



FLORIDA PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND E-GOVERNMENT: SERVICES, ISSUES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study demonstrates that public libraries are an integral part of E-Government delivery in Florida as service providers. Moreover, for many Floridians who do not have access to computers or the Internet, the public library is the only place to engage in the democratic process and open government. Indeed, the majority of survey respondents report they do not own computers, and they use the Internet at the library because they do not have to pay for the service. State and federal E-Government information resources are the most frequently used and the majority of participants search for government forms.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to identify the E-Government needs of patrons who access government-related information and current library E-Government practices in order to provide practical guidance to public libraries in meeting the needs of local community members they serve. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What E-Government services and resources do public libraries typically provide?
2. What types of E-Government assistance and/or resources do Florida residents request at the library?
3. Why do residents seek E-Government services and resources at the public library?
4. What barriers and issues do librarians face in providing E-Government services and resources?

The findings indicate an increase in E-Government requests within public libraries that given current trends in E-Government will not decrease in the near future. Based on these developments, the study points to a number of recommendations:

- Libraries should reach a statewide consensus on E-Government service;
- Libraries within the state of Florida should form a consortium to leverage E-Government resource maintenance and exchange best practices;
- Libraries and state agencies should collaborate on the design and implementation of E-Government services and resources;
- Library staff training in E-Government should be increased; and
- State and local government should directly support libraries as providers of E-Government services and resources.

Public libraries are essential providers of E-Government services and resources. They can serve as access points to public access technologies, government information providers, gateways to government services, and technology and government services training centers.

In engaging in these roles, however, librarians need practical guidance in how best to meet the needs of the local communities they serve. There is a critical need for public libraries and government agencies to coordinate E-government services, and for state and local governments to better support public libraries. There is also a need for public libraries, the State Library & Archives of Florida, and others to continue working to leverage available library and government staff and resources in the delivery of E-Government services. A consortium of libraries and other organizations may be one approach to leverage these resources.

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INTRODUCTION

As local agency offices close, more residents head to the public library to use free access to computers and the Internet; receive computer and Internet skills training; search for government service-related information and forms; seek government program assistance; and receive assistance in accessing government websites, navigating program requirements, and completing online forms (Bertot, McClure, Wright, Jensen & Thomas, 2008). In short, the need for government agency program and service support has not diminished, but rather, state and federal government agencies have shifted the burden of support to other entities.

The Information Use Management and Policy Institute (Information Institute) at Florida State University has undertaken an initiative specifically focused on E-Government service in Florida's public libraries. The E-Government initiative, which includes a combination of research and education initiatives - aimed at assessing library needs, providing E-Government training, and making contact with government agencies - arose out of the perceived need for government to become more efficient and effective in the administration and delivery of its products and services.

The Information Institute, along with co-sponsors, i.e. the Washington office of the American Library Association and the State Library & Archives of Florida (State Library) launched the E-Government initiative with a two-day meeting in Atlanta, Georgia in December 2006. Since that meeting, the Information Institute has undertaken the following activities:

- *E-Government workshops and surveys*: Conducted five E-Government workshops (Spring 2007) in northwest Florida, northeast Florida, central Florida, southwest Florida, and southeast Florida to explore E-Government service provision by libraries. Attendees at the workshops received a survey that asked librarians to identify the most frequently provided E-Government services and issues encountered by patrons seeking E-Government assistance in local libraries.
- *Interviews with public librarians*: Conducted interviews with public librarians in the summer and fall of 2007 to explore and identify types of E-Government services public librarians provide and issues encountered by public librarians in the provision of E-Government services and resources.
- *Florida Library Association presentation*: Presented preliminary findings from the 2008 E-Government survey at the annual meeting of the Florida Library Association, and engaged in dialogue with librarians and administrators about E-Government service issues and strategies (April 2008).
- *Interviews with state agency officials*: Information Institute researchers conducted interviews with officials from agencies that engage in E-Government in the state of Florida in the fall of 2007 and spring of 2008.
- *Florida Libraries article*: Spring 2008, Information Institute researchers published a paper entitled *Community Leadership through Public Library E-Government Services*¹.

¹ Gibson, A.N., McClure, C.R., Bertot, J.C., McGilvray, J.A., & Andrade, J.C. (2008). Community leadership through public library e-government services. *Florida Libraries*, 51 (Spring), 4-7.

The paper offers practical suggestions for how public libraries can take a leadership role in their community in dealing with E-Government issues.

- *Digital Government Society of North America article*: Information Institute researchers presented a paper, entitled *Citizen Centered E-Government Services: Benefits, Costs and Research Needs* to the Digital Government Society of North America in May 2008. The paper examines user-centered approaches to E-Government services and resources and provides an overview of the results of public librarian interviews and surveys conducted by Information Institute researchers. Results of the surveys and interviews indicate that public librarians provide a range of E-Government services to their communities and patrons and encounter a host of issues through the provision of the services.
- *Pasco County E-Government Training Evaluation*: Developed surveys in the spring of 2008, in collaboration with the Pasco County Library Cooperative for the Pasco County Library Cooperative's public E-Government training sessions. The intent of the surveys is to provide insights on the success of the training program and to help improve future E-Government training sessions. The Information Institute will provide an analysis of the results fall 2008.

This initial combination of research, teaching, and public service provides the foundation for a larger, more comprehensive Information Institute initiative to coordinate E-Government library service at the statewide level.

This paper presents the results of Information Institute initiated interviews, surveys, workshops, and log analysis assessments. Findings of the research identify multiple roles for public libraries as essential providers of E-Government services and resources. Public libraries serve as access points to technology; serve as government information providers; provide gateways to government services and resources; and function as technology and government services training centers. In engaging in these roles, however, research results indicate that librarians need practical guidance in how best to meet the E-Government needs of the local communities they serve. In addition, research indicates there is also a critical need for public libraries and government agencies (i.e. federal, state, and local) to better coordinate E-government services and for federal, state, and local governments to better support public library's roles as providers of E-Government related services and resources.

Public Libraries and E-Government Background

The *E-Government Act of 2002*, which evolved from a number of previous policy instruments and initiatives (McClure, et. al., 2007) was a comprehensive approach designed to promote federal agency use of a range of technologies and the Internet to deliver federal government services and information. The most important anticipated benefits of E-Government include improved efficiency, convenience, and better accessibility of public services.

