

VI. General (state funds), Miscellaneous Revenue, and Library Services Improvement Fund (LSIF)
B. Program – Digital Inclusion at Your Library Survey Report – Information item

As the Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL) embarks on a pivotal period of work on statewide digital inclusion initiatives, it continues to seek insight and feedback from library partners. In February 2024, the ICfL emailed a survey to 107 Idaho public library directors. Ninety-three (87%) of the libraries responded.

Most of the survey questions mirrored those sent to the libraries in February 2022. The resulting data comparisons offer a snapshot of statewide trends in a time of ongoing transformation for libraries. The responses also illustrate the many ways Idaho libraries support their communities through digital access services and programs.

The full **2024 Digital Inclusion at Your Library Survey Report** is attached below.

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Introduction

As the Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL) embarks on a pivotal period of work on statewide digital inclusion initiatives, insight and feedback from library partners is critical.

In February 2024, the ICfL emailed a survey to 107 Idaho public library directors. Ninety-three (87%) of the libraries responded.

Most of the survey questions mirrored those sent to the libraries in February 2022. The resulting data comparisons offer a snapshot of statewide trends in a time of ongoing transformation for libraries. The responses also illustrate the many ways Idaho libraries support their communities through digital access services and programs.

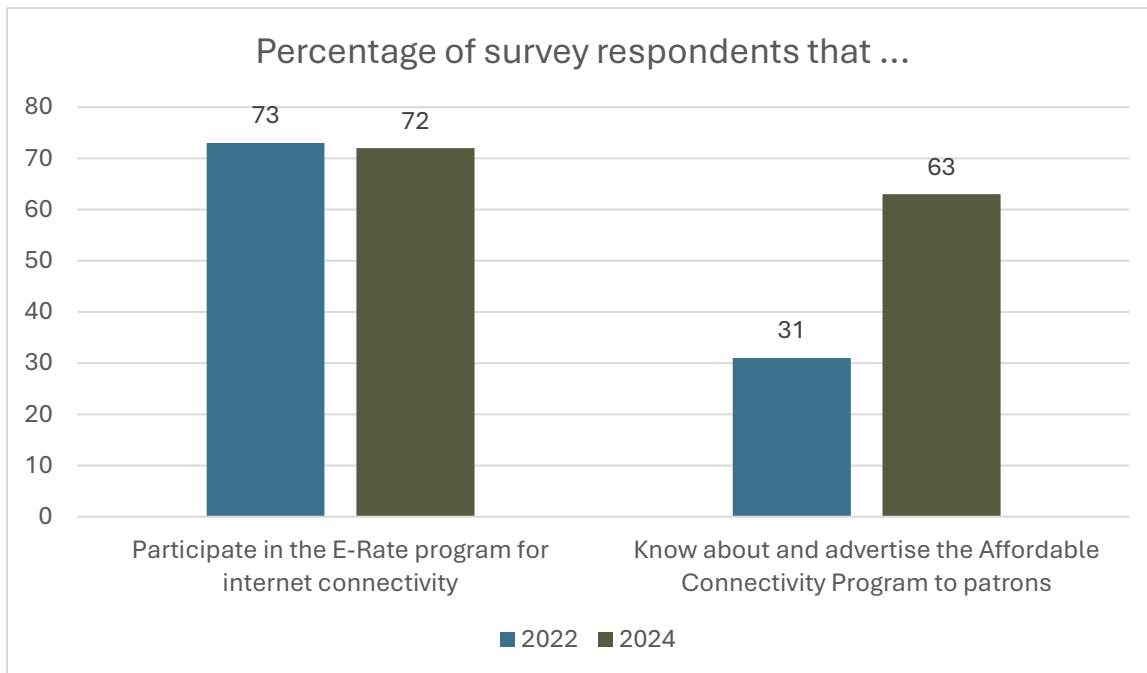
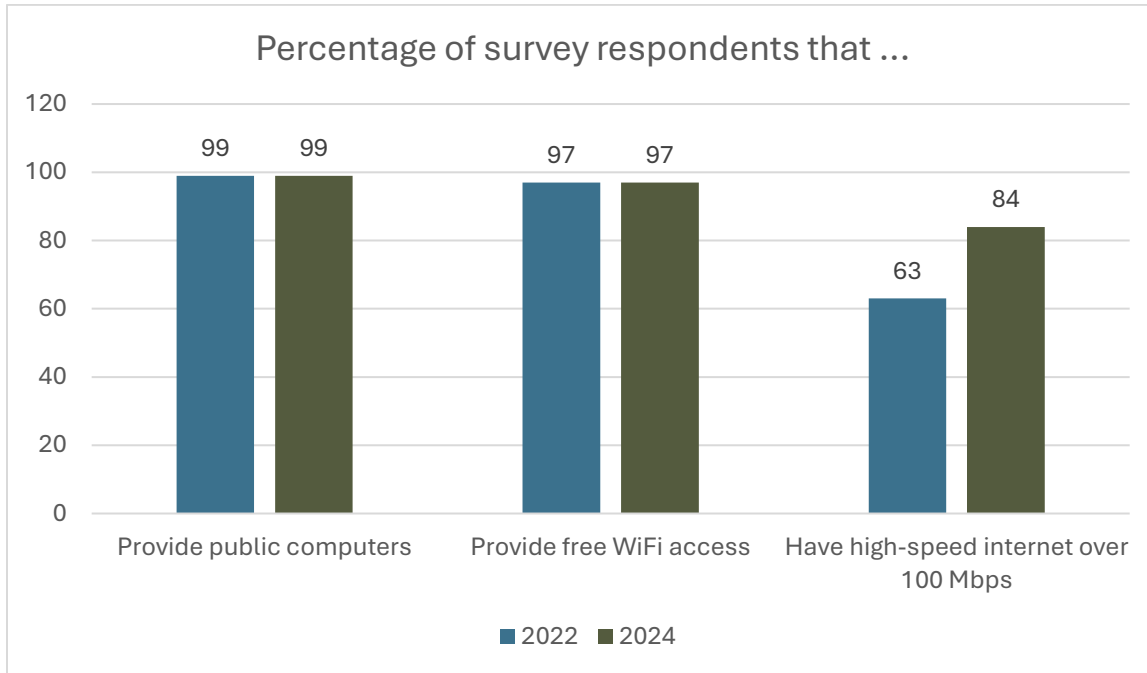
Key findings include

