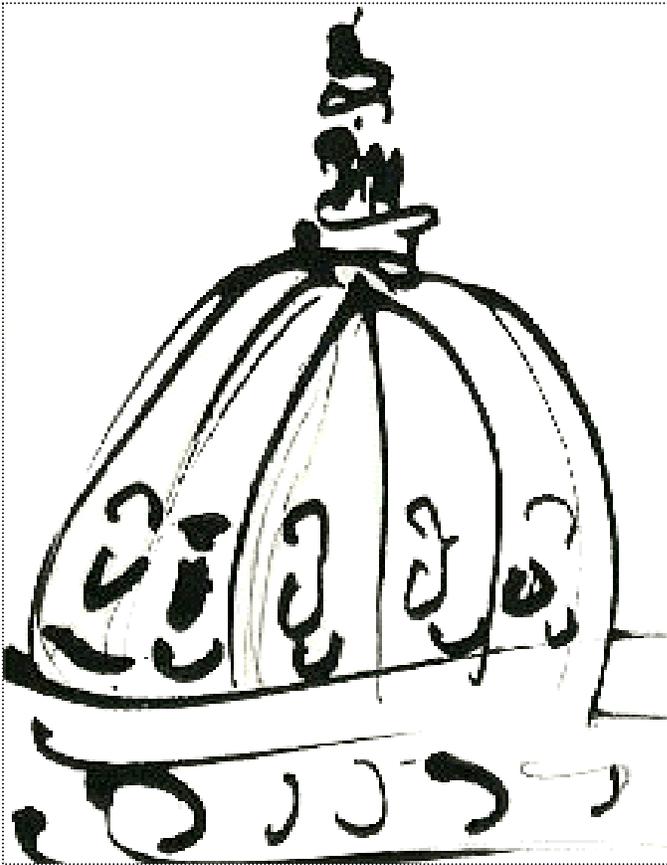




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Public Libraries and the Internet 2006: Study Results and Findings

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V. DATA ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

Looking across all the data collection efforts, the below are the key findings of the study

Quantitative Data

Major findings from the quantitative data include:

1. In 2006, 98.9% of public library branches are connected to the Internet. Considering the margin of error, virtually every public library outlet in the United States has access to the Internet.
2. With 98.4% of public library outlets offering public Internet access, virtually all public library outlets in the United States not only have Internet access, but also allow public use of this access.
3. 100% of high poverty libraries are connected to the Internet and offer public Internet access.
4. Most library outlets now have either 769kbps-1.5mbps (34.4%) or greater than 1.5mbps (28.9%). In both of these levels of connection speed, there has been a significant increase from 2004, with the categories having been at 27.4% and 20.3%, respectively.
5. The average number of hours open per public library branch is 44.8. This number has increased slightly since 2004.
6. The number of public library outlets offering wireless access has roughly doubled from 17.9% to 36.7% in the two years from 2004 to 2006. Furthermore, 23.1% of outlets that do not currently have it plan to add wireless access in the next year. If libraries follow through with their plans to add wireless access, 61.0% of public library outlets in the U.S. will have it within a year.
7. The overall average number of public access Internet workstations in each public library branch is 10.7.
8. One-quarter of public library outlets have 3 or fewer workstations, two-quarters of public library outlets have 6 or fewer workstations, and three-quarters of public library outlets have 12 or fewer workstations.
9. In the next two years, 16.6% of outlets are planning to add more workstations, while a further 28.6% of outlets are considering doing so.
10. In the next two years, 72.8% of outlets are planning to replace some workstations. Of these libraries, 35.3% have plans to replace a definite number of workstations, with an average replacement of 7.2 workstations.
11. Space limitations (79.9%) and cost factors (72.6%) were by far the most common factors that influence decisions to add or upgrade public access Internet workstations.
12. In the majority of outlets (53.5%), the connection speed is adequate to meet patron needs at all times, while the connection speed is sufficient to meet patron needs some of the time in a further 29.4% of outlets. In 16.1% of outlets, the connection speed is inadequate to meet patron needs at all times.
13. The total operating budget of 45.1% of public library systems has increased since last year and stayed the same for 36.6% of systems, while decreasing for 6.8%.
14. The Internet-related technology budget of 18.6% of public library systems has increased since last year and stayed the same for 64.2% of systems, while decreasing for 5.0%.