In addition to increasing effectiveness and efficiency of services, agencies increased their use of E-Government in an effort to cut operating costs (Bertot, Jaeger & McClure, 2008; Lee, Tan, & Trimi, 2005; Jaeger & Thompson, 2003). For example, figure 1 below² indicates the

² Jaacks, M.P. (2007). Budget Reduction Presentation. Retrieved from www.dcf.state.fl.us/opengov/docs/Budget_Reductions.ppt

Florida Department of Children and Families’ (DCF) cut almost ten thousand staff positions between FY 2001-02 (25,745 positions) and FY 2006-07 (13,528 positions), three thousand of which are attributable directly to the introduction of its new ACCESS Florida initiative (Jaacks, 2007).

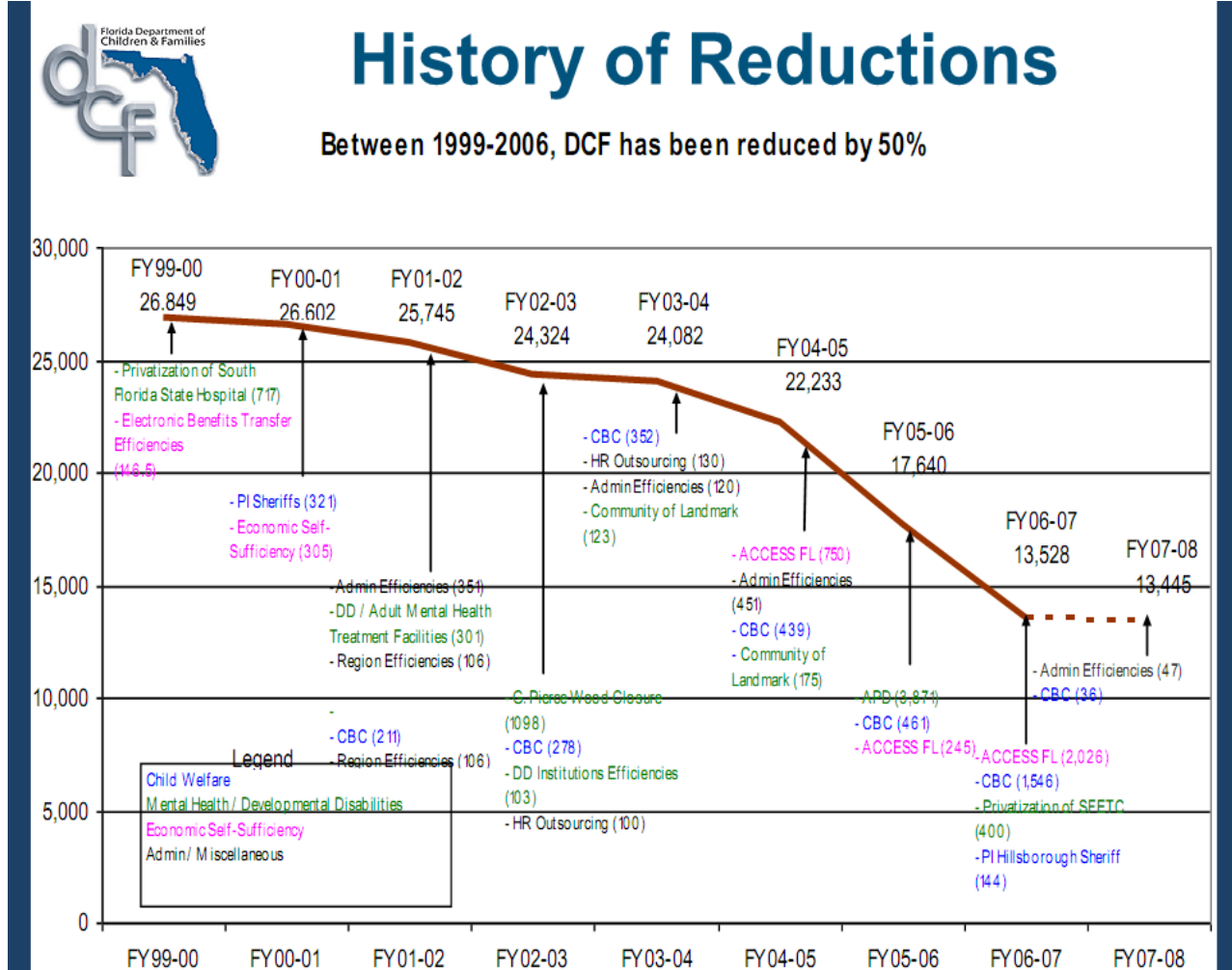


Figure 1: History of Department of Children and Families personnel reductions, 1999-2008

Results of interviews, conducted by the Information Institute in the spring of 2007 indicate that DCF now counts public libraries among its community partners, who are agencies and organizations willing to provide Internet access and service assistance to DCF applicants. A close examination of the DCF Community partners list³ reveals that, in most counties, libraries are the only partners charged with providing free Internet access to any resident who enters requesting service. Other partners are limited to specific constituencies.

³ Department of Children and Families. (2008). Department of Family and Children Services Partner List. Available July 27, 2008 at http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/ess/docs/partner_listing.pdf.

While DCF is taking active steps to encourage online-only applications, a number of other agencies have also made Internet-based information and applications the primary means of service without actively discouraging paper applications. The Department of Business and Professional Regulations has posted its licensing applications to the Internet⁴, as has the Agency for Workforce Innovation⁵, which oversees unemployment benefits and the state's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program. Increased use of these online application and service systems has an effect on libraries, as patrons without Internet access come to the library for help with these forms.

The national surveys of Public Libraries and the Internet, conducted by Bertot & McClure since 1994, provide substantial longitudinal data regarding public library involvement with and use of Internet-based services and resources⁶. Results of the surveys find that between 1994 and 2007, Internet availability in libraries grew from approximately 21% to over 99% (Bertot, et. al, 2007). Most recently, the 2008 national survey found that 74.0% of public libraries provide as-needed assistance to patrons for understanding and using E-Government services and resources (Bertot, et. al., 2008). In addition, the Information Institute also published the results of a 2006 survey of Florida librarians providing E-Government services (McClure, McGilvray, Barton & Bertot, 2007), in which 96.4% of librarians responded that their communities use the local library to local information about state or federal agencies. Results of these surveys indicate that public libraries provide substantial E-Government service and resource support, both nationally and in Florida.