- An increase in the number of libraries offering high-speed internet over 100 Mbps – From 63% of respondents in 2022 to 84% in 2024
- Increases in the number of survey respondents supporting patrons by ...
 - Lending laptops for patrons to take home (15% to 23%)
 - Lending tablets for patrons to take home (10% to 17%) or use at the library (33% to 44%)
 - Providing telehealth availability (12% to 26%)
- Significant increases in various avenues of digital literacy training and support, including:
 - Formal programs or classes on technology and related skills (24% to 32%)
 - Digital literacy training resources (21% to 39%)
 - Informal, one-on-one training or assistance on technology and related skills (70% to 80%)
 - Tech classes for the general public (15% to 27%)
 - Digital inclusion training for staff (7% to 19%), including resources for staff to learn digital inclusion and technology at their own pace (29% to 39%)
- Shifting focus away from online homework resources (decreasing from 35% to 29%) or assistance through services such as tutor.com or brainfuse.com (18% to 8%). However, several libraries reported directing patrons to homework resources provided through the ICfL, including Niche Academy and Libraries Linking Idaho (LiLI) databases.

The following report summarizes findings from the full survey.

Affordable, Robust Broadband Internet

Public libraries continue to excel at providing free access to public computers and wireless internet.

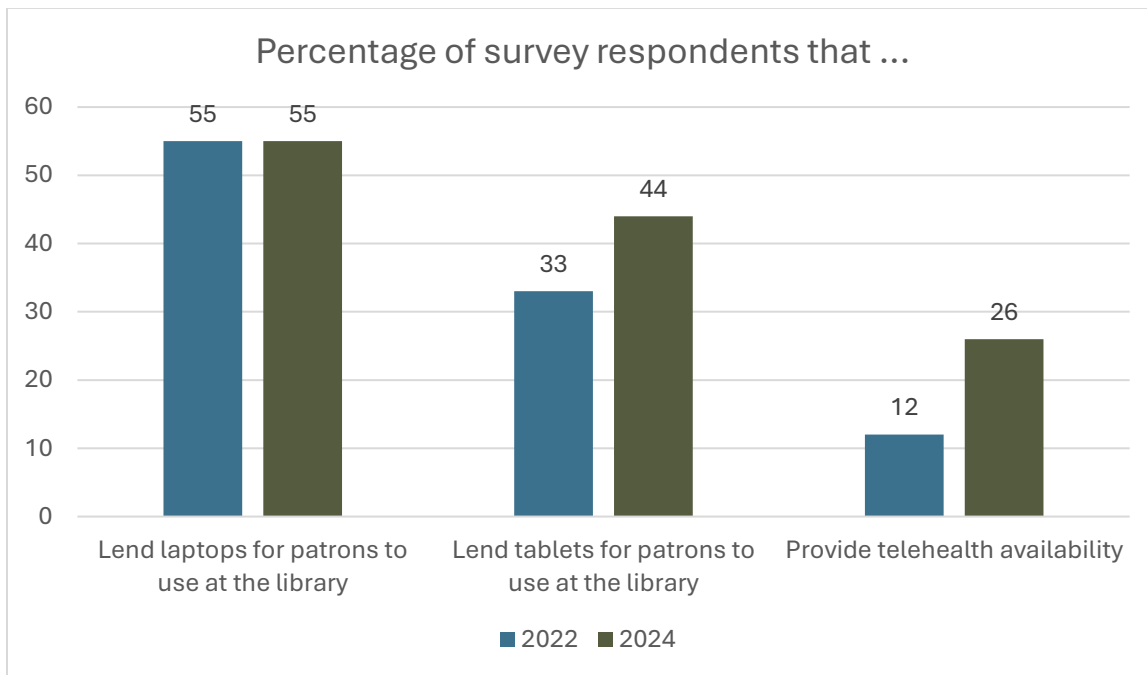
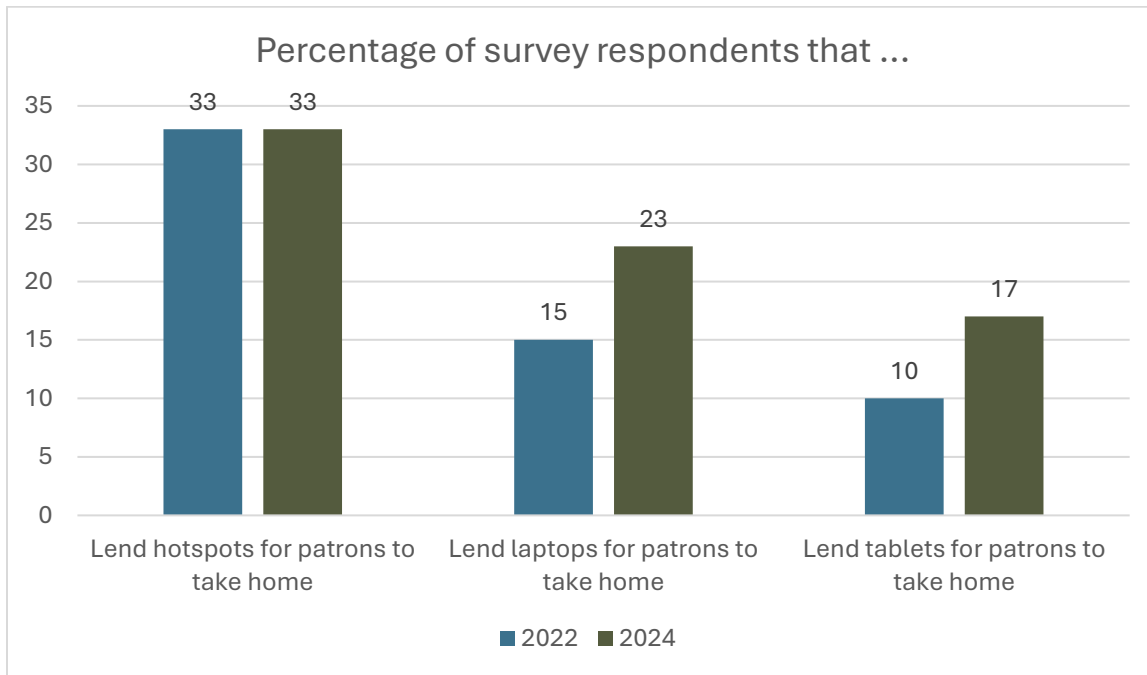


