

The 1998 National Survey of U.S. Public Library Outlet Internet Connectivity

Summary Results October 1998

**American Library Association
Office for Information Technology Policy**

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The survey was sponsored by the American Library Association's Office for Information Technology Policy in cooperation with the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. Unless otherwise noted, information contained in this summary reflects results from the 1998 National Survey of Public Libraries Outlet Internet Connectivity.

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Less than 1 in 2 public library outlets are able to offer multimedia Internet access to the public at speeds of 56 kbps or greater.

Approximately 8 in 10 public library outlets are connected to the Internet. About 7 in 10 offer public Internet access, with almost the same numbers offering multimedia access to the Internet.

At the time of this survey, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that in 1994 there were 8,921 library systems representing 15,945 library outlets—that is central and branch libraries. A sample of 2,500 of the nation's 15,718 public library outlets was selected for this survey. The survey achieved a response rate of 75.5%.

**Graphic public
access with speed
of 56k or more:
45.3%**

**Graphical public
Internet access:
68.6%**

**Public Internet
access:
73.3%**

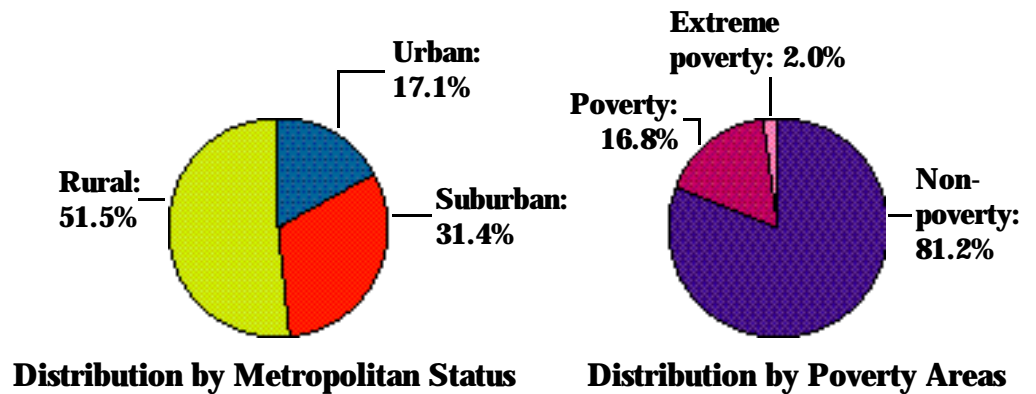
**Connected to the
Internet:
83.6%**

**All public library outlets:
100%**

Public Library Outlets in Rural and Poverty Areas

n=15,718

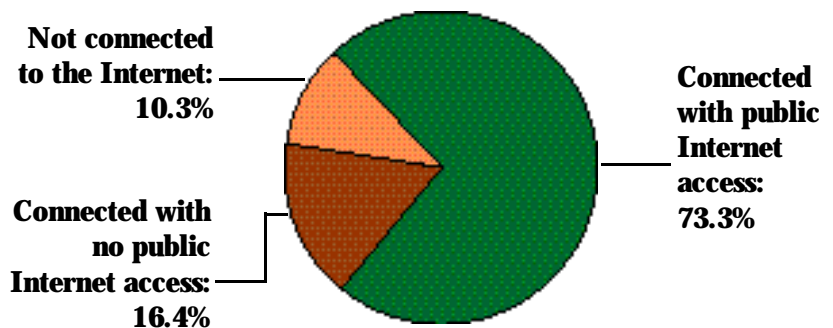
More than half of all public library outlets are located in rural areas. Almost 1 in 5 public library outlets serve a poverty area. About 1 in 10 public library outlets serve rural poverty areas.



Public Library Outlet Connectivity

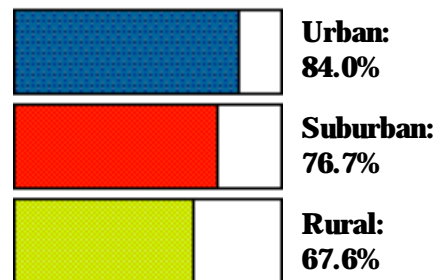
n=15,718

Seven out of 10 public library outlets offer public Internet access and nearly 2 in 10 are connected to the Internet, but are not offering any public Internet access.



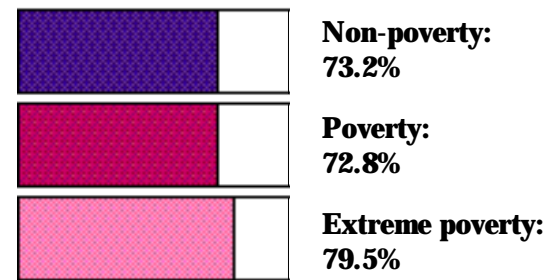
Public Library Outlets Help Bridge the Digital Divide

Urban: n=2,691
Suburban: n=4,933
Rural: n=8,094



Connectivity by Metropolitan Status

Non-poverty: n=12,757
Poverty: n=2,644
Extreme Poverty: n=317



Connectivity by Poverty Area

In urban and suburban areas, about 4 out of 5 public library outlets offer public Internet access; in rural areas, a little more than 3 in 5 offer public Internet access.