Results of studies also indicate that residents in need of government services do not bear sole responsibility for co-opting libraries into E-Government service. Some agencies refer residents to public libraries to access web-based forms or applications that are not available in their offices (Bertot, Jaeger, Langa & McClure, 2006). Because they are, in many cases, the only organizations offering free Internet access in their communities (Bertot, et. al, 2007), the public library fills an instrumental role in equalizing differences in resident access to personal computers and the Internet, moving the E-Government system away from exclusion of segments of the population, and toward "design for all" (Aichholzer, 2004). In this role, many libraries have begun to evolve into "one-stop shops" that now include assistance with government service programs, access, and delivery (Bertot, et al., 2008).

This role is a substantive departure from a long-standing role of public libraries as access points to government information and forms (i.e., tax forms during tax season). For example, though librarians provided tax forms in the past, they did not serve as tax accountants who assisted patrons complete and file their taxes. Yet now, residents come to the library seeking program assistance, not simply access to information. This shift seems to occur in direct relation to government agencies cutting back in their provision of program support services due to the adoption of E-Government technologies.

⁴ Florida Department of Business & Professional Regulation. (2007). For businesses. Available 27 July 2008 at <http://www.myfloridalicense.com/dbpr/businesses.html>

⁵ State of Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation. (2008). Agency E-Government Services. Available 27 July 2008 at http://www.floridajobs.org/About%20Awi/awi_eGovernment.html

⁶ Information Use Management & Policy Institute. (2008). Public Libraries and the Internet: Reports. Available 27 July 2008 at http://www.ii.fsu.edu/plinternet_reports.cfm

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this exploratory study is to identify the E-Government needs of patrons who access E-Government-related information, and to identify current public library E-Government practices in order to provide practical guidance to public libraries in meeting the needs of local community members they serve. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What E-Government services and resources do public libraries typically provide?
2. What types of E-Government assistance and/or resources do library community members' request?
3. Why do library patrons seek E-Government services and resources at the public library?
4. What barriers and issues do librarians face in providing E-Government services and resources?

Answers to these questions serve as a means to ascertain E-Government needs from a user perspective, but also to begin understanding the impacts of E-Government on community-based support organizations such as public libraries.

Methodology

This exploratory study uses an iterative multi-method approach that includes:

- Interviews with public librarians: The interviews explore and identify the E-Government services public librarians provide and the issues encountered by public librarians in providing E-Government services and resources.
- E-Government workshops: The study team conducted five E-Government workshops in key geographic regions (panhandle/Northwest Florida, Northeast Florida, central Florida, Southwest Florida, and Southeast Florida) to explore E-Government service provision by libraries in the regions.
- E-Government workshop attendees: The survey asked librarians to identify the most frequently provided E-Government services, and to identify issues encountered by patrons seeking E-Government assistance in local libraries.
- User survey (See appendix A): The survey explored the reasons why users came to the public library for E-Government services and resources, library services requested and used to engage in E-Government services, and issues encountered while engaging in E-Government services. The survey was available in English, Spanish, and French Creole. The survey was primarily in print format, though a web-based *Survey Monkey* version of the survey was available in English.
- Librarian-maintained E-Government reference log files (Appendix B): The log files captured specific E-Government service and resource transactions provided to users in libraries.

The interviews and workshops informed the development of the log file and user surveys. User surveys and log files were pre-tested to ensure their usability and ability to capture valid and reliable data.

Sampling Strategy and Data Quality

The study team employed a combination of purposeful and cluster sampling for the study's data collection efforts. The study team identified and selected public librarians who provided E-Government services in their libraries, both face-to-face and through developed web sites that contained a range of information regarding federal, state, and local government services. The study team also conducted workshops in four geographic regions throughout the state of Florida (Central, Southeast, Southwest, and Northwest) to explore library E-Government involvement and services. Given the diversity of the state of Florida and various communities, the regional workshops provided the study team with information of E-Government services related to user needs in each of the regions. The individual interviews provided more in-depth information regarding librarian efforts to develop and offer E-Government services and resources in their libraries.

For the librarian logs, user surveys, and librarian interviews the study team developed a cluster and purposeful sampling approach to select libraries for participation based on:

- Library diversity, such as urban, rural, and suburban, and geographic spread throughout the state of Florida;
- Community diversity, such as poverty, immigrant, language, and a range of other library community factors;
- E-Government services and resources provided by the library;
- Knowledge of state, local, and federal E-Government services and resources; and
- Selected libraries that agree to participate.

In all, 74 libraries agreed to participate in the study by maintaining library logs and distributing user surveys. The research team provided surveys in multiple languages based on librarian indications of the communities the libraries serve.

The user surveys and librarian-maintained E-Government logs files were in the field for two weeks (March 18-30, 2008). Overall, the study team interviewed nine public librarians individually, conducted workshops with 145 public librarians throughout the state, received 415 librarian logs, and 210 usable user surveys (see Appendix A for a copy of the distributed survey and log file). The research team collected 46 usable librarian surveys during workshops.

The study was exploratory and purposeful, thus limiting the generalizability of the data. The five methodologies, however, provided detailed and overlapping findings regarding issues associated with providing E-Government services and resources in public libraries. By using an iterative and multi-method approach, the study team identified and triangulated perspectives on E-Government in public libraries from both the public library and user populations, thus ensuring reliable and valid data.

STUDY FINDINGS

The following is a brief summary of survey and librarian log data. Figures 2 through 6 illustrate survey data. Figures 7 and 8 illustrate librarian log data. Figures 2 and 3 (below) illustrate participants' reasons for accessing E-Government information at the library. Fifty two percent of respondents selected "I don't own a computer," approximately 42% selected "I don't have access to the internet at home or at work," and 40% selected "The internet at the library is free." The most frequent response written in for this question is "The library has better internet access than I can get at home or work".