Most of the libraries reported participating in the federal **E-Rate** program, which offers discounts on specified internet, telecommunications, and equipment costs for eligible schools and libraries. E-Rate support has allowed many libraries to upgrade from antiquated DSL or wireless connections to fiber. This is reflected in the increased percentage of libraries offering high-speed internet.

Additionally, the ICfL is responsible for distributing internet service cost reimbursements to public libraries through Idaho's **Education Opportunity Resource (EOR)** Act. EOR reimbursements cover the internet service costs that remain after E-Rate discounts.

Though libraries stepped up promotion of the Affordable Connectivity Program between 2022 and 2024, the federal program ended in June 2024 due to a lack of additional funding from Congress. The federal **Lifeline** program is an alternative resource to assist low-income households with phone and internet costs. This benefit provides eligible consumers with a monthly discount of up to \$9.25. Consumers living on Tribal lands are eligible for an enhanced discount of up to \$34.25 per month.

Internet-Enabled Devices



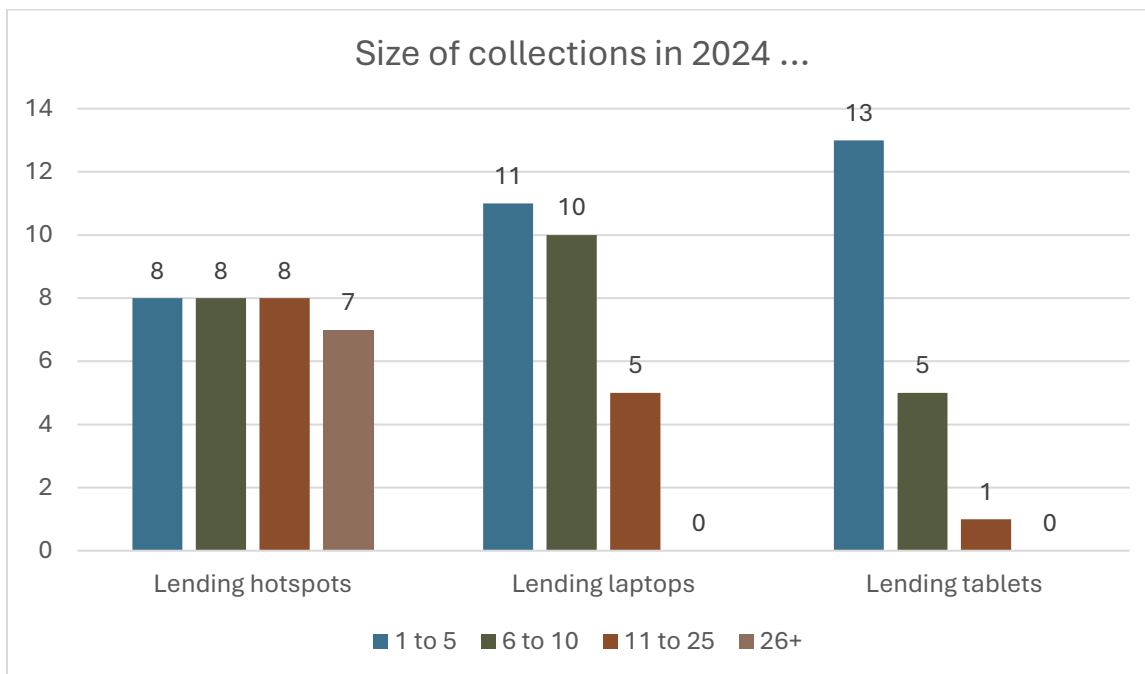
Telehealth is an area of increasing focus for Idaho libraries and the ICfL. Libraries are well-positioned to serve as connection points for patrons and health care providers, offering reliable internet, appropriate devices, tech assistance, and private spaces necessary for virtual appointments. This is especially critical in rural, remote areas of

