FAST ⚡ FACTS

Recent Statistics from the Library Research Service

GUI Grants Make a Dent in the Digital Divide

If you are from the metro area, broadband (high speed) Internet access is probably a given in your local library. In fact, you probably don't think twice about web pages downloading quickly and having access to sound and video over the net. Unfortunately, in rural areas, this is often not the case. Exorbitant costs, poor telecommunications infrastructure, and lack of vendors have made it difficult, if not impossible, for some rural communities to get broadband Internet access.

Since implementation of the Graphical User Interface (GUI) grant, a $250,000 two-year LSTA grant, 57 public and school libraries that lacked Internet access, or only had dial up, now have some form of broadband Internet access. The GUI grants helped to purchase computers and to offset telecommunications costs by paying for first-time installations and one year of Internet access fees for libraries receiving GUI grants.

What were the far-reaching effects of these grants? Has improved Internet access made a difference to those libraries receiving GUI grants?

In January, the Library Research Service and the GUI project coordinator conducted a survey to learn if there had been notable changes in Internet connectivity in libraries that received these grants. Each GUI recipient was given 10 surveys for patrons to fill out and one staff survey. About half of the surveys were returned.

The most noteworthy finding is that GUI grants have reduced the digital divide, especially in rural areas of Colorado. Sixty-two percent of patrons that responded to the survey lack Internet access at both home and work. For such patrons, the library may provide their only connection to the Internet.

Other Survey Highlights:
- Sixty-three percent of patrons responding to the survey reported accessing information quickly on the GUI computers at their libraries.

- Fifty-four percent of these patrons found that getting a turn at a library computer was easier after libraries received the GUI grant computers.

Patron Comments

Without the library, I wouldn't know what the Internet is.

My home Internet access doesn't work as well; I can come [to the library] and find things I need.

My family can't afford [a computer and Internet access]. Having it at the library helps me in school.

CONTACT ABOUT THIS ISSUE
Rose Nelson, Technology Consultant
Networking & Resource Sharing Unit
Colorado State Library
201 East Colfax Avenue, Suite 309
Denver, Colorado 80203-1799
Tel.: 303.866.6746
Fax: 303.866.6940
E-mail: nelson_r@cde.state.co.us

Staff also reported improvements in Internet speed after implementation of the GUI grants.
- Ninety four percent of staff respondents reported that Internet access has been quicker since the GUI grants were implemented.
- As a result of the GUI grants, thirty-one libraries that were previously on dial up or no Internet access now have at minimum a 56k dedicated connection.

Connectivity and computers were only half the battle of implementing the GUI grants. Training and sustaining are the other half. This is where Regional Library Service Systems have been particularly instrumental in implementing the GUI grants. Sixty-eight percent of libraries that received additional training after their grant received this training from their System.

Proof in the Testimony

While the numbers demonstrate that GUI grants made significant improvements in library Internet access, testimonials from Colorado librarians describe the impact that these grants had on individual patrons.

A lady suffering from melanoma was looking for information and solace. I showed her how to go on line for information and in the course of things, she found a chat room and met several others going through the same ordeal. It made a difference to her and was a real eye opener for us.

Ouray Library District

As of early last summer the library had literally no teenage library users. They didn't set foot in the door. Over the past summer and fall the students found that the library's computers are now as fast as those they use at school and faster than their home computers. Spending time in the library using our computers resulted in our local teenagers feeling comfortable in the library and we now see significant use of all our facilities by this age group. Sometimes they even check out books!

La Veta Public Library

All patrons enjoy the quick Internet access, but the patrons I see who really benefit are senior citizens. These reluctant users become very confident after one session of Internet basics. One patron accesses information about her grown daughter who is a teacher traveling the U.S. and putting her adventures and lesson plans on a website. The mother is now a confident user and enjoys how quickly she can see what her daughter is up to. When her daughter traveled through Wray, she made a stop at Wray Public Library to try the computer her mom talked about and was much impressed with our access after visiting a variety of libraries throughout the U.S. That is something to be proud of!

Wray Public Library