



impact of technology services in Ontario public libraries

Bridge 2023/2024 Report

key highlights

- The results from 22 participating Ontario public libraries, with nearly 6,500 respondents, show the crucial role that libraries play in connecting communities to digital services.
- In particular, 59% of Ontario library respondents reported that the library gave them access to technology they would not have had otherwise.
- Those using the library for internet access were much more likely not to have access at home (16%) compared to the general population (6%). This was even higher for those in Northern communities (30%).
- Library technology helps reduce social isolation and is used by 56% of customers to establish and maintain social connections.
- Library technology services support economic resilience by helping to advance career development and employment outcomes.
- Impacts were highest for equity deserving groups, as well as those in Northern and rural communities, clearly demonstrating that public libraries are essential infrastructure in bridging Ontario's digital divide.

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primary outcomes

digital inclusion & equitable access

Libraries are essential to bridging the digital divide.

The results show that most people who use library technology services would not have had access to that technology otherwise. This impact is more pronounced among equity-deserving groups. From a geographic lens, this impact is also more pronounced for Northern Ontario libraries. Most strikingly, the library is a critical point of access for those without internet access at home. Those using the library to access the internet were much more likely not to have access at home (16%) compared to the general population in Canada (6%).¹

"Free high-speed WiFi has been invaluable to me. Since my only option at home is limited band with slow satellite internet, fast connection at the library has been great."

overall top technology reported used



16% of the respondents that used internet, reported they do not have internet service installed at home, significantly higher than the national average

30% among Northern Ontario library respondents

92% reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with library technology service(s)

59% reported the library gave them access to technology they would not otherwise have had

69% among low-income households

66% among persons with disabilities

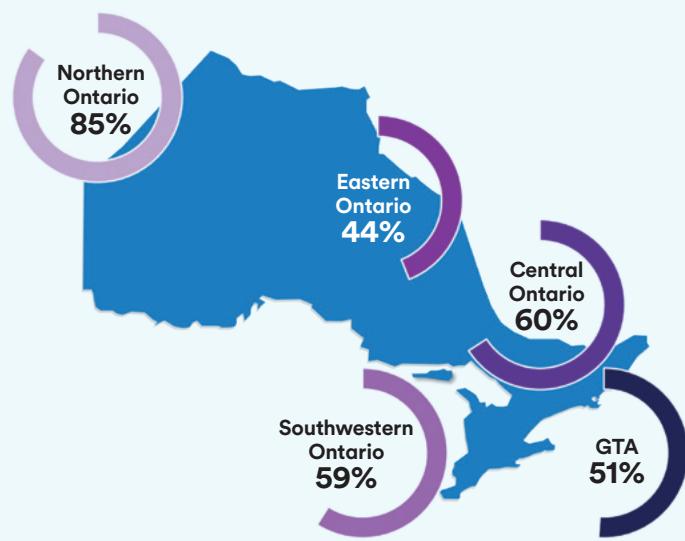
61% among Indigenous persons



Percentage of respondents who reported that the library gave them access to technology they would not otherwise have had, by library size:



Percentage of respondents who reported that the library gave them access to technology they would not otherwise have had, by library region:



Top reasons for technology access:

change of scenery or convenience of location

can't afford it or don't have access to it at home

to supplement other library services

¹ Statistics Canada. "Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2022." The Daily, 20 July 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230720/dq230720b-eng.htm>.

digital literacy and adoption

Libraries support digital literacy, strengthening lifelong learning.

The results show that Ontario public libraries are essential drivers of digital literacy, equipping individuals—especially those most vulnerable—with the skills needed to participate and thrive in today's digital world. High rates of long-term technology use demonstrate that libraries don't just introduce new technologies—they support sustained adoption through hands-on learning, trusted guidance and digital confidence.

[When the library] introduced my daughter to new technology, she showed great interest.

Our whole family has benefitted from technology classes run at the library.

82% reported increased digital comfort as a result of using library technology service(s)

88% among gender minorities

87% among newcomers

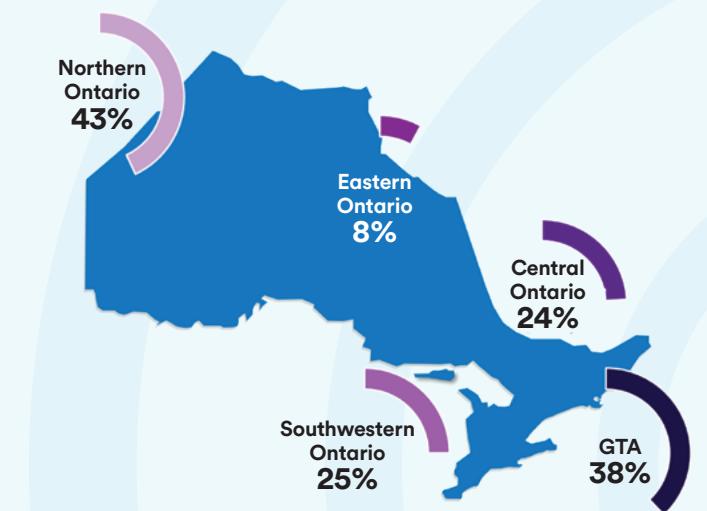
28% reported they were introduced to new technology

93% of those introduced to new technology, continued to use it

Percentage of respondents who reported being introduced to new technology, by library size:



Percentage of respondents who reported being introduced to new technology, by library region:



secondary outcomes

community, social and civic engagement

Library technology supports social connection and civic engagement.

