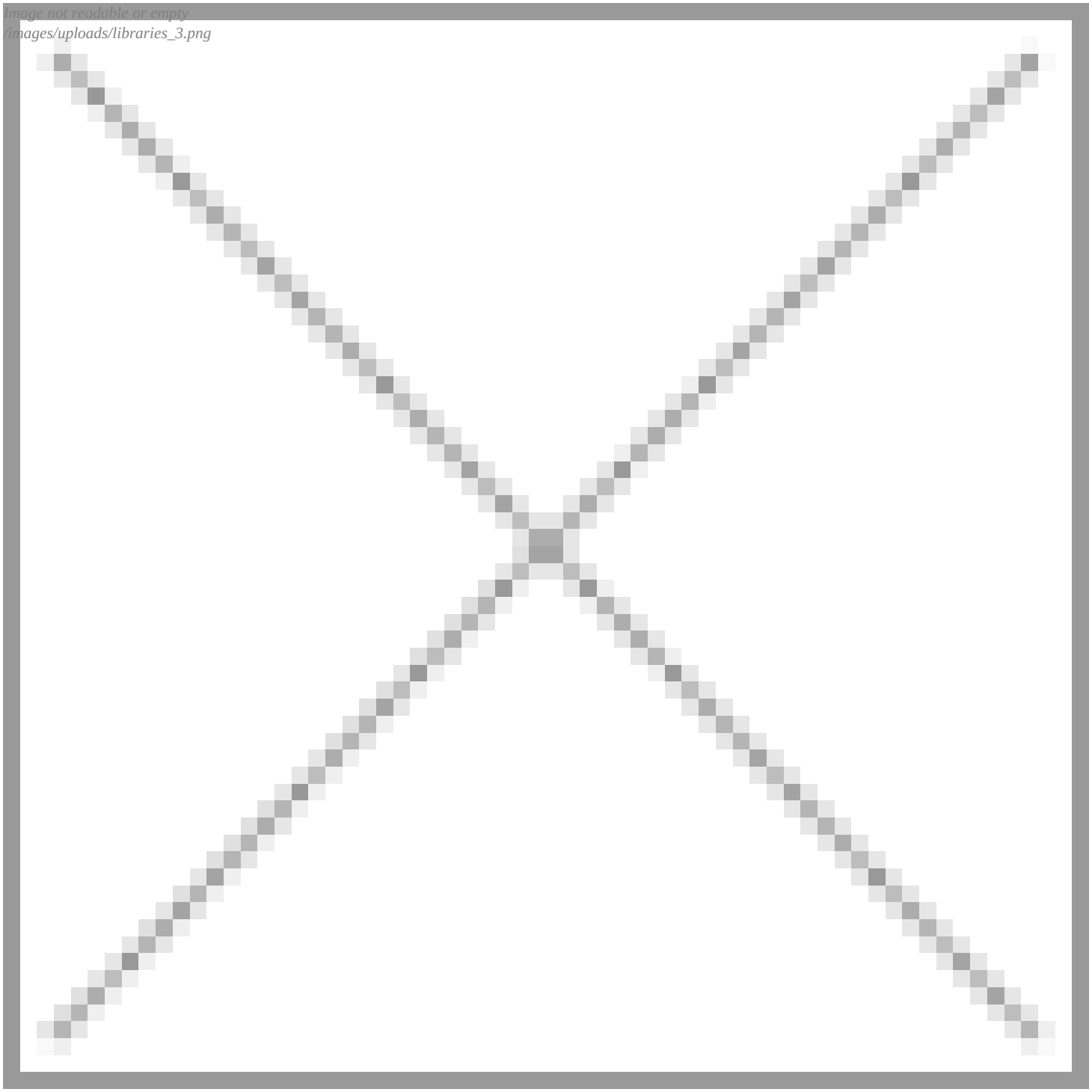
- *In six cities, at least 10 percent of libraries are open every day: San Antonio (100 percent of branches are open seven days a week), San Diego (35 percent), Philadelphia (21 percent), Dallas (14 percent), Phoenix (12 percent), and Los Angeles (11 percent).*
- *In three cities, a smaller share of branches are open seven days a week than in New York: Chicago (6 percent of branches are open seven days a week), San Jose (4 percent), and Houston (2 percent).*
- *In seven of the state's largest counties, at least 25 percent of branches are open seven days a week: Suffolk County (89 percent are open every day), Rockland County (88 percent), Nassau County (71 percent), Westchester County (63 percent), Onondaga County (38 percent), Albany County (37 percent), and Monroe County (27 percent).*
- *In two counties, no libraries are open seven days a week: Broome County and Erie County.*
- *Our analysis shows that 99 percent of New York City's branch libraries are now open at least 6 days a week, up from 67 percent two years ago.[ii]*