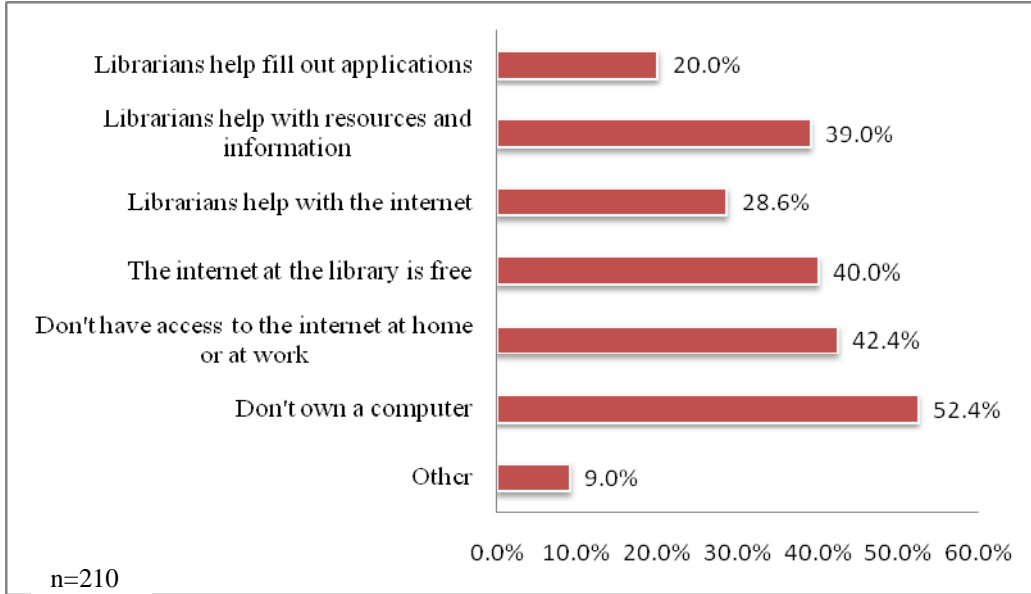


Figure 2: Reasons patrons use the library to access the Internet

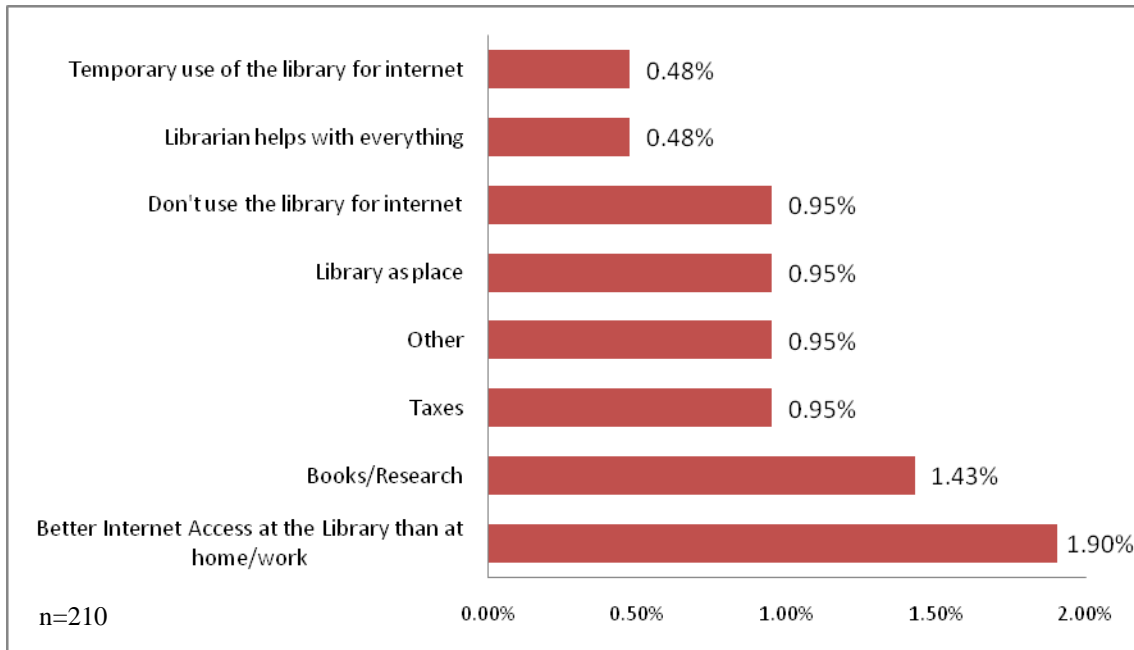


Figure 3: Reasons patrons use the library to access the Internet (Other)

Figures 4 and 5 (below) illustrate respondents' most frequent searches for E-Government information. Thirty-three percent of respondents reported they use the library to search for federal and state E-Government information, 31% reported they searched for Federal information, and 28% reported they searched for City or County Information. Twenty-one percent of respondents reported they used library computers to search for information on the DCF.