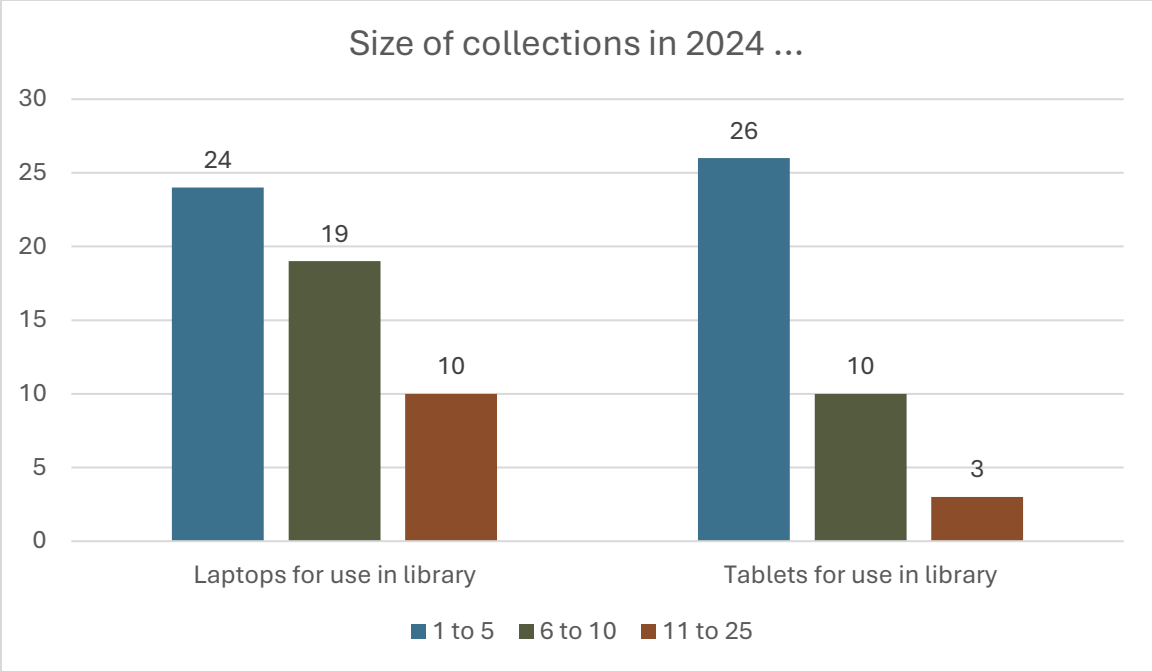
the state. Forty libraries across Idaho have established or are in the process of setting up dedicated telehealth spaces. A guide for getting started at your own library is available on the ICfL website: libraries.idaho.gov/telehealth/toolkit.

Despite these initiatives, space remains a challenge for many public libraries. More than half of survey respondents – 53% – do not have a dedicated space for telehealth, workforce development, and educational needs. Another 43% reported having one to five dedicated spaces for these purposes.

Device Collections

The ICfL also collected details about the size of library hotspot, laptop, and tablet collections. The following charts show the breakdown of collection sizes among the libraries that reported offering those resources.





The ICfL’s **Connecting Communities Digital Inclusion Program** supports public libraries in equipping patrons with devices and digital skills. In fall 2022 and summer 2023, the ICfL distributed a total of 310 Chromebooks to 19 libraries. Those libraries then utilized the devices at their locations or gave them to community members to keep after those individuals completed basic technology and cybersecurity training.

Digital Literacy Support and Training

Public library staff are accustomed to assisting community members with technology questions. Survey respondents said patrons frequently request help with:

- Accessing email accounts
- Printing documents, especially ...
 - Formatting documents for printing
 - Wireless printing from phones
 - Printing from email
- Scanning
- Setting up phones and devices
- Searching for jobs, submitting job applications, and formatting application materials such as résumés
- Navigating government websites to print and submit forms
- Using the Libby app to access OverDrive e-books and audiobooks. More than 90% of Idaho public libraries utilize Libby/Overdrive.