15. Only 4.4% of public library systems receive E-rate discounts for internal connection costs, 22.4% receive E-rate discounts for Internet connectivity, and 39.6% receive E-rate discounts for telecommunications services.
16. For the majority of libraries that do not receive E-rate discounts, the most common reasons are the application process is too complicated (35.3%) and the discount is too low to invest the time in the application process (31.7%).
17. The most frequently offered public access Internet services by public library systems are licensed databases (82.8%), homework content (60.9%), digital reference or virtual reference services (55.1%), and e-books (37.9%).
18. The largest impacts of the public access Internet services offered by public library systems are providing education resources for K-12 students (63.6%), services for job seekers (46.1%), computer and Internet training skills (38.0%), and access to and assistance with local, state, and federal government electronic services (21.4%).
19. The types of information technology training offered by public library systems for patrons include providing information literacy skills (51.6%), providing general technology skills (42.7%), helping students with school assignment and work (41.9%), and offering technology-training opportunities to those who would not otherwise have any (41.2%).

The overall findings demonstrate that public library branches generally continue to expand the public access computing and Internet services that they make available to patrons. Virtually all public library branches are connected to and offer public access to the Internet. Connection speeds in library branches also continue to increase significantly.

While some library branches are now encountering physical or financial limitations on how much access they can provide, demand for access from patrons remains enormous. The addition and/or replacement of older workstations is a high priority at many library branches. Of particular interest is the fact that many libraries are using wireless access as a means to increase access, as wireless access overcomes space limitations within the library building.

Qualitative Data

The open-ended survey question was: “In the space below, **please identify the single most important impact on the community** as a result of the library branch’s public access to the Internet.” All responding branches had the opportunity to answer the question, and respondents were able to write as long a response as they desired to the question. A total of 3,887 libraries answered the qualitative question. Answers ranged from a length of fewer than five words to more than 100 words.

The five most frequently cited impacts in the responses were:

1. A total of 71.7% of responses discussed issues of access for patrons who would not otherwise have access.
2. Many libraries (23.4%) also focused on educational purposes. Internet access was most often tied to support for local K-12 students. In some communities, the library provides Internet access that the schools lack entirely or have insufficient amounts of.

3. The responses of 19.4% of libraries related to the role of the Internet in supporting the place of the library in the community—bringing people into the library who would not otherwise be there and encouraging people to spend more time in the library.
4. Commerce-related activities, such as support for local businesses, plays a number of different important roles for library patrons, leading 15.5% of libraries to rate it as a primary impact of Internet access.
5. Communication was considered an important impact by 15.5% of public libraries and were viewed as particularly important for people who otherwise might not have access to them.

Site visits

As noted above, the 2006 study included site visits to public libraries in five states to better describe those libraries that are successfully networked and successfully use information technology in their libraries. The report identifies specific factors that tend to be present in these libraries, discusses a number of issues related to being successfully networked public libraries, and offers a discussion related to how public libraries might become successfully networked in the future.

Quality of survey data

Figure 1 (below) shows the response rate distribution of the survey. As the figure shows, the overall distribution of survey is representative of the population.

Figure 1: Public Library Outlets by Metropolitan Status and Poverty.

	Poverty Level						Overall	
	Low (Less than 20%)		Medium (20%-40%)		High (More than 40%)			
	Responding Facilities As a Proportion of All Respondents	Responding Facilities As a Proportion of National Population	Responding Facilities As a Proportion of All Respondents	Responding Facilities As a Proportion of National Population	Responding Facilities As a Proportion of All Respondents	Responding Facilities As a Proportion of National Population	Responding Facilities As a Proportion of All Respondents	Responding Facilities As a Proportion of National Population
Metropolitan Status								
Urban	7.8% (378 of 4,818)	10.0% (1,650 of 16,457)	4.9% (234 of 4,818)	6.6% (1,092 of 16,457)	0.6% (31 of 4,818)	0.9% (148 of 16,457)	13.3% (643 of 4,818)	17.6% (2,890 of 16,457)
Suburban	29.8% (1,434 of 4,818)	30.2% (4,967 of 16,457)	1.5% (71 of 4,818)	2.1% (342 of 16,457)	0.4% (2 of 4,818)	0.4% (7 of 16,457)	31.3% (1,507 of 4,818)	32.3% (5,316 of 16,457)
Rural	48.2% (2,320 of 4,818)	43.6% (7,182 of 16,457)	4.9% (234 of 4,818)	6.3% (1,040 of 16,457)	0.2% (9 of 4,818)	0.2% (29 of 16,457)	55.4% (2,668 of 4,818)	50.1% (8,251 of 16,457)
Overall	85.8% (4,132 of 4,818)	83.8% (13,799 of 16,457)	13.4% (644 of 4,818)	15.0% (2,474 of 16,457)	0.9% (42 of 4,818)	1.1% (184 of 16,457)	100.0% (4,818 of 4,818)	100.0% (16,457 of 16,457)

Based on geocoding of 16,457 outlets.
Overall Response Rate = 69.0%

Source: Bertot, J. C., McClure, C. R., Jaeger, P. T., & Ryan, J. (2006). *Public Libraries and the Internet 2006: Study Results and Findings*. Tallahassee, FL: Information Use Management and Policy Institute, Florida State University. Available: <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/plinternet/>