



AMERICA'S LIBRARIES: POWERING BROADBAND ADOPTION, ACCESS, AND USE

From getting an education and securing employment to filing taxes and staying in touch with family, broadband access and use are increasingly essential to every aspect of our lives. Yet 33 million U.S. households do not use the internet at home, and nearly twice that number have low levels of digital readiness. Low-income families, rural residents, African Americans, Latinos, and people with disabilities are disproportionately disenfranchised by digital opportunity gaps. The leading reasons for these gaps are lack of awareness of the benefits of broadband, affordability, and lack of digital literacy. America's libraries—120,000

strong—are essential to realizing the vision of universal broadband adoption, access and ability to use.

Libraries are taking actions that include (1) spurring home adoption by increasing awareness of and confidence in using online resources and services, (2) providing internet access for those who lack home broadband, and (3) supporting a lifetime of learning new applications and devices. Decision makers at the White House, the Federal Communications Commission, the National Telecommunications & Information Administration, the ▶

U.S. Congress, and other public and private entities should look to libraries to make broadband work for everyone in this nation.

Promoting widespread broadband adoption

Internet service providers bring megabits to the home, while libraries boost skills and provide broad-ranging services. Library professionals provide digital literacy training that makes the internet more relevant. Nearly 90% of libraries offer digital literacy training, and a significant majority support training related to using new technology devices (62%), safe online practices (57%), and social media use (56%).

Libraries also help to make the case for broadband adoption. Through myriad programs and outreach, libraries increase awareness of the benefits and advantages afforded by new technology. Also, the American Library Association (ALA) and libraries are advocates for efforts like the recent Lifeline modernization to apply subsidies to broadband costs for low-income Americans. As with literacy, libraries seek universal access to broadband as essential to access to knowledge and engagement in society.

Leveraging high-speed broadband

From videoconferencing to hackathons to 3D printers, today's libraries empower people to create, collaborate and learn new digital skills. People also use libraries to access vital services online—do schoolwork, file their taxes, apply for jobs, research health concerns, and explore our world. Many of these services or information sources are no longer offered in print. Affordable high-speed broadband is essential to provide modern library services, and yet is unevenly available.

Gigabit connectivity has been a game changer for Ohio's Cuyahoga County Public

“What’s so exciting about the GigLab project is that its impact isn’t limited to one classroom, one school, or even one organization—everyone is invited into this space to use this incredible technology and to access this amazingly fast connection,” said Mozilla Community Catalyst, Lindsey Frost Cleary.



Library (CCPL). Before its upgrade, internet usage at multiple branches was so high that CCPL had to target ideal times for programs to reduce public bandwidth access during high usage. Now, most of CCPL's 500+ public access computers are in continual use, and the library offers services that include a community recording studio and innovation centers for entrepreneurs.

In Tennessee, gigabit broadband has made it possible for the Chattanooga Public Library, in collaboration with city government, to create an independent open data platform to enable citizens, developers, non-profit organizations and researchers to make use of local data. Mayor Andy Berke sees this open data as a way to spur civic innovation and economic growth. The collaboration is one among many applications in development through the library's GigLab, in partnership with the Mozilla Foundation, the National Science Foundation and others.

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Expanding Wi-Fi access

Libraries across the country make use of Wi-Fi in diverse ways. The Poultney (Vt.) Public Library expanded its popular Wi-Fi service into an internet zone for the downtown district, providing access regardless of library hours and space limitations, and helping to showcase local businesses and organizations. Across the country at the Young (Az.) Public Library, Forest Service fire watchers in the community of 700 bring their laptops to the library to monitor and report incidents.

Wi-Fi exponentially increases the library's capacity to serve the public beyond its wired desktops—powering mobile devices inside the library and on the road with mobile training labs and pop-up library programs. And libraries from suburban Michigan communities to Philadelphia report that Wi-Fi usage doubled in only two years' time. In libraries, as in society at large, we see major continued growth in Wi-Fi opportunities and needs.

Getting up to speed

Unfortunately too many libraries still fall short of Federal Communications Commission (FCC) broadband goals

ABOUT AMERICA'S LIBRARIES



The 120,000 libraries across the United States are a powerful force in addressing public policy priorities. Libraries advance Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Engagement for Everyone, Everywhere—The E's of Libraries®.

Libraries serve America's cities, towns, counties, and states; on school and college campuses; on military bases; in hospitals, government agencies, corporations, and other institutions. Library professionals provide diverse programs, services and resources tailored to community needs.

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with more than 57,000 members. The ALA Annual Conference, held in June, typically attracts over 20,000 participants. ALA maintains a Washington Office to engage federal and national decision makers and influencers.

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