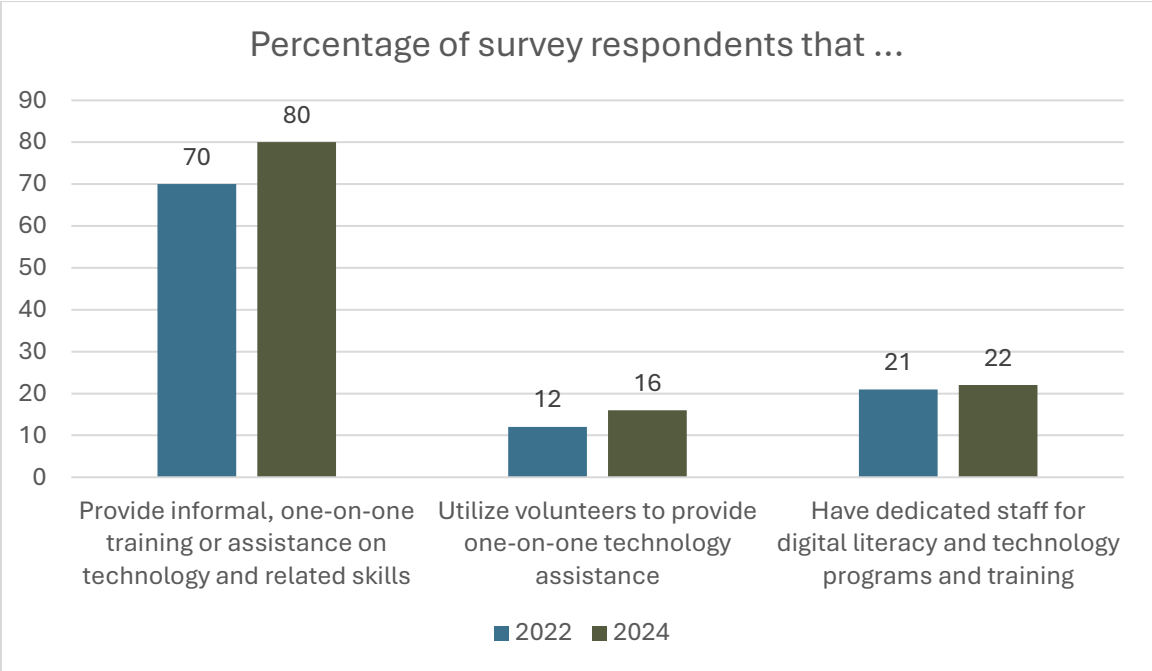
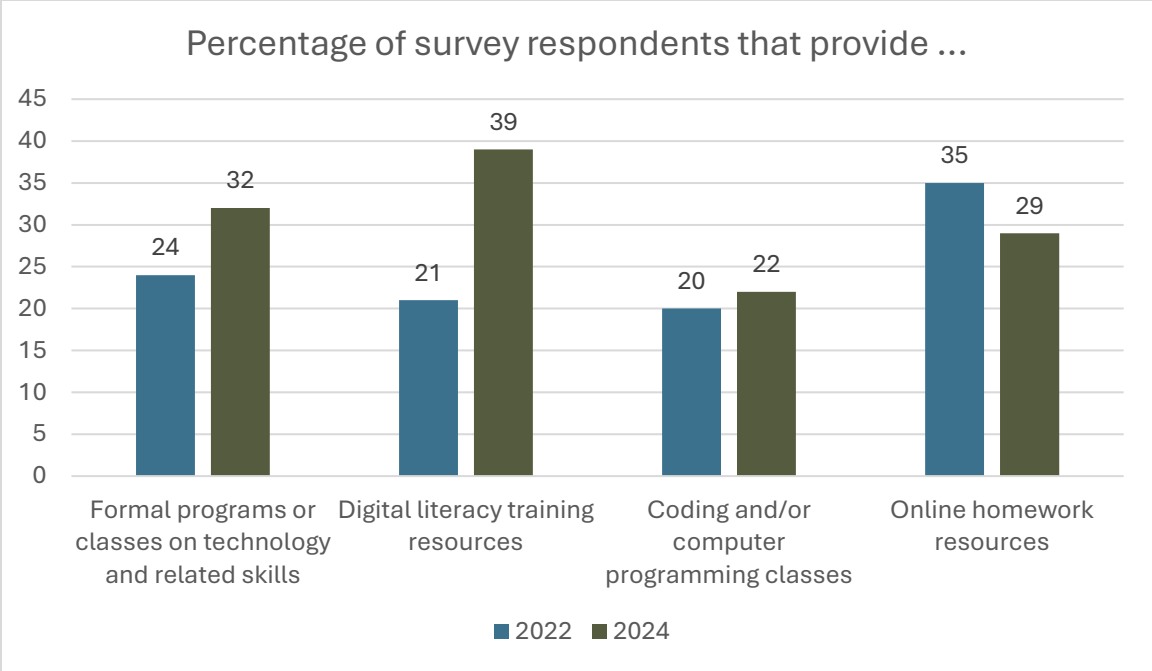
One survey respondent summarized that patrons need assistance “understanding the landscape that runs our world, from basic internet hygiene to how to do online banking/shopping”