Public libraries foster community connection and civic participation by providing inclusive access to technology. Whether they're staying in touch with loved ones, accessing local news, or engaging with online government services, patrons rely on library technology to stay informed and involved. As more services and interactions move online, libraries play a critical role in bridging the digital divide, especially for equity-deserving groups and individuals in small rural communities, ensuring everyone can participate fully in civic and community life.

"The library technology service has allowed me to keep up to date with news/community happenings that pertain to my work, without additional fees, or expenses which I cannot otherwise afford."

"Staff have been amazing with helping me fill out government forms."



56% reported increased community or social engagement as a result of using library technology service(s)

70% among Indigenous persons

61% among persons with disabilities

Percentage of respondents who reported increased community or social engagement, by library size:



large
57%

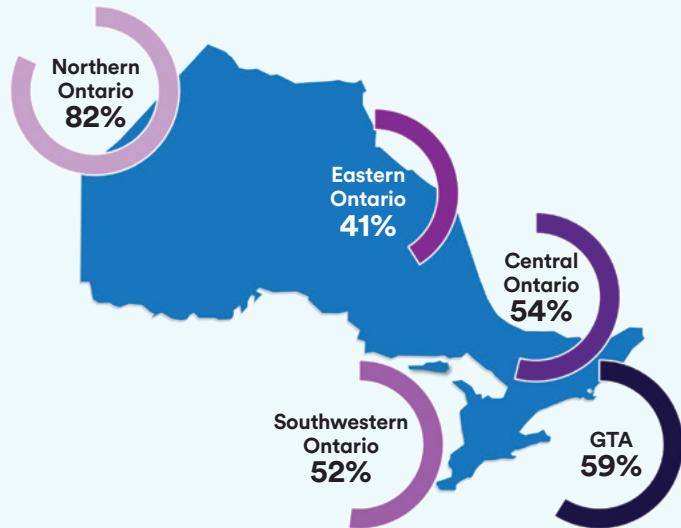


medium
51%



small
74%

Percentage of respondents who reported increased community or social engagement, by library region:



Top activities that contributed to community or social engagement:

hobbies, entertainment or social media

communication with friends or family

collaborating for research or homework

33%

30%

25%

27% reported using library technology service(s) to access online government resources

45% among Indigenous persons

42% among low-income households

31% among racial minorities

Top services or resources patrons accessed that contributed to civic engagement:

accessing government forms, applications, permits and licenses

accessing information about government officials or agencies

accessing government programs or services

38%

25%

21%

creativity and innovation

Library technology fosters innovation and creative expression.

The results show that Ontario public libraries are hubs of creativity and innovation, offering access to cutting-edge digital tools that empower both emerging and experienced creators. From audio and video production to design software and makerspaces, libraries provide the resources and support that spark new ideas, foster collaboration and bring creative visions to life. These opportunities are especially transformative for equity-deserving communities and Northern Ontario libraries, where access to such technology might otherwise be limited.

"I really like that the library offers various workshops and has specialists that are well-versed in a variety of skills. It's super helpful for learning new skills and moving towards my personal goals of making and editing music!"



31% reported using library technology service(s) to make creative products

56% among Indigenous persons

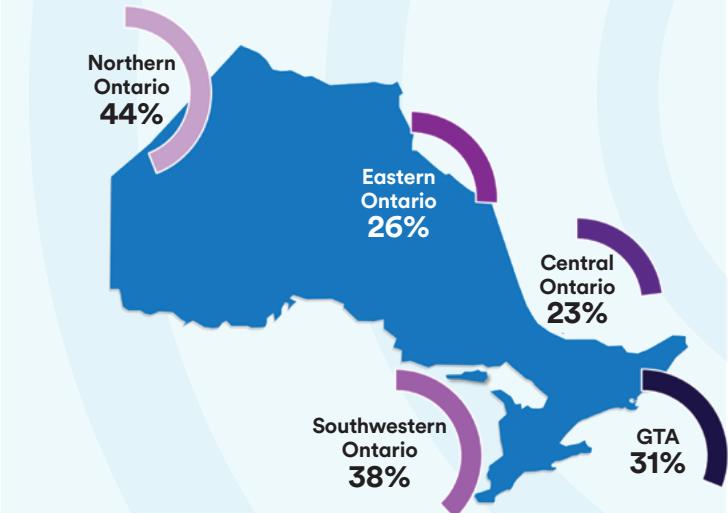
51% among gender minorities

39% among youth

Percentage of respondents who reported making creative products, by library size:



Percentage of respondents who reported making creative products, by library region:



Top creative products technology was used for:

photo or image editing

23%

fabrication & manufacturing

22%

3D printing or modeling

18%

secondary outcomes

workforce development

Library technology facilitates education and helps to bridge the homework gap.