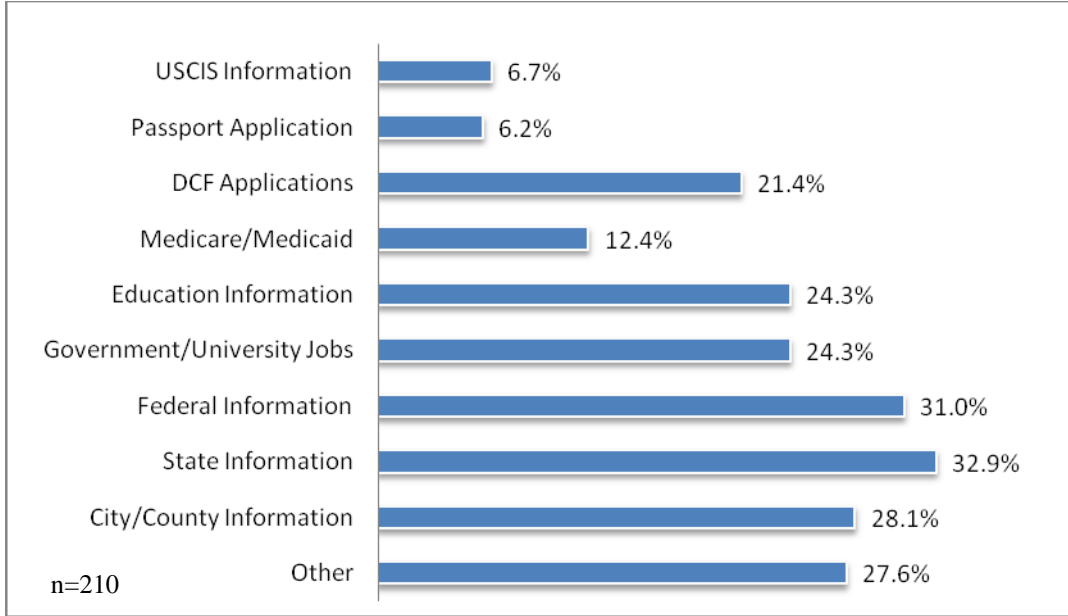


Figure 4: Patron searches by subject

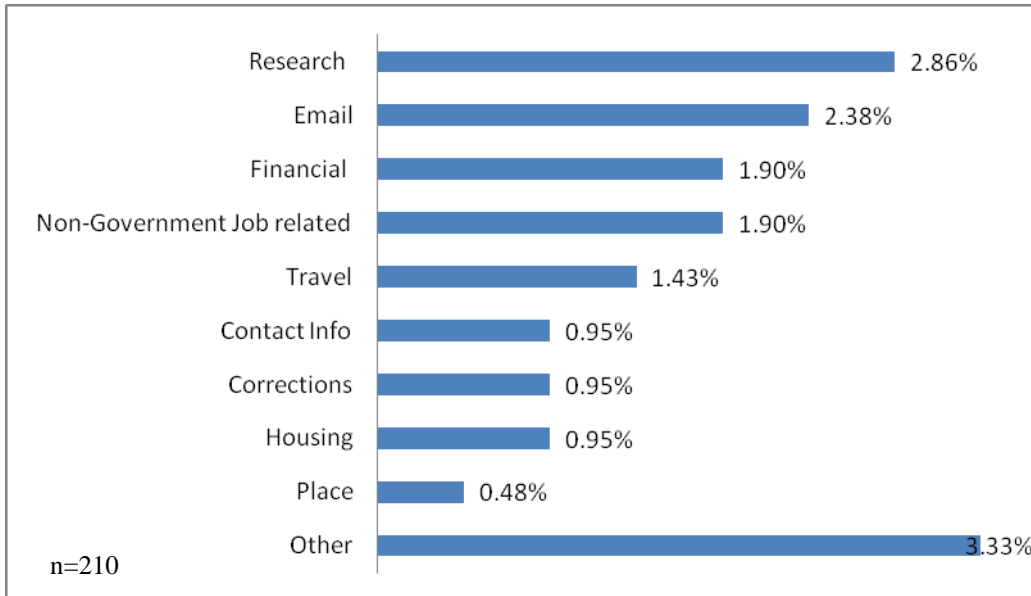


Figure 5: Patron searches by subject (Other)

Figure 6 (below) describes problems patrons encountered in searching for E-Government information at the library. The most frequently selected response for this question was “None”

(38%), followed by “I needed help with the Internet” (28%). Almost as many respondents mentioned that time limits on library computers presented a problem for them while searching for E-Government information (24%). Four percent of respondents responded they felt library staff did not have sufficient knowledge to help them complete their searches.

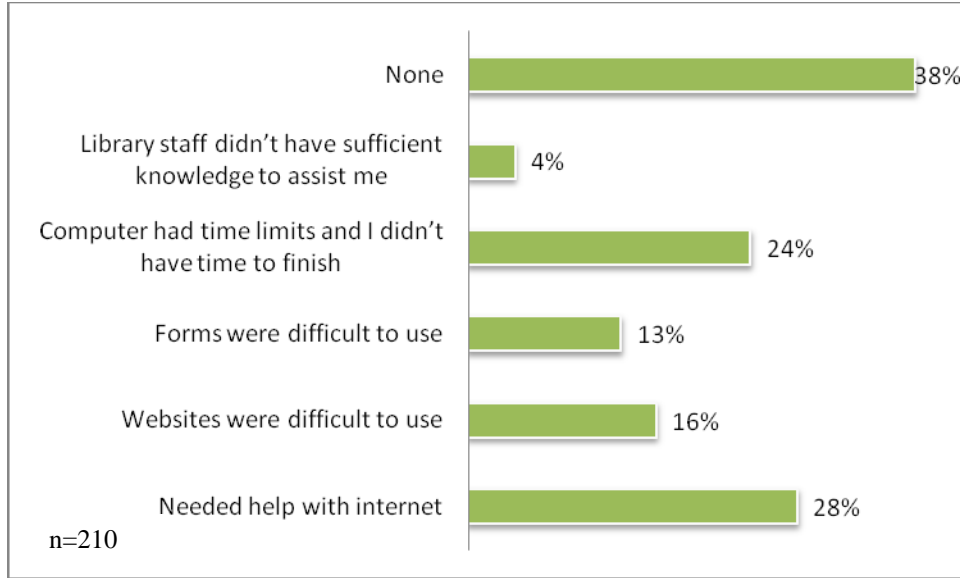


Figure 6: Patron E-Government Challenges

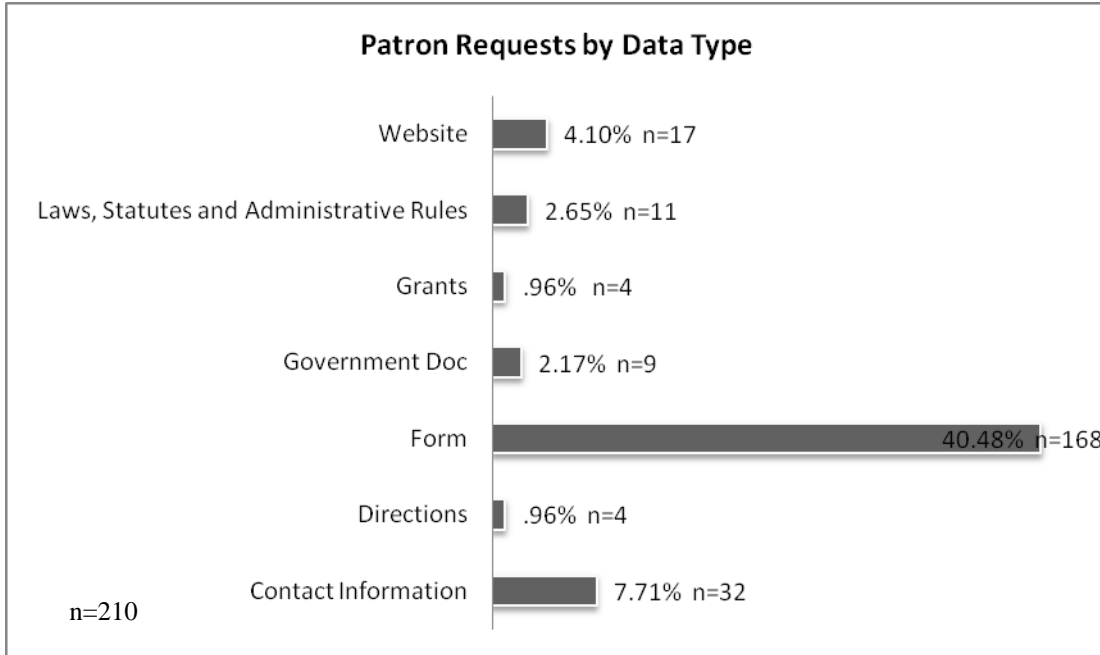


Figure 7: Librarian log: Requests by Data Type

Figure 7 (above) illustrates the frequency of requests for specific types of information by library patrons. Approximately 40% of requests related to finding or completing online

