BILL & MELINDA GATES *foundation*

Public Libraries in the Digital Age

The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project *has produced a series of reports presenting* **new research on library services, trends in reading habits and patron needs in the digital age**. *This three-year research program is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and informed by an advisory group, focus groups and surveys of library users, non-users, and librarians.*

This brief, prepared by the Gates Foundation, offers information and potential messaging based on this research for you to customize and use in your community. Please feel free to use the information in this report as you see fit.

Top 4 Messages from "Public Libraries in the Digital Age," and supporting data points (report PDF pages cited):

Message 1:   Libraries are one of the few things nearly every American can agree on

- Public libraries are essential community anchors that provide access to information and opportunity for all people, through services and programs that inform, educate, and bring together people from all walks of life.
- Libraries enjoy broad support from Americans with well over three quarters of Americans stating that public libraries are important to their community.
- As a trusted provider of services that reflect community priorities, libraries are ideal partners for community leaders and decision makers working to find solutions for difficult social and economic problems.

Supporting Facts
- 91% of Americans ages 16 and older say libraries are important to their communities; and 76% think libraries are important to them and their families. (page 4)
- In the past year, 53% of Americans ages 16 and older visited a library or bookmobile; 25% visited a library website; and 13% used a handheld device such as a smartphone or tablet computer to access a library website. All told, 59% of Americans ages 16 and older had at least one of those kinds of interactions with their public library in the past 12 months. (page 4)
- Nearly all Americans (84%) have gone to a library at some time in their life. (page 4)

Message 2:   Libraries and librarians are leaders in bridging the digital divide

- Libraries provide free public access to computers and the Internet, as well as digital content and tools such as job search databases, online learning programs, and health information programs that meet specific community needs.
- Libraries are at the forefront of bridging the digital divide and are working to ensure all people can participate fully in the digital age.
- High-quality public access to technology tools, information, and training in libraries help millions of Americans every year access and create information that improves their lives.
- Librarians have become a de-facto digital literacy corps, helping millions to improve their digital and information literacy – skills that are critical to most aspects of American life and work today.

- African-Americans and Latinos are especially connected to their libraries and place high value on the services libraries offer their communities including computer and Internet access, but also, quiet study spaces, and educational programs for youth.

Supporting Facts
- According to IMLS, there are over 17,000 public library outlets, including branches and bookmobiles in the United States.[i]
- According to ALA, 62% percent of libraries state they are the only institution in their community that provides free access and training to the Internet.
    - 96% of public libraries report helping patrons apply for or access e-government services.
    - 76% percent of libraries help patrons complete online job applications.
- According to ALA, 35% of public libraries offer classes in digital literacy; many more provide one on one coaching.[ii]
- 26% of Americans use library computers or WiFi connections to find online information and engage in activities to improve their lives: (pages 6-7)
    - 66% reported doing research for school or work
    - 54% used email
    - 47% got health information
    - 41% visited government websites or got information about government services
    - 36% looked for and applied for jobs
    - 16% paid bills or did online banking
    - 16% took an online class or completed an online certification program
- 83% of blacks and 81% of Hispanics consider library career resources very important compared to 61% of whites. (page 45)
- More than three quarters of Americans believe that the availability of free technology is very important for libraries to offer, as many as say this about books and reference help. (page 3)

Message 3:   Americans value library staff expertise and support meeting diverse information needs

- Library staff provide a critical link to information and guidance that help people find and use important information.
- Americans value the one-on-one support received from library staff. In fact, half of all people who visit libraries say they go specifically to seek help from a librarian.
- Libraries meet consumers at their "point of need" providing digital and information literacy support but also supporting patrons with basic literacy training, advanced search and reference guidance and helping with "vertical literacies" like accessing health, financial or educational information.

Supporting Facts
- 80% of Americans think it is very important to their community that libraries have staff on hand available to help people find and use information. (page 42)
- 36% percent of people who have visited a library say library staff had helped them use a computer or the Internet at a library. (page 7)

- This connection with librarians translates to the digital age, as well. The most requested technology-related service was an "Ask a Librarian" online research service to get help from librarians, which 73% of people said they would be likely to use if available. (page 3)

Message 4: Americans embrace increasing technology services

- Americans want their libraries to expand existing digital services for ease of use. For example, many Americans want their library to expand digital content and E-reader selections and offer services like online reference help.
- A majority of Americans are eager to see new digital services at their library, like classes on how to use digital devices like E-readers, interactive learning programs, and the ability to access library information and resources online and on mobile devices.
- While Americans crave new services, they don't want libraries to discontinue services they already value including borrowing print books and having quiet spaces to study, work, and read.
- According to IMLS, local governments are struggling to support library services in their communities, but their share of library funding has never been more important: over the past ten years, state and federal funding for libraries is down while local demand for library services has surged.[iii]

Supporting facts
- 53% of Americans think libraries should definitely expand E-book selections, and 58% would likely borrow books on E-readers if pre-loaded. (pages 4, 49)
- A majority of Americans support innovations like mobile apps that provide access to library services and "Red-box" style book and media lending kiosks. (page 47)
- Only 20% of Americans strongly support removing book stacks from public locations to in favor of newer programs and resources. Yet a full 40% of consumers are unsure about the role that books play in tomorrow's library. (pages 56, 48)

Related data on public technology access from IMLS & ALA:
- More than 40% of libraries report inadequate Internet connection speeds to meet demand.
- Nearly two-thirds of libraries report an insufficient number of computers to meet patron demand with the majority in urban areas (87% percent of urban libraries cannot meet daily demand). [iv]
- Over the past ten years, library funding from state government is down 37.6% and federal library funding is down 19.3%. Nationally, revenue from local governments for public libraries has increased 23.5%.[v]

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[i] *Public Libraries in the United States*, IMLS 2010 survey
[ii] *American Library Association's Libraries "Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, 2011-2012"*
[iii] *Public Libraries in the United States*, IMLS 2010 survey
[iv] *American Library Association's Libraries "Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, 2011-2012"*
[v] *Public Libraries in the United States*, IMLS 2010 survey