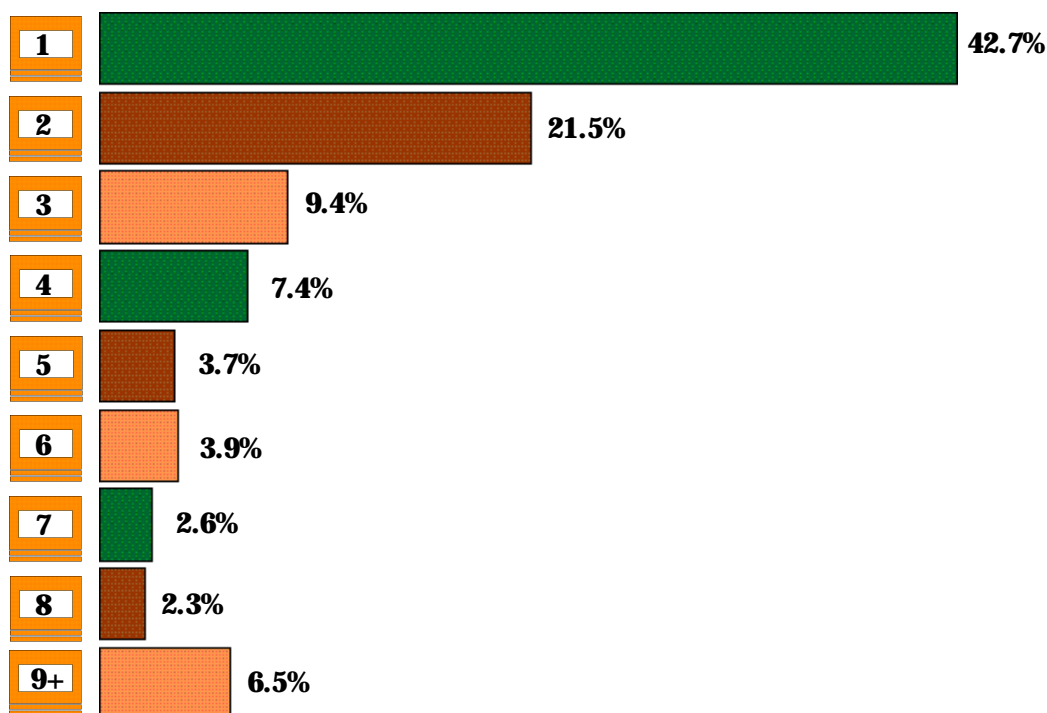
Public access to the Internet from libraries is about equal in poverty and non-poverty areas. However, a smaller proportion of rural libraries offer public Internet access than their urban and suburban counterparts.

Adequacy of Access in Public Library Outlets: Workstations

n=10,623

Nearly half of all public library outlets with public Internet access have only 1 multimedia workstation available to the public.