government forms and/or applications. Approximately 8% of requests were for contact information, followed by requests for assistance in finding websites (approximately 4%).

Figure 8 (below) illustrates the distribution of E-Government-related questions at the reference desk and public use terminals. Researchers developed the coding for this chart inductively from librarian reference logs. The overwhelming majority of recorded requests concerned the IRS, taxes, and upcoming stimulus payments. Approximately 39% of requests related to taxes. The next most frequent requests related to the Florida Department of Children and Families, food stamps and public assistance. Approximately 15% of logged requests were DCF related. In addition to these two agencies, which represented a large portion of the requests, the survey also identified a number of other agencies and services. Education related requests (school enrollments, voluntary pre-kindergarten, FAFSA/student loan); legal advice, forms and information; United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS); county-level property searches and ownership information; and government job searches all ranged between 3 and 6%.

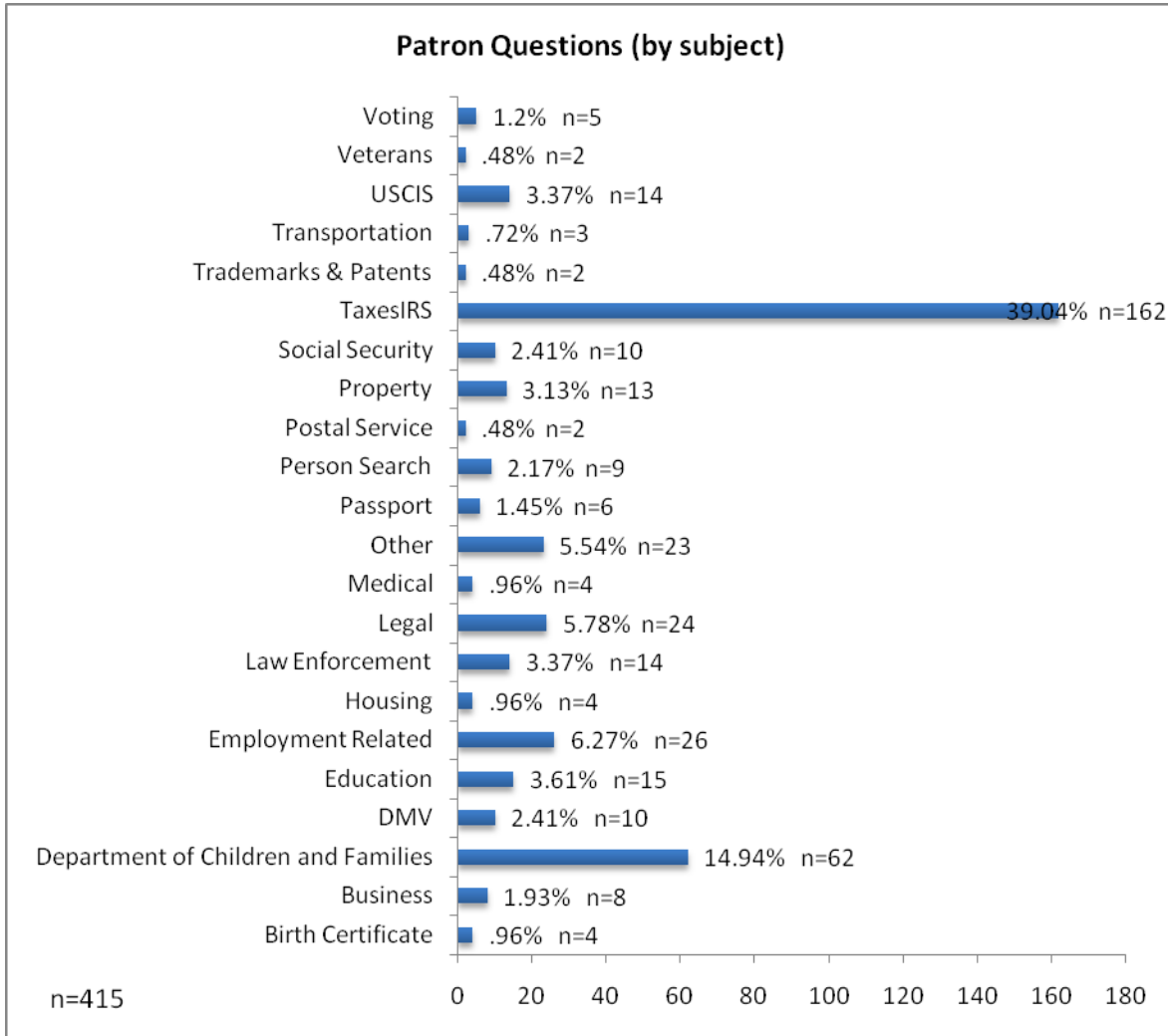


Figure 8: Librarian Log: Patron Questions by subject

KEY ISSUES

The study identified a number of key issues raised related to local, state and federal E-Government implementations. The following sections present key issues by subject.

Access and the digital divide

Study findings indicate the digital divide continues to exist, to the detriment of residents without access. In some 70% of local communities, public libraries provide the only free access to the Internet (Bertot, et. al., 2008) and thus the only link to E-Government.

In some cases, E-Government is the only option for accessing needed government services. The Florida Department of Children and Families, which deals primarily with a low-income constituency, has moved the majority of its services to an Internet-based system, closing most of its offices. As a result, applicants have begun seeking help at public libraries. In many locations in South Florida, the only way to make an appointment at the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services office is to use the web-based appointment system. The Federal Emergency Management Agency requires that residents use a telephone number or the Internet to apply for emergency assistance (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2008). E-Citizenship and E-Participation often rely on access to the Internet, making access an issue of democratic participation.

