Libraries respond to COVID-19

Connecting communities during a critical time and ready to aid in economic recovery

Libraries continue to deliver essential services in challenging times

The Public Library Association surveyed libraries about their responses to COVID-19, including connecting people to critical broadband services:

- 93% of public libraries provide (or plan to provide) free Wi-Fi access on their grounds even when their buildings are closed to the public
- 44% of public libraries have moved routers outdoors to improve public access
- 23% of libraries surveyed also provide Wi-Fi hotspots for patrons to check out and use at home

Almost all libraries have limited services available but they continue to provide critical access to the internet during this pandemic.

Libraries will be integral to recovery

Libraries are essential partners in economic recovery, workforce and small business development, student success, and digital inclusion. Demand for library services increases during economic downturns. During the COVID-19 recovery, libraries anticipate demand for computers and internet access, helping students make up for lost ground, and application support for government services and employment.
America's libraries in action
Libraries across the country see growing demand for hotspots and other devices even as communities cautiously re-open. As learning, work, and all aspects of daily life pivot to virtual, libraries stand ready to provide internet access in innovative ways.

Kansas' Topeka and Shawnee Public Library turned two bookmobiles into Wi-Fi hotspots, parking them in areas where residents lack internet access at home.

In Kentucky, a woman with a serious medical condition was able to check out a laptop and hotspot from the McCracken County Public Library to learn more about her health and consult doctors online.

50% of surveyed Utah libraries said they would provide hotspots if they had more funding. 35% identified connectivity as one of their patrons' most pressing needs.

Library systems from Mississippi to Maine have made maps of available Wi-Fi library parking lots.

35% of Malvern-Hot Spring County, Arkansas is without any internet access and relies on Wi-Fi and hotspots from the library to keep them connected.

A public school teacher in rural Pennsylvania used a local library hotspot to communicate with her students to conduct online classes.

The Burnsville Public Library in West Virginia has seen a growing waitlist for hotspots during the pandemic as options for home internet service are far and few between.

The Main Library in South Peoria, Arizona is located in a socio-economically challenged area. Patrons check out hotspots to use at home for homework and job searching.

For more information, contact ALA’s Public Policy and Advocacy Office at alawash@alawash.org, or visit ala.org/advocacy.

Published July 2020