Number of workstations

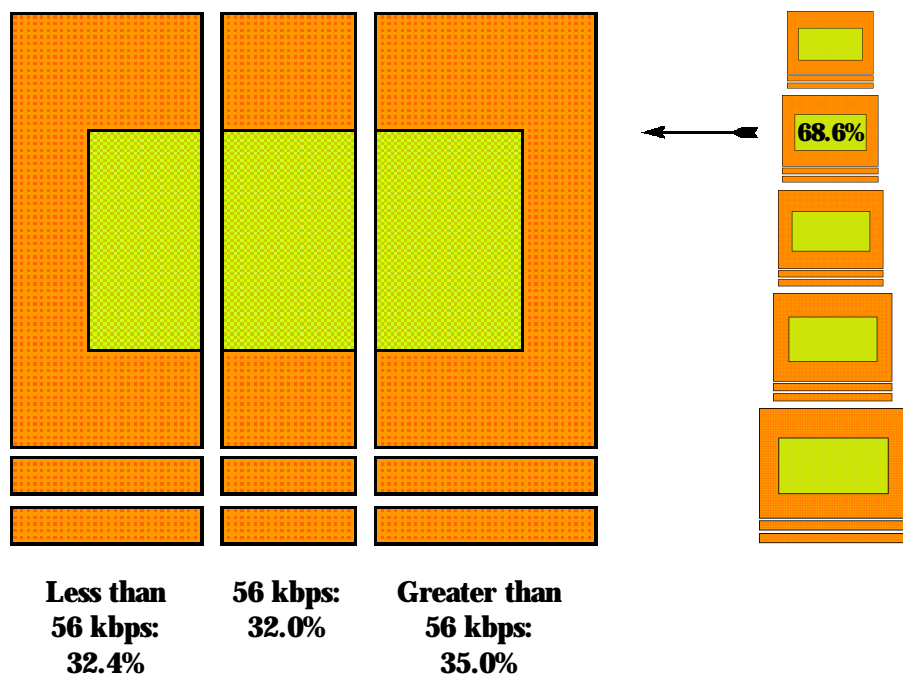


Percentage of Outlets With This Number of Multimedia Workstations

Adequacy of Access in Public Library Outlets: Speed of Connections

n=10,079

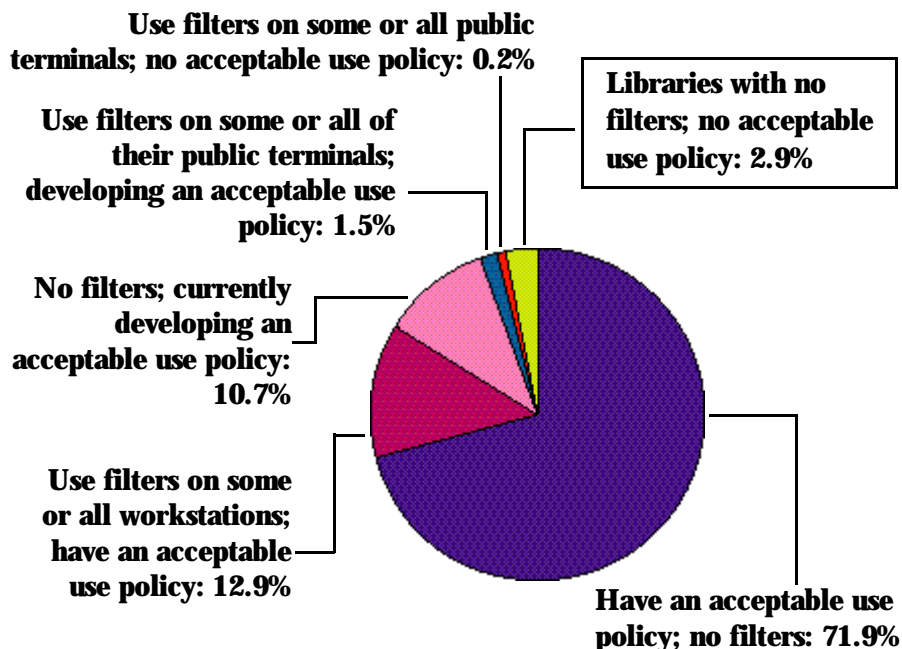
Only about 1 in 3 public library outlets with multimedia public Internet access are connecting at speeds greater than 56 kbps.



Internet Use Policies in Public Library Outlets

n=11,519

Nearly every public library outlet has or is developing an Internet acceptable use policy for patrons using their facilities. More than 8 in 10 public library outlets have an acceptable use policy and another 1 in 10 are developing such policies. About 1 in 7 public library outlets use filters on some or all of their public workstations.



The 1998 National Survey of U.S. Public Library Outlet Internet Connectivity was conducted from May through June 1998 by Dr. John Carlo Bertot, associate professor at the School of Information Science and Policy, University of Albany, State University of New York and Dr. Charles McClure, distinguished professor at the School of Information Studies, Syracuse University. It was sponsored by the American Library Association's Office for Information Technology Policy and the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. The 1998 study builds and expands upon areas of public library Internet-related data as reported in the ALA/NCLIS report of 1997 and the NCLIS-sponsored 1994 and 1996 studies.

The number of public library outlets comes from the National Center for Education Statistics. While 1995 statistics are now available, in 1994, the latest year for which statistics were available at the time of the study, there were 8,921 library systems representing 15,945 library outlets—that is central and branch libraries. A sample of 2,500 of the nation's 15,718 public library outlets was selected for this survey.¹ The sample was weighted to represent public libraries across various poverty and non-poverty areas and central city, suburban, and rural locations based on U.S. Census definitions of poverty areas² and metropolitan status. The survey achieved a response rate of 75.5%.

Limited copies of "The 1998 National Survey of U.S. Public Library Outlet Internet Connectivity: Summary Results" are available at no charge from the address below or online at <http://www.ala.org/oitp/research/survey98.html>. A more detailed final report should be available by early 1999.

Inquiries concerning the information presented here should be directed to the Office for Information Technology Policy, American Library Association, 1301 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Suite 403, Washington, D.C. 20004-1701; phone: 202/628-8421; fax: 202/628-8424; e-mail: oitp@alawash.org or the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1110 Vermont Ave., N.W. Suite 820, Washington, D.C. 20005-3522; phone: 202/606-9200; fax: 202/606-9203.

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¹ The remaining 227 libraries did not have metropolitan status codes in the NCES public library universe file and so could not be included in the universe for this study. Of the remaining 15,718 over half, 51.5%, of these outlets are in rural areas, 17.1% in urban areas, and 31.4% in suburban areas. About 81.2% of outlets are in non-poverty areas, 16.8% in poverty areas, and 2% in extreme poverty areas.

² The U.S. Census defines a poverty census tract as one in which 20% or more of residents have incomes at or below the poverty level. Extreme poverty areas are those tracts in which 40% or more of residents have incomes at or below the poverty level.