Access is only one aspect of the divide (Bertot, 2003). Computer and Internet use training, information resource selection, and web site navigation are examples of other aspects needed by residents to participate successfully in E-Government. The availability of technology in libraries leads to a number of other types of requests for E-Government assistance that agencies are unable or unwilling to provide.

Resolving life events: The evolving role of the librarian

The increased emphasis on E-Government in public libraries threatens to alter the role of the librarian from neutrally situated information provider to that of social worker (Bertot, et.al. 2006). Reference staffs help patrons to resolve problems, offer advice to patrons on which forms they need to use, and at times, assist patrons in completing forms and applications. More frequently, librarians take on the responsibility of referring patrons to agencies; and with increasing frequency librarians must deal with sensitive personal information.

In addition, the needs of residents change over the course of the year. Librarian surveys conducted in late 2007 suggest that the greatest volume of E-Government services provided occurred on behalf of the Department of Children and Families. In contrast, librarian log data collected in early 2008 suggested that most E-Government services provided occurred on behalf of the IRS. Together, the data demonstrate that E-Government related information needs change fluidly with external life events, such as tax season and agencies' application deadlines.

This evolution of librarian as information provider to caseworker has multiple and profound implications. Not only is this a substantial shift in librarian duties, but it also requires librarians to become facile with multiple agency programs. In addition, given that user life

events can cut across multiple agencies, programs, and eligible benefits, the knowledge and skills librarians need are numerous.

Skills and training

Librarians expressed concern and anxiety that they are unprepared to provide the services requested by users. While some agencies have made significant efforts to reach out to libraries and community centers that serve their target populations, many have not made any efforts to provide training to non-agency staff. As a result, libraries that embrace the role of E-Government service provider must pour significant resources into training staff, most often without assistance from federal, state, or local agencies. In short, librarians that engage in the provision of E-Government services and resources are self-taught and can often lack an essential programmatic perspective.

There is a need for increased communication and cooperation between libraries and the government agencies on state and local levels. Local agency offices are often unaware of the level of service libraries are able to offer and direct patrons to the library for services the library may not provide. Library staff also argued that state agencies often shut down local offices without consideration for the restrictions of the local library's funding, resources, or space.

Liability

As patrons ask library staff-members to assist with forms and applications and to handle sensitive personal information (i.e. social security numbers, payment information, date of birth, etc.), librarians and library administrators grow more concerned over possible liability issues. This anxiety includes civil and criminal concerns. Fear over possible lawsuits against library staff, administrators, and city/county councils. In addition, criminal consequences associated with entering false information (unknowingly) on behalf of library patrons lead some libraries to avoid E-Government altogether. A few local library administrators restrict librarians from providing assistance with E-Government forms. In some cases, library administrators and managers instruct library staff members to limit E-Government help to locating forms as requested and to provide no help in interpreting or completing applications.

Technology Management

Public libraries typically have a limited number of public access computers available for use. Eighty two and one half percent of libraries report they have insufficient public access computers and 93.4% have time limits on workstation use (Bertot, et. al., 2008). Given this, libraries have had to purchase, install, and maintain public access management software that manages user- workstation registration process, enforces time limits, and resets the computers after each session. Although time limits are often necessary to manage computer use, time limits are often in direct conflict with E-Government service requirements.

Completing E-Government applications online can often take considerable time and effort. The time needed may force librarians to either try and remove the time limit features (which is not always possible), set up E-Government workstations (thus removing one or more

workstations from the general public use and degrading overall service to the library's community), or risk the loss of a patron's E-Government application and other information. Thus, E-Government service provision can impose a substantial management and infrastructure burden on libraries.

An unfunded mandate: Resources and burden shifting

When state and federal agencies send residents to county-funded public libraries to access E-Government forms, schedule appointments, and seek information instead of providing that information in the traditional office setting, they add to an overall increase in the number of patrons requesting E-Government services. While libraries provide services at no cost to the public, they are not truly "free." The increase in patronage taxes the human and financial resources of already strained local libraries, increasing costs associated with staff time (and salary), computer equipment, and Internet bandwidth. The public ultimately pays these increased costs in the form of taxes. Although Florida's budget reductions represent an extreme case, reduced library funding is a national issue, made worse by downturns in the economy.

Agencies that choose to exchange face-to-face services for Internet based services are, in many cases, actually shifting personnel and operating costs to locally funded organizations (like libraries) that provide free public Internet access and assistance. Local agency offices are often unaware of what level of service libraries are prepared to offer and direct patrons to the library for services library staff may not be in a position to provide. State agencies often shut down local offices without consideration for the restrictions of the local library's funding, resources, or space. While some local libraries are able to absorb the costs associated with a spike in patronage, others cannot, and risk closure when local agency offices close their doors.

This burden shift amounts to an unfunded mandate from state agencies to local, city and county governments that fund local library systems. Libraries find themselves in the position of providing services they may not have the staff, expertise, equipment, or funding to deliver, or risk the ire of a patron base that provides the library's funding. Community support is sometimes the only protection a library has at its disposal.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that public libraries are an integral part of Florida's E-Government system as service providers. The majority of surveyed patrons seek federal, state and county E-Government information most frequently at the public library because they do not have Internet access at home or at work. While it is clear that patrons seek E-Government information and service from the library, it is not clear that libraries are ready to meet the challenges associated with E-Government. Librarians and library administrators have received little guidance in terms of how to deal with resource allocation, training, and other E-Government provision issues. Coordinating library E-Government services would allow Florida's public libraries to provide these services more efficiently and effectively.

