



DESCRIBING INDIANA PUBLIC LIBRARY E-GOVERNMENT SERVICES, COSTS, AND BENEFITS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND KEY FINDINGS

Importance of the Study

At a time when public library e-government service provisions continue to expand, it is critical for state and public libraries to assess fully their role as e-government service providers in order to manage current needs and allocate financial and other resources for future development. While there is widespread realization that the public library community is expending considerable resources in order to meet demands for increased e-government services, there is limited information available on the estimated costs, broadband needs, obstacles, and the resulting benefits of this service role. Additionally, there is little guidance available for developing future opportunities including recommendations and next steps for more successful e-government service provision.

Goals and Objectives

This 2011-2012 study provides preliminary findings that will assist the [Indiana State Library](#) and others in (1) identifying the range of costs public libraries incur in their provision of e-government services; (2) describing the benefits that result for Indiana residents, libraries, and government agencies; (3) evaluating access to high-speed broadband in libraries; (4) assessing the usability of the [IN.gov](#) web portal for e-government services; and (5) providing recommendations for how public libraries in Indiana can continue to improve their e-government service provision.

Data Collection Activities

The study team employed a multi-method research design to collect data for this project. These methods included:

- Web-based survey,
- Activity log case studies,
- Interviews with state agency representatives,
- Focus groups with library staff,
- Phone interviews with library directors, and
- A usability analysis of IN.gov.

The use of multiple methods was designed to ensure reliable data and a thorough representation of the diversity of Indiana public libraries. While not included in the original tasking, phone interviews and the usability analysis of the IN.gov web portal were included to strengthen the project's findings.

Key Findings

The study finds that the situational nature of e-government service provisions varies library by library across the state and is variable in estimates of the frequency of e-government service transactions among different staff members in the same library system. However, study participants agree that there is a need for additional training for both library staff and patrons about the range of issues involved with provision of e-government services and resources, including access, legality, security, and general computer literacy.

The study also finds that both participating libraries and participating state agency representatives recognize that there are benefits from public library e-government service provision, such as free Internet access for patrons, increased visibility for libraries, and reduced staff and printing costs for agencies. Both libraries and state agencies would be willing to communicate more in order to improve the accessibility, usability, and quality of e-government services offered in Indiana, but both are uncomfortable initiating the process to build stronger partnerships.

Finally, many libraries fail to recognize that insufficient broadband connectivity is a barrier to providing adequate e-government services and are unaware of existing discrepancies and connectivity issues identified through this research. Despite evidence that a large percentage of libraries are not experiencing the speeds their ISPs advertise at the workstation level, very few libraries identified broadband connectivity as an obstacle to providing good e-government service. Poor connectivity may be causing these libraries to offer subprime services for e-government activities and daily programming due to inadequate and underperforming broadband connections.

Key Recommendations and Next Steps

The findings of this study demonstrate that there are several areas where Indiana's public library e-government service provision could be improved. These include addressing broadband connectivity issues, providing additional training to library staff, and building stronger relationships with state agencies for assistance with state-level e-government services.

While addressing broadband connectivity issues would require additional research and expanded broadband capacity planning, training needs could be addressed immediately through steps such as developing statewide training programs related to the provision of e-government services for selected state agencies, addressing communication issues between government agencies and public libraries by holding a statewide conference, and utilizing these relationships to develop agency-specific training modules for libraries on best practices for state-level e-

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government services. Additionally, the Indiana State Library can begin improving relationships with state agencies by establishing a set channel through which agencies can communicate with libraries, developing an outreach campaign to inform the public about e-government services offered at public libraries, and even potentially developing an e-government service portal that includes resources, direct links, and contact information for relevant agencies.

Increased Applicability

While this study was exploratory, it presents an opportunity for Indiana to serve as a national model and leader in the provision of e-government services. A significant amount of work has been completed to better understand Indiana public library e-government service provision, but this study only represents a starting point for future research, collaboration, and the continuation of statewide e-government research and activities. Although the results may not be generalizable beyond Indiana, the methods, findings, and recommendations have greater applicability for other state library agencies, other state agencies, researchers, and, most importantly, the results present an opportunity for Indiana to improve public library e-government service provision.

Final Report

The [final report](#) issued by the Information Institute provides detailed information about the study and its findings and may be obtained from the Information Institute's website.

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