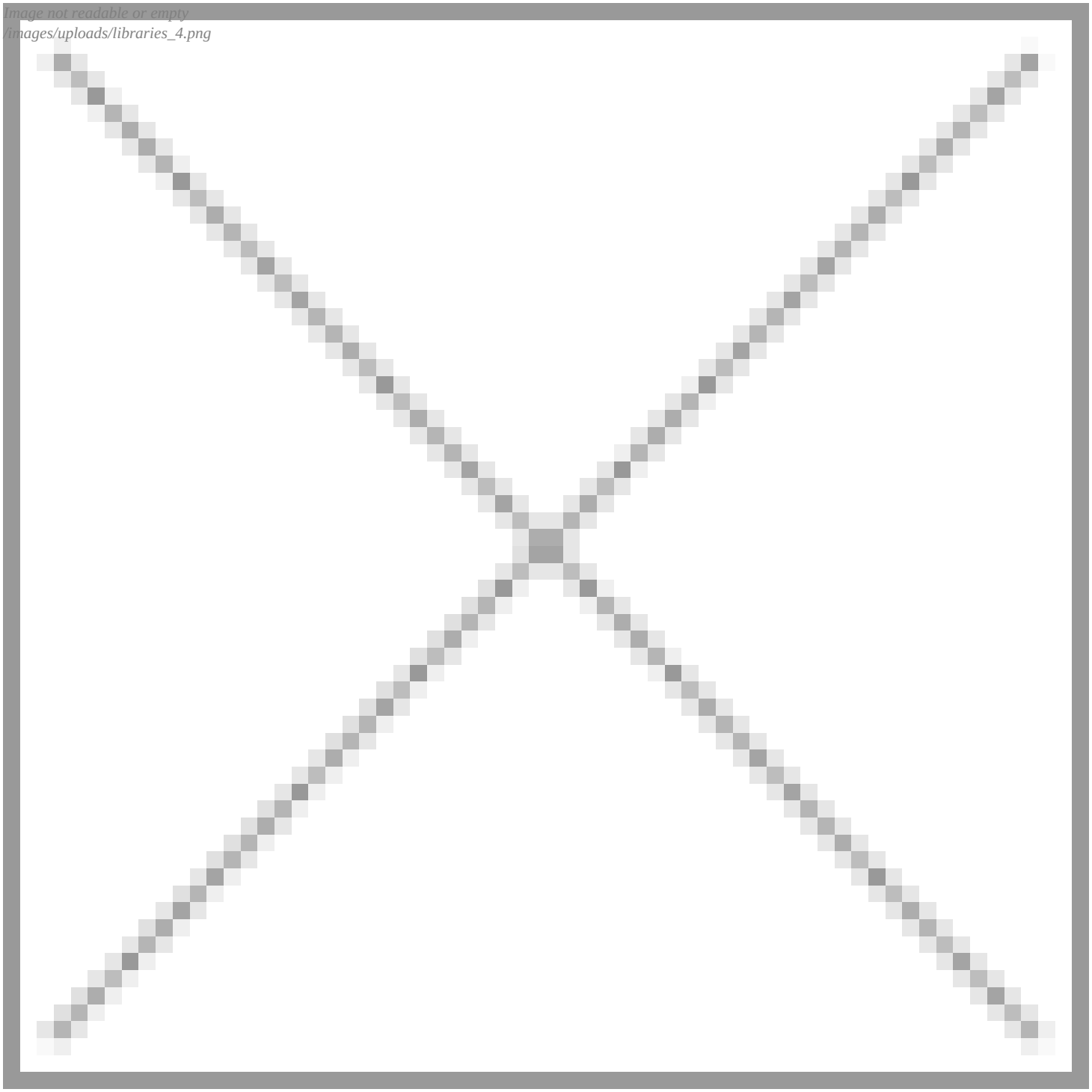
In advance of negotiations over the fiscal year 2018 budget, the City Council has proposed a $34 million increase in operating support for New York City's libraries. Mayor de Blasio should agree to this funding boost, which would extend seven-day service from 15 branches to 53 branches.

