

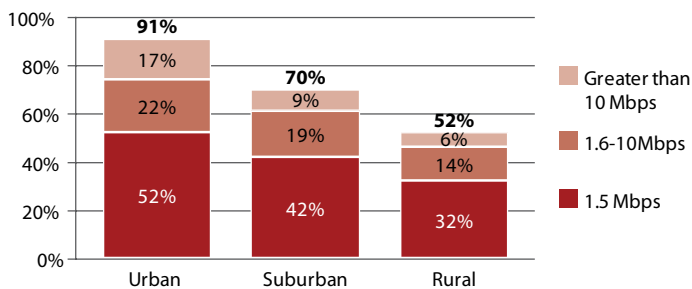
Libraries Use Broadband Internet Service to Serve High Need Communities

By Erica Pastore and Everett Henderson

America needs greater access to broadband Internet to spur economic growth, innovation, and job creation. To date, gains in household broadband take-up are not evenly distributed across all demographic groups or geographic areas. While from 2001 to 2007, the percentage of households in the United States with access to broadband Internet services grew from 9% to 51%,ⁱ just over half of the households in urban areas (54%) reported home-based broadband Internet use and only 39% of the households in rural areas reported broadband use in the home. Among households with incomes below \$35,000, only 23% report home-based access to broadband.ⁱⁱ

The technology available in today's public libraries can help reduce the broadband access gap for families, while providing a wide range of information resources and services. Overall, the percentage of public libraries that provide free broadband Internet to patrons increased from 49% in 2002 to 65% in 2007, the most recent year available.ⁱⁱⁱ In 2007, the percentage of libraries providing broadband Internet access in urban, suburban and rural areas was 91, 70 and 52%, respectively.^{iv} Figure 1 displays

Figure 1: Percentage of Public Libraries with Broadband Internet by Area and Connection Speed (1.5 Mbps or greater), 2007



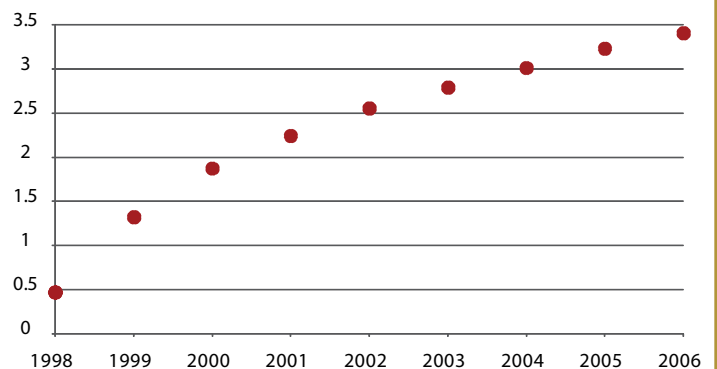
Davis, Denise. et. al. *Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2007-2008*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2008. (adapted from Figure C15, pg 42)

these rates by area and connection speed at 1.5 megabytes per second (Mbps) and above.

Investments in library technology are helping communities that need it most. In 2007, 88% of public libraries in high poverty areas provided access to broadband Internet and 73% of public libraries reported their facilities as being the only source of free Internet access in their community.^v

In addition to connectivity, public libraries have made considerable investments in hardware to meet public demand. Figures from the Public Library Survey, an annual census of libraries administered by The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), show that the availability of Internet terminals in public libraries increased by more than 600% in less than a decade (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of Internet PCs in Public Libraries Per 5,000 People, 1998-2006



Source: IMLS analysis of Public Library Survey, FY1998-FY2006, Institute of Museum and Library Services/National Center for Education Statistics

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Discussion

Information technologies available in the majority of public libraries represent a vital community resource, combining technology access with high quality content to meet the needs of patrons in the digital age. Today's librarians leverage an ever-widening range of resources to help patrons access health information, apply for jobs, find financial and government information and much more.

Improvements in library technology services over the past ten years suggest that public libraries are well positioned to play a greater role in providing access points to broadband services for people in both urban and rural areas and to families in need. Future budget and policy decisions regarding the deployment of broadband should consider not only household penetration rates, but also the role that libraries can play in addressing broadband priorities at the state and local levels.

References

ⁱ National Telecommunications and Information Administration, "Networked Nation: Broadband in America 2007," National Telecommunications and Information Administration. 2008 www.ntia.doc.gov/reports/2008/NetworkedNation.html. (Accessed January 16, 2009).

ⁱⁱ *ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Bertot, John Carlo., and Charles McClure. *Public Libraries and the Internet 2002: Internet Connectivity and Networked Services*. Tallahassee: School of Information Studies, Florida State University. 2002 ; and Davis, Denise, John Carlo Bertot, Charles R. McClure and Larra Clark. *Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study 2007-2008*. Chicago: American Library Association. 2008. <http://www.ala.org/plinternetfunding>.

^{iv} Davis, Denise, John Carlo Bertot, Charles R. McClure and Larra Clark. *Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study 2007-2008*. Chicago: American Library Association. 2008

^v *ibid.*

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