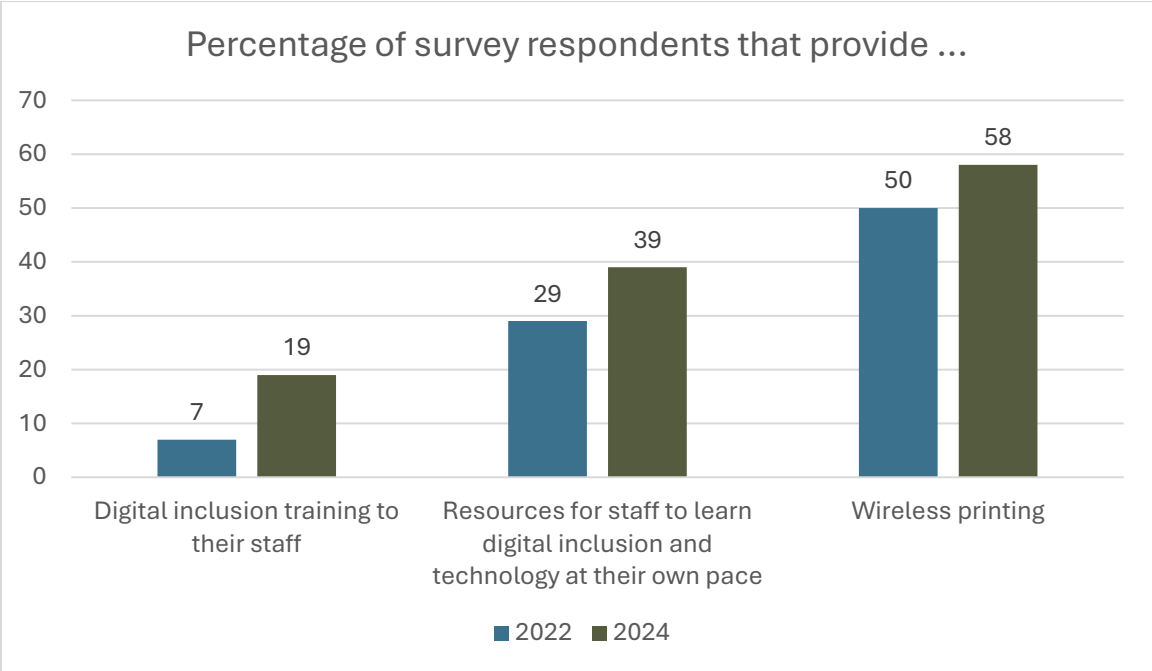
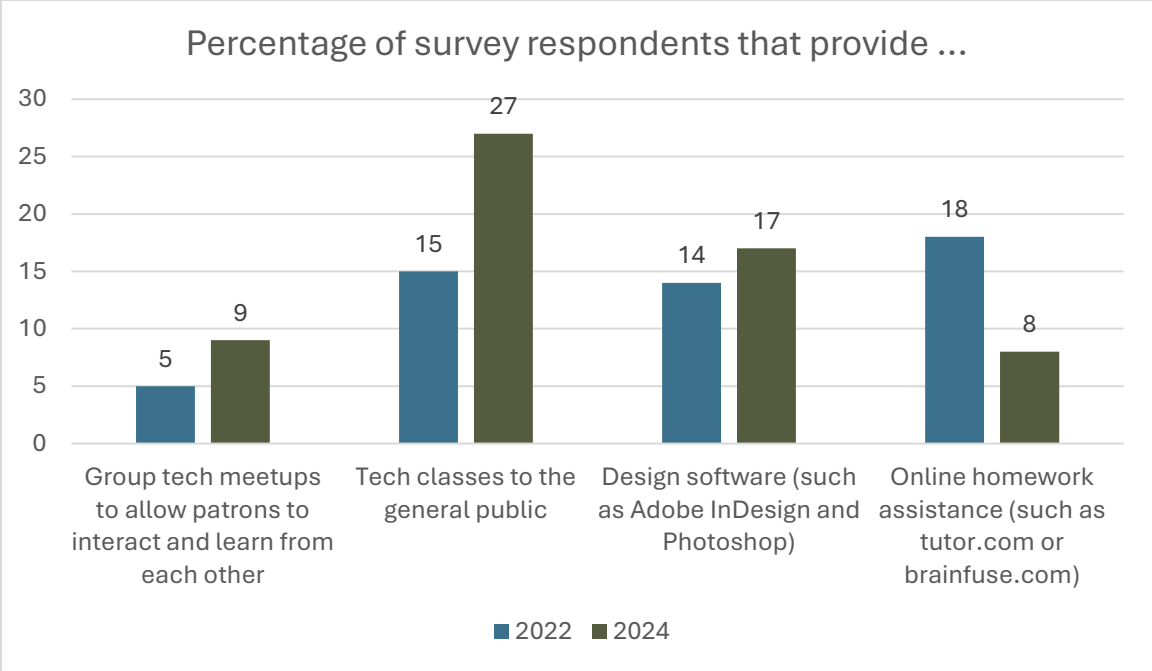


The avenues for supporting patrons vary across libraries. Many reported focusing on one-on-one tech assistance. Others collaborate with community partners – such as a school district, community college, and organizations focused on seniors – to offer formal technology classes. Libraries offering coding and computer programming classes reported focusing on children and teens.