The findings indicate an increase in E-Government requests that, given current trends in E-Government, will not reduce in the near future. Based on these developments, the study points to a number of recommendations:

- ***Reach a statewide consensus on E-Government service levels*** – Standardizing a number of E-Government service levels would offer much needed guidance to libraries concerned with liability and resource availability. Service levels could vary by library size, numbers of public access computers available, and a range of other considerations. The consensus-building process could also encourage dialogue between libraries and state government highlighting issues associated with burden shifting. Standardized levels of service would encourage individual libraries to decide what E-Government services they are willing to provide, the level of support, and the level of resource expenditure.
- ***Increase collaboration between libraries by forming a statewide consortium*** - Create a collaborative, statewide, resource-sharing initiative between libraries to reduce the burden individual branches suffer in seeking and maintaining silos of information on state and federal agencies. A number of library systems have already begun developing extensive local E-Government resources for patron use. Organizing these disparate projects into a single, cohesive consortium prevents duplication of efforts and maximizes limited resources. Such a consortium would take a leadership stance in developing practical and shared strategies for managing, accessing, using, and disseminating Florida E-Government resource services. This approach will allow public librarians in the state to better provide E-Government services and do so with less total overall cost.
- ***Foster collaboration between library and state agencies*** - Libraries should collaborate with state agencies on the design and implementation of E-Government services and resources. The more libraries are involved in the deployment of E-Government services, the more informed librarians will be regarding agency programs and services. This also may serve to foster closer ties between libraries and selected agencies and lead to better support for librarians needing assistance with specific aspects of programs, applications, and websites.
- ***Increase E-Government related library staff training*** – Increased public library staff E-Government training would raise the level of service, reduce staff anxiety, and save time and effort in providing E-Government services. In addition to benefiting libraries and library staff, it is in the interest of local and state agencies to collaborate with libraries in providing training, information, and assistance on a consistent basis. Libraries provide a reliable point of contact with target populations; and with state agencies supporting libraries efforts, libraries will be better able to serve the needs of the libraries and agencies mutual constituencies.
- ***Encourage national, state, and local governments to directly support public libraries' E-Government efforts*** – Increasing the support public libraries receive from national, state, and local agencies with regard to E-Government service provision will improve the level of service received by Florida residents, facilitate libraries' ability to provide E-Government services, and allow government agencies to directly support libraries' E-Government efforts. One possibility of direct support from state and local governments to public libraries is to implement an agency charge-back mechanism, similar to efforts in which government agencies routinely engage through outsourced services – for example,

social services routinely contract with private case workers on a per-case basis. Based on estimation of the cost of assisting a user to complete a particular agency's form, a library can bill agencies on a per-transaction basis for the services they provide.

The connection between libraries, state and local agencies falls at the crux between open government, access to government services and resources, and the digital divide. Investing in library E-Government training, library technology, and consortium building is vital to maintaining equal access to government services and information, particularly E-Government services.

As governments and agencies reduce costs and staff associated with service provision through technology, it is essential to realize that residents still need and seek assistance from individuals and community-based organizations. The combination of public access technology and information professionals who know how to seek and find government information that the public library provides makes the public library an institution of first choice by residents.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH/NEXT STEPS

Additional research is necessary to monitor E-Government planning, development, and adoption in Florida public libraries. Moreover, there is a need to continue collecting data regarding the demands for E-Government services in public libraries and to determine the best methods by which to improve E-Government service provision in public libraries. To create efficiencies, reduce duplication, and better provide informed and coordinated E-Government services within the public library community, the Information Institute would propose to develop a statewide E-Government consortium within the state of Florida.

Immediate next steps to building such a consortium include identifying the goals, objectives, and intended outcomes of such a consortium; developing support for a consortium within the Florida public (and other) library and E-Government communities; and establishing funding sources. Interviews and discussions with public librarians, administrators, policy makers, and other key stakeholders would help researchers and staffs gauge interest from potential partners, as well as a better understanding of the resource needs and approaches to developing and implementing such a consortium. In short, consortia of 7-15 libraries could significantly leverage the identification, organization, management, dissemination, and access of E-Government information resources, services, and expertise and make these resources available statewide.

The Information Institute plans to continue gathering data related to the possible establishment of a consortium through additional interviews with library staff and administrators, surveys, log file collection, and other efforts. The ultimate goal of future research is to help improve E-Government in Florida's libraries, both from a service delivery and librarian level of effort perspective. The public library response to E-Government service demands cannot continue on a library-by-library basis. Continued assessments of E-Government needs within libraries are necessary to ensure that public libraries engage in the most cost effective, efficient, effective, and informed E-Government service delivery approaches.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT



The Information Institute at Florida State University is conducting this survey to gain a better understanding of library users' E-Government needs. Your answers to survey questions will remain confidential to the full extent allowed by law.

I consent to participate in this study, and understand that the results of this research study will be published, but my name and/or contact information will not be used in any form.

You can also complete the survey on the Web at <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/e-govsurvey>

1. I use the public library to access the Internet because

(mark all that apply):

- I do not own a computer
- I do not have Internet access at home/work
- Access to computers and the Internet is free
- The librarians help me use the computers/Internet
- The librarians help me find information and resources that I need
- The librarians help me understand and complete online applications
- Other (please describe):

2. During my visit to the library, I searched for the following

(mark all that apply):

- City/county information (e.g., permit/tax information)
- State government information (e.g., voter registration, driver's license)
- Federal information (e.g., tax forms/information)
- City/County/State/University jobs
- Education information (e.g., GED/FAFSA, college courses)
- Medicare/Medicaid forms
- Department of Children and Families (DCF) Access Florida application
- Passport application
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) information
- Other (please describe):

3. Please identify the challenges you encountered while seeking government information or using government web sites

(mark all that apply):

- I needed help using the computer/Internet
- The websites were difficult to use
- The online applications/forms were difficult to use

- The library computers have time limits and I didn't have enough time to finish
- The library staff did not have sufficient knowledge to assist me with government information
- Other (please describe):

4. Please give examples of how your library helped you find government information and use government services on the Internet:

5. Gender (circle one): Male Female

6. Home Zip Code: _____

7. Age Group (circle one):

18-21	40-44	65-69
22-25	45-49	70-74
26-29	50-54	75-79
30-34	55-59	80-84
35-39	60-64	85+

8. Household Income (circle one):

Less than \$9,999	\$50,000 - \$74,999
\$10,000 - \$14,999	\$75,000 - \$99,999
\$15,000 - \$24,999	\$100,000 - \$149,999
\$25,000 - \$34,999	\$150,000 - \$199,999
\$35,000 - \$49,999	\$200,000 and above

Thank you for your participation

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. John Bertot at jbortot@fsu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Office of the Vice President for Research at (850) 644-8633. Additional information on human subjects can be found at the Office of Research Human Subjects Committee home page located at <http://www.research.fsu.edu/humansubjects/index.html>.

