

Statewide results

North Carolina Library



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Introduction

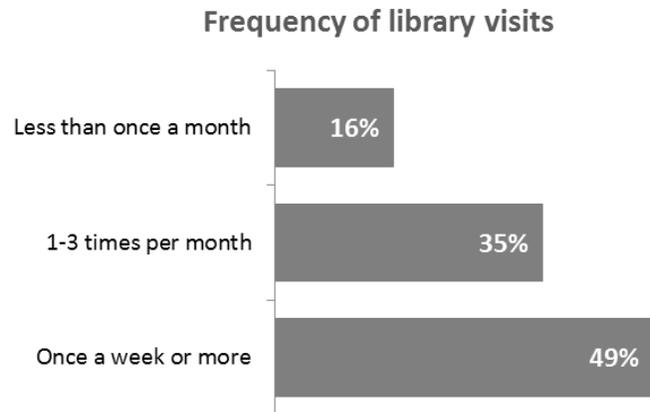
Understanding your community is essential to providing library patrons with the technology services they need. The Impact Survey¹ is an online survey tool designed specifically for public libraries that want to better understand their communities and how people use their public technology resources and services. The Survey asks patrons how they use library technology services such as public computers, wireless networks, online resources, digital literacy training, and what outcomes were achieved. It is meant to assist libraries in informing internal planning; survey responses can help libraries evaluate technology services and identify where they are excelling and where there is room for improvement. This information can also help libraries better understand patrons, track trends, and make smart choices when it comes to resource allocation and a long-term strategy for technology services.

This report presents responses from 38 of North Carolina's 80 public libraries that implemented the Impact Survey in North Carolina between January 13, 2014 and June 29, 2014 (45% of NC libraries). A total of 5,381 people completed the survey. Questions fell into eight categories: education, employment, entrepreneurship, health & wellness, eGovernment, civic engagement, eCommerce, and social inclusion.

¹ The Impact Survey is the result of a successful research initiative from the University of Washington with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. <http://impactsurvey.org/>

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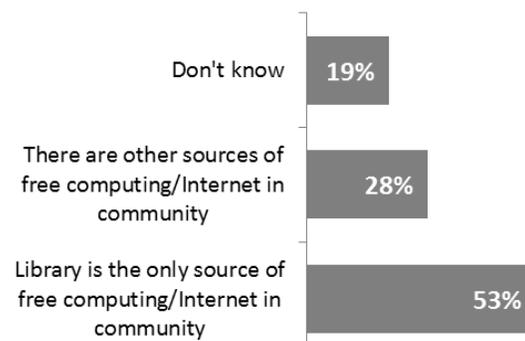
Nearly half of all survey respondents visit the library once a week or more. Additionally, 98% (5,249) of respondents access library resources through either their library's website or remotely. 45% of



respondents have also accessed online library resources through a handheld device, such as a smart phone or tablet. Overall, 74% of survey respondents had used a public access computer or used a library's wireless network connection to access the Internet during the past 12 months. 62% used a computer in their library to access the Internet during the past 12 months, 2,740 (50%) had accessed their library's wireless network connection using their own computer.

Public access to the Internet is extremely important for people who don't have access elsewhere, and **16%** of respondents reported that they do not have free access to the Internet anywhere except the public library. Furthermore, **53%** of respondents reported that there was no other location in the community that provides free access to computers and the Internet.

Community sources of free computing / Internet



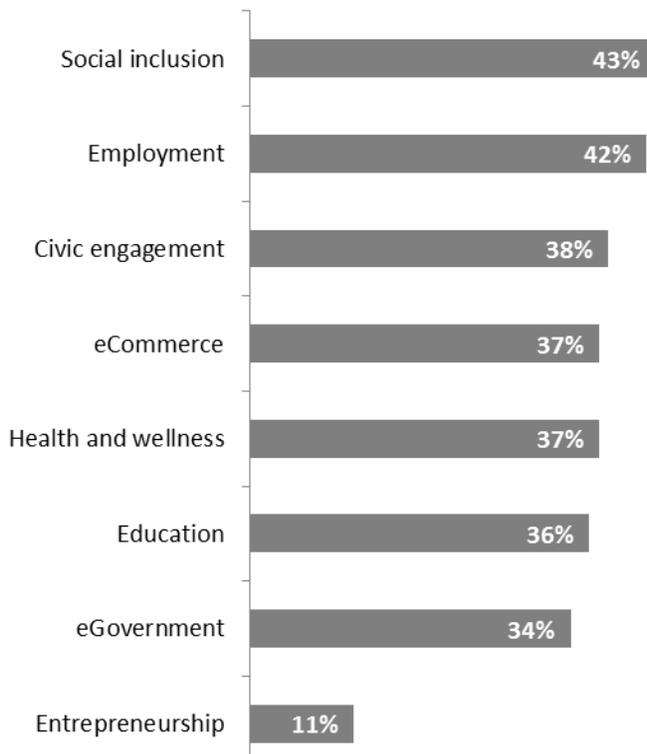
The beneficiaries of library Internet access often extend beyond the individual users; at North Carolina libraries, **50%** of users found information or performed tasks for other people using their library's computers or Internet connection.

