

# E-Government and Public Libraries

WSRI – Workshop on E-Government  
and the Web

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# Public Libraries and the Internet Studies (1994-2006)

[http://www.ii.fsu.edu/projectFiles/plinternet/2006/2006\\_plinternet.pdf](http://www.ii.fsu.edu/projectFiles/plinternet/2006/2006_plinternet.pdf)

## 2006 response rate:

- Survey response 69.0% (4818 responses)
- Site visits to 30 libraries in 5 states

## Good news about connectivity:

- 98.4% of public library branches offer public Internet access
- Wireless access has increased from 17% in 2004 to 36.7% in 2006
- Internet connectivity has increased from 20.9% to nearly 100% in ten years

# Public Library Challenges

- Increased demand for public access computing
  - People who do not have access
  - Inadequate bandwidth, need faster speed libraries can offer
  - People do not know how to use the Internet
  - Support for federal, state, and local e-government services, including emergency services
- 45% of public libraries report a decrease in funding compared to the previous fiscal year
- Rural libraries tend to have fewer workstations, lower bandwidth, less access to wireless
- 45.5% says connection speeds are inadequate
- 20.7 need more workstations to meet demand
- Space (79.9%), cost factors (72.6%), maintenance (38.85) top reasons for not upgrading

# Policy Considerations

- What new roles should public libraries play in society?
- To what extent are librarians prepared to offer new services?
- Are there adequate resources for libraries to accomplish new roles and responsibilities?
- How successful are libraries when offering public access computing services, particularly new services like e-government?

# Unfunded Mandate

- When local, state, and federal agencies move to e-government to save costs, streamline work, etc. - those services are pushed down to public libraries
- E-Government Act of 2002 notes that public libraries will play a key role, but what role?
- Increasingly, government agencies refer individuals to their local public libraries for assistance and access to the Internet for citizen-government interactions
- Public libraries, in the eyes of federal, state, and local government agencies, are seen as part of the larger governmental fabric that deliver a range of services — including emergency services — to its citizens.

# “Every day” E-Government Services

- Medicare registration, completing drug prescription forms
- Locating or completing IRS forms
- Contacting Immigration and Naturalization Service
- Locating or completing social services forms, ex. Florida Department of Children and Families (DFC)
- Voter registration or information about candidates
- Registering citizen complaints with state and local government
- Registering children for school
- Setting appointments with agencies
- Motor vehicle registration renewal
- Completing job applications, filing unemployment claims

# Emergency Services

Finding and communicating with family members and friends who had been displaced after natural disaster, evacuated to other cities, or were missing

Completing FEMA forms and insurance claims that can only be completed online and require certain types of software to download

Searching for news about conditions in the area from which they had evacuated

Searching for information about the condition of homes or places of work, including checking news sites and satellite maps

Serving as emergency shelters

Providing emergency responder services (call centers, aiding emergency staff, providing relief services)

Providing equipment used by first responders during emergencies (ex. bookmobile with wireless Internet access, laptops, public access computing )

# Needs

- Funding --small amount of money comes from federal and state government (5-7%)
  - e-rate discounts are paid by telephone customers
  - 85-90% comes from local community
- Education and training including education of government officials on impact of referrals
- More broadband, more library space
- Recognition of services offered
- Information policy that supports the public library's role in e-government service provision

# Why public libraries?

- Libraries in nearly all communities
- First refuge during community emergencies
- Ready access point for people without access and for people who do not understand the Internet, application processes or forms
- First choice – libraries are trusted institutions in their communities