

E-Government, Librarian Training, and the Digital Divide

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This paper presents results of a survey conducted during the summer of 2009. The participants clearly stated that librarians and staff need more training in e-government web sites in order to assist their patrons. Over the last twenty years the public library has taken on the role of having Internet connected public access computers (PACs) for patrons to access information. Some of the participants stated in a comment section that many of the patrons who come in to use the PACs for e-government purposes have some of the lowest computer literacy skills. Many times these patrons have just visited a local, state, or federal agency and have been sent along to the public library where there is free computer access and assistance. The assumption by the agency that the client is computer literate is often a false one. Library staff then spends valuable time teaching the patron computer basics and helping them find the government web site where the necessary form is located. The necessary form is only available online. The library may have neither the staff nor the time for a computer lesson of the magnitude just explained.

Conventional wisdom holds that more and more individuals have begun purchasing their own personal computers and Internet access in order to have that availability inside the home. However, research that has been done to date by the Federal Communication Commission and Pew Internet and American Life Project has stated that there still is a dividing line between the haves and have nots in regards to broadband technologies like cable modems, DSL-enabled phone lines, fixed wireless, satellite, a mobile broadband wireless connection for a computer or cell phone, fiber optic connection, or a T1 line (Horrigan, 2010; Horrigan 2009). The digital divide is socioeconomic based upon income and education and in some cases age (Horrigan, 2010; Horrigan, 2009; Rainie, Estabrook, & Witt, 2007).

The paper will look at the survey research done and the literature currently available on the digital divide and e-government. The policy implications need to be discussed and looked at as well. In these tough economic times, many libraries have had to cut staff, hours, and funding in order to stay afloat. As state, local, and federal agencies and departments move the actual e-assistance to the public library, this is an unfunded mandate that needs to be resolved.

References

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