Impact of technology services in Ontario public libraries
Bridge 2021/2022 Report

key highlights

- Library patrons continue to rely on technology services, with over 60% of respondents noting they used technology they would not otherwise have access to.

- Regionally, Northern Ontario patrons experienced the highest level of positive outcome accessing and using library technology services.

- Many people who are introduced to technology at their library continue to use it long after.

- The data shows the crucial role libraries play in connecting communities, especially some of Ontario's most vulnerable, to digital services and digital literacy supports.

powered by

tpl: toronto public library
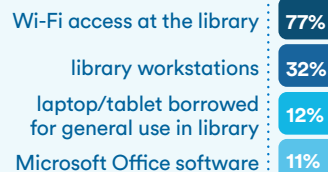
library impact ontario

primary outcomes

digital inclusion & equitable access

Libraries are essential to building digitally inclusive communities, bridging inequities to technology access.

The preliminary results show that most people who use library technology services would not otherwise have had access to at least some of that technology. More strikingly, most of the people who use technology services with no other access, use them to access the Internet at or through the library.
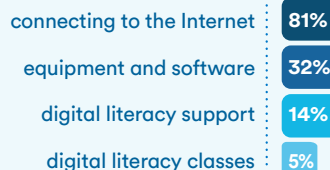
overall top technology reported used

Wi-Fi access at the library	77%
library workstations	32%
laptop/tablet borrowed for general use in library	12%
Microsoft Office software	11%

respondents who would not otherwise have had access to technology

61% used technology at the library

- **75%** among Indigenous patrons
- **73%** among low-income households
- **71%** among patrons in Northern and Southwestern Ontario

81% accessed the Internet at or through the library

connecting to the Internet	81%
equipment and software	32%
digital literacy support	14%
digital literacy classes	5%

digital literacy & adoption

Libraries are responsive in supporting digital literacy in their communities.

Public libraries facilitate the development of digital literacy that is critical to living and working in the digital age, especially for those most vulnerable. Ontario public libraries not only play a role in introducing patrons to new technologies, but the high rate of longer-term adoption indicates that these new technologies continue to be relevant to patrons even after their initial introduction.

82% of respondents reported increased digital comfort after using one or more technology services

- **90%** among Indigenous patrons
- **87%** among immigrant patrons
- **87%** among patrons in Northern Ontario

29% of respondents who used technology services were introduced to new technology

- **90%** of those introduced to new technology continued to use it.

secondary outcomes

community, social & civic engagement

Libraries enable patrons to establish and maintain meaningful connections and provide critical access to public resources.

Activities associated with community, social and civic engagement span the full range of technology services. For example, through Internet access patrons are able to connect with friends and family, thus increasing their levels of social engagement. Similarly, accessing digital information resources using library technology helps patrons learn more about their local news and community events, thereby increasing their levels of community engagement. With customer preferences shifting to digital over the long-term, as well as with the pandemic, the need to have access to government resources online has been heightened, especially for vulnerable populations and equity-deserving groups.
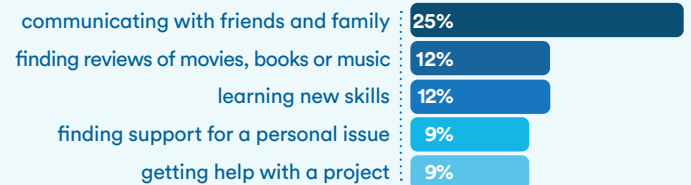
73% of respondents reported increased levels of **community engagement**

Top activities

learning about current news/events	33%
learning about volunteering opportunities in the community	20%
learning about community groups & non-profits	16%
learning about local politics	15%

71% of respondents reported increased levels of **social engagement**

Top activities

|	
communicating with friends and family	25%
finding reviews of movies, books or music	12%
learning new skills	12%
finding support for a personal issue	9%
getting help with a project	9%

37% of respondents had used technology service(s) to **access online government services or resources**

57%	among Indigenous patrons
51%	among low-income households
50%	among patrons with disabilities
47%	among patrons in Northern Ontario

Top activities

obtain government forms	42%
submit forms online	37%
learn about government services or programs	12%
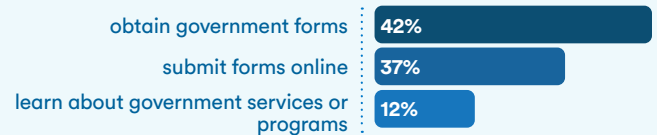
creativity & innovation

Libraries foster ideation and creative expression.

Public libraries are at the forefront of providing cutting-edge creative tools to amateur and professional creators alike. Digital tools and supports at public libraries foster creativity and innovation, in part through enabling collaborations and introducing community members to the potential of digital tools to advance creativity and innovation.

27% of respondents used technology service(s) to **make creative products**

45%	among Indigenous patrons

Top activities

writing	28%
3D model or illustrative design	15%
film/video	15%
multimedia project	15%
audio/music recording	12%

secondary outcomes

entrepreneurship & business outcomes

Libraries provide essential supports for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Digital literacy is foundational to participating in the knowledge economy. The public library's role in supporting entrepreneurship extends beyond basic digital skills training. Much support is available at libraries where staff direct patrons to appropriate business-related resources and help them navigate regulatory requirements online. Some public libraries also run programs that target business skills, many of which incorporate technology services including both on-site and virtual business resources. Public libraries also provide access to work spaces, which have the potential to spark networking and collaborations among the small businesses and entrepreneurs that use library services to start, manage or expand their businesses.

15% of respondents used technology services for business-related activities

91% of these businesses employed fewer than 20 employees.

Top activities were performing business-related research and managing an existing business.
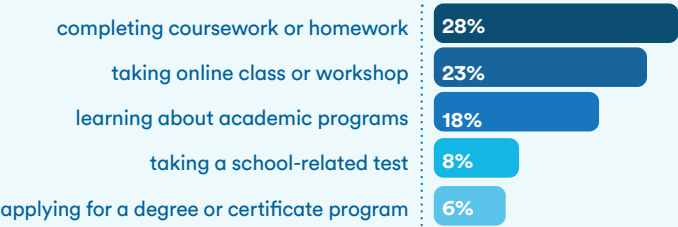
workforce development

Libraries facilitate education, enable employable skills and support the various stages of the job search process.

In addition to providing opportunities for patrons to learn about technology (i.e. digital literacy), public libraries allow patrons to learn through technology. Technology services at public libraries assist people of all ages in updating their skills, finding work and excelling academically and professionally in a connected world. The technology access provided by libraries helps patrons with their job search skills in employment success.

31% of respondents used the technology service(s) to **develop employable skills**

Most common skills developed

technical skills	39%
administrative skills	20%
management skills	20%
sales/marketing skills	10%

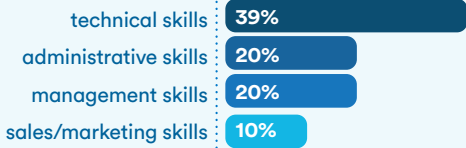**55**% of respondents used the technology service(s) for **educational activities**

64% among trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit patrons
61% among immigrant patrons
60% among racialized patrons

Top activities

completing coursework or homework	28%
taking online class or workshop	23%
learning about academic programs	18%
taking a school-related test	8%
applying for a degree or certificate program	6%

24% of respondents used the technology service(s) to **develop job search skills**

49% of respondents who used the technology service(s) to develop job search skills were successful in landing a job

Most common skills developed

accessing job boards and listings	29%
finding info related to a job or profession	28%
resume-building skills	23%
interviewing skills	15%