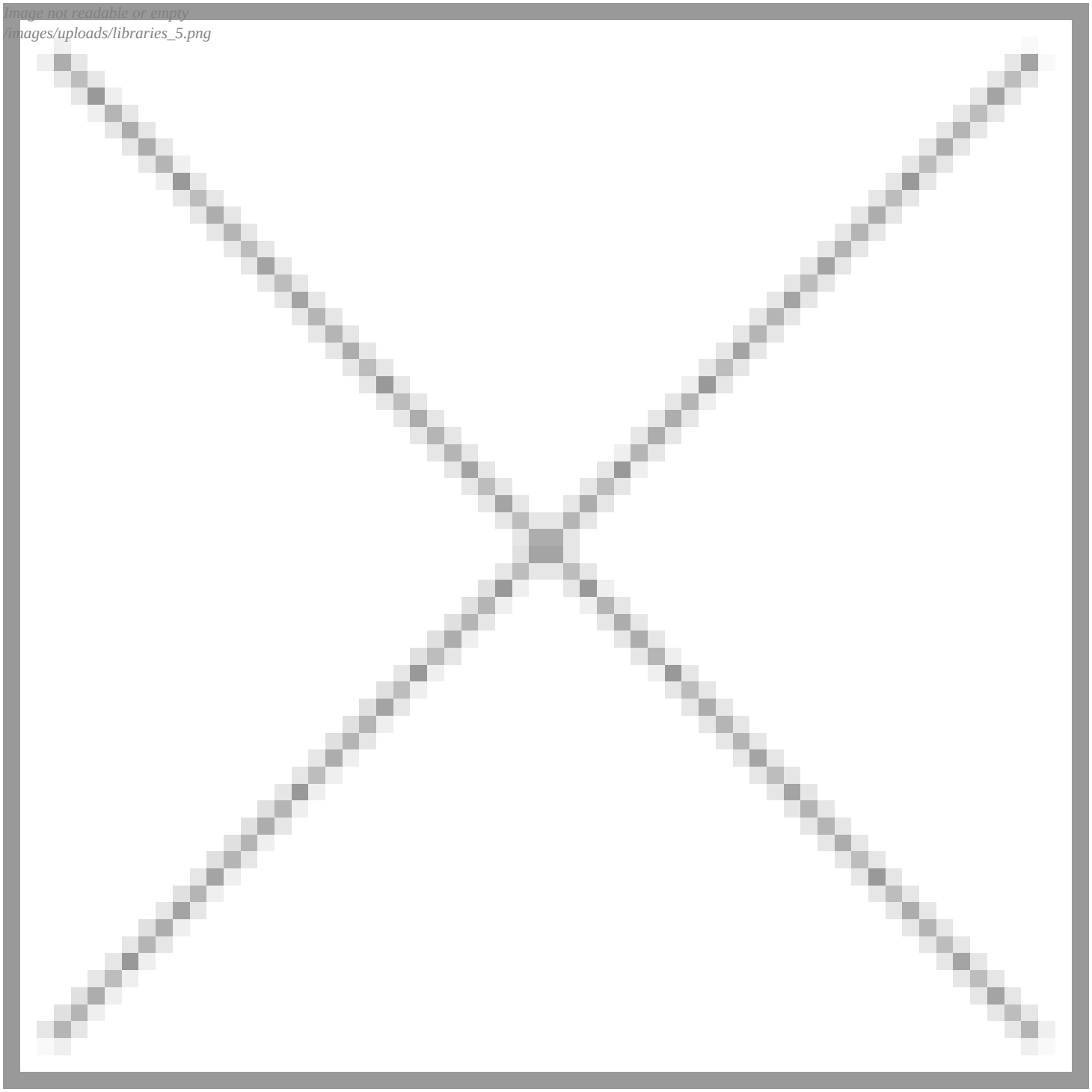
This data brief is based on an assessment of posted library hours that we conducted in April 2017.


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In a few of the counties, there is a separate library system for the county and its major city. As we did in prior years, we opted to include library hours for branches in both the county's library system and in the municipal system. For example, we included Onondaga County and the city of Syracuse together. We also included Monroe County with Rochester, Broome County with Binghamton, and Erie County with Buffalo.

[ii] To come up with the average number of hours per week that libraries are open and the percentage of libraries that are open at least six days a week, we excluded libraries that are currently closed due to renovations. We also only included full branch libraries, not library centers.

Image credit: Glen Noble

This report was made possible through generous support from the ***Charles H. Revson Foundation****.*

General operating support for the Center for an Urban Future is provided by the ***Clark Foundation*** *and the* ***Bernard F. and Alva B. Gimbel Foundation****. We are also grateful for support from* ***Fisher Brothers*** *for the Center for an Urban Future's Middle Class Jobs Project.*

Center for an Urban Future *(CUF) is an independent, nonprofit think tank that generates innovative policies to create jobs, reduce inequality and help lower income New Yorkers climb into the middle class. For 20 years, CUF has published accessible, data-driven reports on ways to grow and diversify the economy and expand opportunity that are anchored in rigorous research, not preconceived notions about outcome. Our work has been a powerful catalyst for policy change in New York City and serves as an invaluable resource for government officials, community groups, nonprofit practitioners and business leaders as they advocate for and implement policies to address some of New York's biggest challenges and opportunities.*

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