The results show that by providing reliable access to devices, internet and digital learning tools, public libraries help learners of all ages succeed in school, build essential skills and thrive in an increasingly connected world. These services play a crucial role in closing the homework gap and supporting lifelong learning across Ontario's communities.

"Hello! I am a library addict so that means I love going to the library often! I do suffer from mental issues and illness's so coming here helps get my homework and drawings here and having available staff and computers when maybe my laptop is dead or so on forth I do appreciate all the help..."

"The wifi in the library helped me complete my homework on many occasions."

35% reported using library technology service(s) for educational activities

55% among Indigenous persons

52% among newcomers

49% among racial minorities

90% of these same respondents reported success in advancing their education as a result of library access

Top educational activities library technology was used for:

taking an online class, workshop or test

completing coursework or homework

taking a degree or certificate program

42%

33%

24%



Library technology enables employable skills and supports the various stages of the job search process.

The results show that Ontario public libraries help people of all ages upgrade their skills, pursue career goals and secure meaningful employment. Technology services at libraries empower individuals to build long-term economic resilience, contributing to stronger communities and a more inclusive Ontario economy.

"[The Library] provides the technology I could not afford to learn new skills, expanding potential career paths (e.g. 3D printing and movie making). Basic training courses/certs for technology use such as Adobe Photoshop certs or Excel etc."

"My family depends on me as the breadwinner. I have been able to upgrade my skills and find employment by utilizing library resources without which I do not think I could have pulled it off."

28% reported using library technology service(s) to develop employable skills or meet career goals

57% among Indigenous persons

44% among racial minorities

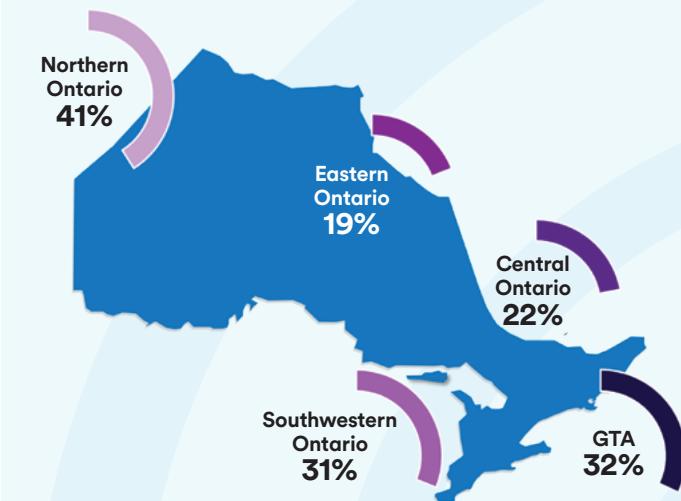
36% among low-income households

77% of these same respondents reported success in advancing their employable skills or career goals as a result of library access

Percentage of respondents who reported developing employable skills or career goals, by library size:



Percentage of respondents who reported developing employable skills or career goals, by library region:



Top employment skills or career goals library technology was used for:



21% reported using library technology service(s) to develop skills related to finding employment

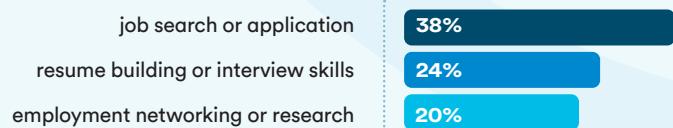
38% among low-income households

34% among Indigenous persons

33% among newcomers

52% of these same respondents reported success in finding employment as a result of library access

Top employment outcomes library technology was used for:



acknowledgements

Prepared by Toronto Public Library

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Blind River Public Library	Marathon Public Library	Port Colborne Public Library
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Clarence-Rockland Public Library	Mississauga Public Library	Toronto Public Library
Guelph Public Library	Newmarket Public Library	Vaughan Public Library
Huron County Public Library	Norfolk County Public Library	West Perth Public Library
Innisfil ideaLAB & Public Library	Oshawa Public Library	
Kawartha Lakes Public Library	Perth and District Union Public Library	

In total, 22 libraries participated in Bridge over 2023 and 2024 and contributed data for this report. Of these, 7 were large libraries (serving a population over 175,000), 12 were medium-sized libraries (serving a population between 15,000 to 175,000) and 3 were small libraries (serving a population less than 15,000).

In terms of geographic distribution, 2 were located in Northern Ontario, 2 in Eastern Ontario, 7 in Central Ontario, 6 in Southwestern Ontario and 5 in the Greater Toronto Area. These partner libraries generously provided input throughout their participation and implemented the Bridge data solution platform in their communities.

Photos courtesy of:

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