Libraries also reported relying on resources provided by the ICfL:

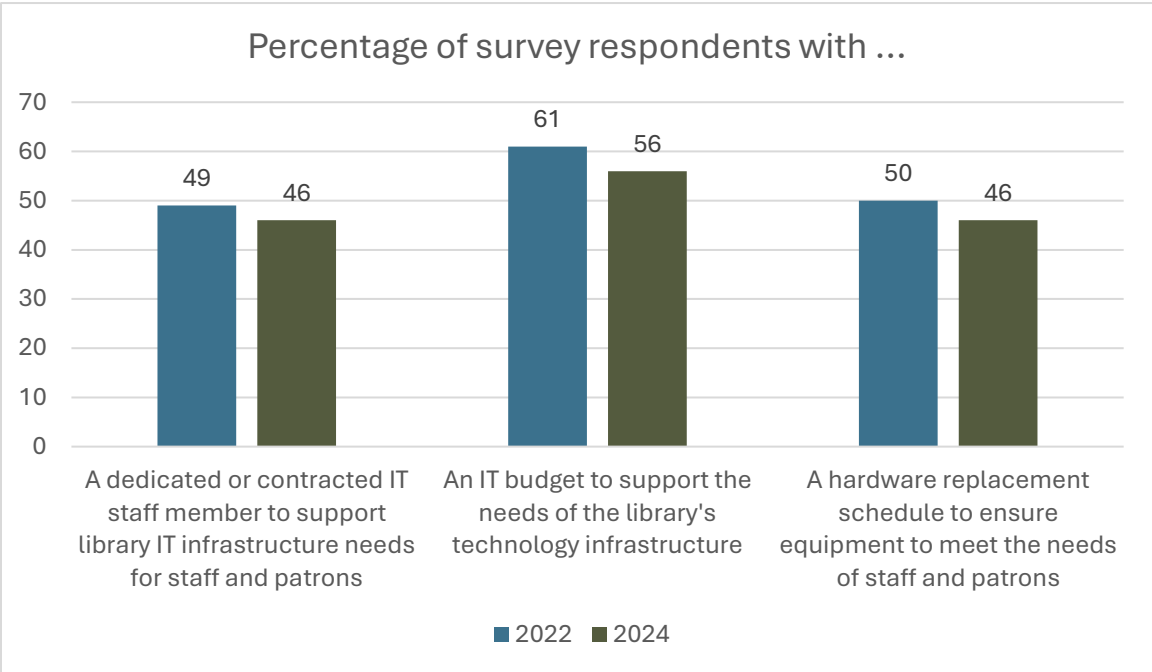
- **IdahoDigitalSkills.org** offers free online learning tools about everything from using a mouse to applying for jobs online.
- Statewide **Digital Navigators** provide personalized tech help through one-on-one appointments.
- **Niche Academy** hosts interactive online tutorials. The ICfL uses this platform to curate and create trainings for library staff. Several survey respondents said they utilize Niche Academy for employee digital inclusion training.
- **Libraries Linking Idaho (LiLI) databases** provide Idahoans with free access to quality articles, magazines, newspapers, professional journals, reference books, and more. This includes **LearningExpress Library**, a collection of test preparation tools, skill-building materials, and career resources noted by survey respondents. Libraries reported directing patrons to LiLI for homework resources.