Another main reason people come to the library to use computers and the Internet is to receive help and training from a librarian or library staff. **65%** of public access technology users reported having received one-on-one technology help from library staff or volunteers in the past 12 months. The most frequent type of help these users received was for library computer services (**74%**). When those that received help at their library were asked about the helpfulness of library staff and volunteers, **88%** said that staff were very helpful, and only **1%** said that staff were not helpful.

Public access technology use by activity area

Access to computers and the Internet, coupled with the technology help and training available at public libraries around the country, is essential to helping people satisfy their information needs and perform tasks in a variety of areas. National research about how the public uses computers and the Internet in libraries has shown that people use public access computers to accomplish a variety of instrumental social, educational, and economic tasks.

% of patrons who have used library technology for the following purposes



The Impact Survey asked users about how they used public library computers, Internet, and wireless networks across several areas of activity, or domains: education, employment, entrepreneurship, health & wellness, eGovernment, civic engagement, eCommerce, and social inclusion. Using this framework, we can explore how the availability of public access technology in libraries impacts the many and varied aspects of users' daily lives.

Education

36% (1,454) of public access technology users indicated they had used public library computers or wireless network for educational purposes. **6%** (318) of all respondents had used technology to apply for degree programs. Of those who had heard back from the programs at the time of the survey, **60%** (84) had been admitted to the programs. **17%** (890) of all respondents had used library technology to complete coursework or homework, and **8%** (428) used the library's technology to take a test.

Employment

42% of public access technology users reported they had used library resources for employment or career purposes in the past 12 months. **26%** (1,384) of all respondents had used library computers to search for jobs. **20%** (1,089) had used library technology to apply for jobs, and of those who had heard back at the time of the survey, **43%** (554) had been granted an interview. Additionally, **344** survey respondents said that they had been hired. This represents **6.4%** of all survey respondents. **20%** (1,051) of all respondents had used library computers to work on a résumé, cover letter, or other job application materials. **11%** (602) had used the library's computers and Internet to receive training to build skills related to their job or profession. **22%** (1,159) had used the library's technology to do research or find information related to their job or profession, and **14%** (766) had used them to perform work for their current jobs.

Entrepreneurship

By providing public access technology services, libraries often contribute to the economic health of the community by supporting the small business community. **11%** of library public access technology users across the state reported they had used library resources for entrepreneurship purposes in the past 12 months, including 172 who had used the library's technology to start their own business (**3%** of all respondents) and 223 who managed an existing business (**4%** of all respondents).

Health & wellness

Increasingly, community members are using technology at public libraries to find health information and conduct health-related service transactions, including signing up for insurance through government insurance exchanges. **28%** (1,488) of users indicated they had used their library's computers or Internet connection for health or wellness purposes. Additionally, **6%** (325) purchased or enrolled in a health insurance or drug discount program on library computers. In the past 12 months, **16%** (867) had used the library's computers or Internet connection to learn about diet or nutrition and of those people, **85%** report that this helped them decide to make changes to their diet. In the past 12 months, **17%** (887) used the library's computers or Internet connection to learn about exercise or fitness and of those people, **84%** report that this helped them decide to make changes in their exercise habits.

eGovernment

Libraries play an important role in ensuring free and open access to resources connecting the public with government agencies at all levels. In the past 12 months, **34%** of respondents (1,367) report that they have used the library's computers or Internet connection to acquire government or legal information or to access government services. For example, 14% of all respondents (775) used library computers to acquire government forms, and **47%** (384) of those also used the library's computer to submit completed forms online. Additionally, **11%** (915) of respondents used library technology to learn about government programs and services and **36%** (346) of those people used library computers and Internet to apply to such services online.

Civil engagement

Public libraries are local, neutral, and respected for providing information that represents different viewpoints. Given their resources and community connections, libraries are the perfect arena to engage the community in civic discourse on important community issues.² Participants were asked whether in the past 12 months they had used the library's computers or Internet connection to learn about or participate in political causes, social causes, or community activities. For example, reading or watching the news, learning about a candidate or political campaign, finding out about community events, or finding volunteer opportunities. **38%** (1,522) responded that they had.

² <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2013/09/future-of-libraries/the-library-as-catalyst-for-civic-engagment-reinventing-libraries>

eCommerce

When asked whether in the past 12 months they had used the library’s computers or Internet connection for ecommerce purposes (for example, banking, shopping or comparing products, buying or selling something, paying bills, finding housing, or making travel arrangements), **37%** of respondents (1,511) said that they had. Of those who had, **23%** (350) had used library technology to learn about getting out of debt, **49%** (747) had used the library’s technology to pay bills, and **25%** (382) had used it to find housing. When considered as a percent of total respondents, these numbers are **7%**, **14%**, and **7%** respectively.

Social inclusion

The last section of the survey asked respondents if they had used the library’s computers or Internet connection for social or entertainment purposes within the past 12 months. For example, chatting or messaging, playing games with others, keeping up with friends on social networking sites, or pursuing a hobby or interest. **43%** of respondents (1,738) said that they had. Of these, **38%** (636 people) had used library computers or Internet connection to find support for a personal issue and **50%** (851) used library computers to learn new skills.