

# FAST FACTS

Recent Statistics from the  
Library Research Service

## Availability of Public Access Internet Computers in U.S. Public Libraries by State and Size of Jurisdiction, 1999

How many computers does a public library need to provide equitable public access to the Internet?

There are a lot of ways to go about answering this question. One strategy is to consider the typical number of such computers found in libraries of different sizes and in different parts of the nation. To account for the enormous variation in the size of public library jurisdictions, it is also helpful to adjust for that factor by looking at the ratio of computers to a certain level of population—let's say, 5,000 people.

In 1999, counts of such computers were taken for the first time by the Federal-State Cooperative System (FSCS) for public library data, a partnership venture of the National Center for Education Statistics with the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies. For that first year, only about half of states and half of all public libraries responded to the question. But, the data gathered is for libraries representing a cross-section of states and jurisdictions of various sizes.

**Table 1. Public Access Internet Computers per 5,000 Served in U.S. Public Libraries by Size of Jurisdiction, 1999**

Size of Jurisdiction	Number of public library jurisdictions reporting	Average public access Internet computers per 5,000 served
1,000,000 & over	5	0.86
500,000-999,999	23	0.87
250,000-499,999	42	0.90
100,000-249,999	141	0.86
50,000-99,999	230	0.98
25,000-49,999	398	1.12
10,000-24,999	822	1.53
5,000-9,999	697	1.74
Under 5,000	1,896	3.21

A fairly clear and simple pattern is apparent when this statistic is examined for different jurisdiction sizes. The average number of public access Internet computers per 5,000 served rises as size of jurisdiction drops: for 25,000 and higher, one; for 5,000 to 25,000, two; and for less than 5,000, three.

Differences on this statistic by state are sometimes dramatic. Consider the extremes: States reporting the most public access Internet computers per 5,000 served—four or more--are: Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Colorado.

### Highlights

- The average number of public access Internet computers per 5,000 served rises as size of jurisdiction drops: for 25,000 and higher, one; for 5,000 to 25,000, two; and for less than 5,000, three.
- States reporting the most public access Internet computers per 5,000 served are: Wisconsin (4.6), Minnesota and Colorado (both 4.0).
- States reporting the fewest such computers per 5,000 served are: Arkansas and Hawaii (both 0.8), South Carolina (0.7), Connecticut (0.4).



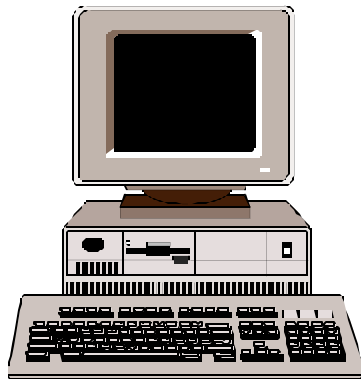
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States reporting the fewest such computers per 5,000 served—less than one—are: Arkansas, Hawaii, South Carolina, and Connecticut.

More typical states on this statistic include: Delaware, Florida, West Virginia, Missouri—all with about one public access Internet computer per 5,000 served—and Illinois, Mississippi, New Jersey and Pennsylvania—all with about two such computers per 5,000 served.

It will be interesting to see if these figures are substantially similar or different once all 50 states and the other half of the nation’s libraries are reporting them.

The change in Colorado in just one year is dramatic. In 1998, the state’s public libraries reported an average of 2.7 computers per 5,000 served. A year later, in 1999, they reported 4.0 such computers—an increase of almost 50 percent in a single year. That is dramatic testimony to how quickly information technology is being introduced into public libraries. These Colorado statistics are no great surprise. Between 1998 and 1999, the State Library’s Networking and Resource Sharing unit made several GUI (graphical user interface) grants to public libraries to enable them to purchase just such computers.



**Table 2. Public Access Internet Computers per 5,000 Served in U.S. Public Libraries by State, 1999**

States reporting	Number of public library jurisdictions reporting	Mean (Average)
Arkansas	21	0.76
Colorado	111	4.03
Connecticut	3	0.38
Delaware	3	0.98
Florida	71	1.02
Hawaii	1	0.75
Illinois	626	1.57
Indiana	222	2.39
Kansas	311	3.37
Louisiana	65	2.36
Massachusetts	362	2.31
Minnesota	134	4.03
Missouri	147	1.38
Mississippi	41	1.63
Montana	71	3.25
North Carolina	75	0.80
North Dakota	79	3.09
New Hampshire	214	2.15
New Jersey	294	1.65
Pennsylvania	456	1.60
South Carolina	40	0.65
Vermont	192	2.94
Wisconsin	350	4.56
West Virginia	96	1.18

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