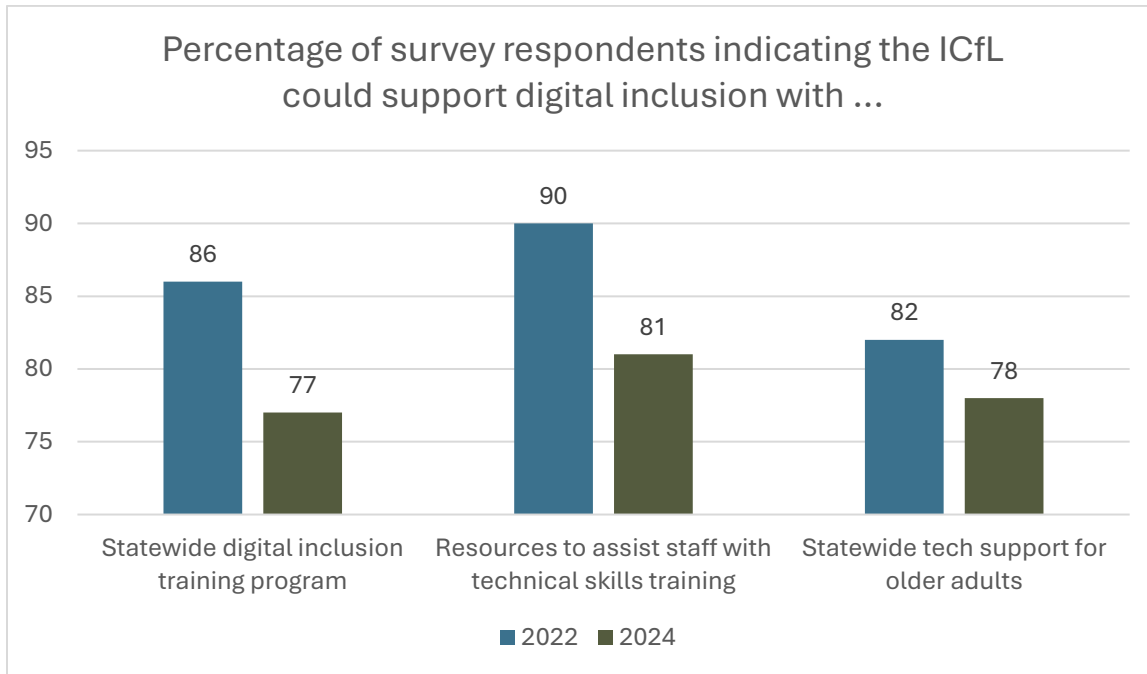
IT Structure

IT support varies widely among libraries – ranging from a dedicated library IT team and budget to city support to contract work. An equipment replacement cycle of three to five years was common among respondents.

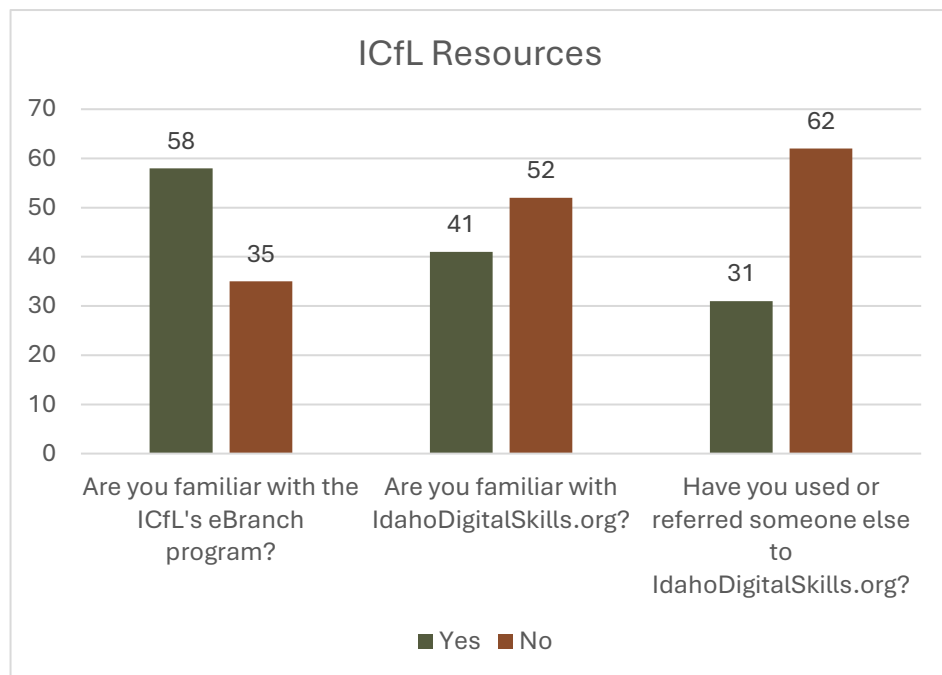


ICfL Opportunities

The survey responses also indicated ways the ICfL can continue supporting libraries in digital inclusion efforts.



The ICfL's **eBranch** program assists Idaho libraries in having an online presence. The ICfL currently assists 101 libraries or consortiums with website hosting, templates, and ongoing support.



What's Next for the ICfL and Digital Inclusion

Idaho's first 5-year, statewide digital access plan was approved by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) in February 2024. The **Digital Access for All Idahoans (DAAI) Plan** aims to ensure Idahoans have access to information and communication technology vital for life in the 21st century. The plan outlines a vision for increasing broadband affordability for Idahoans, as well as improving digital skills, cybersecurity awareness, access to devices, technical support, and access to public services.

Some Idahoans face especially steep barriers to digital access because they have traditionally been excluded from the benefits of technological advances. The DAAI plan includes specific populations that are covered by the Digital Equity Act of 2021 and considers the unique barriers and solutions for each covered population. The DAAI covered populations are households below 150% of the federal poverty level, aging individuals, incarcerated individuals, veterans, individuals with disabilities, individuals with a language barrier, individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, and individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.

The ICfL is the lead state agency tasked with implementing the DAAI plan in the coming years. The ICfL plans to offer three subgrant programs for libraries and others to tackle digital inclusion issues in their communities. These programs will target digital skills, cybersecurity, technical support, and device access.

This work aligns with other strategic planning efforts in Idaho to address digital access in sectors such as economic and workforce development, education, health, civic and social engagement, and public services. This plan aligns with the Idaho Department of Commerce's Office of Broadband Link Up Idaho Initiative Five-Year Action Plan and local digital equity plans that are currently in development.

Libraries across the state are key partners in this unprecedented effort to address the digital divide. Stay tuned for information about grant opportunities, workshops, resources, and much more.

You can learn more about the DAAI plan and the ICfL's digital access initiatives at libraries.idaho.gov/digital-access-for-all-idahoans.

Connect with the ICfL

For information on digital inclusion programs and services, reach out to a member of the ICfL's E-Services Team:

- Digital Access for All Idahoans Plan and Idaho Digital Skills: Digital Inclusion Consultant Chelsea Summerlin, chelsea.summerlin@libraries.idaho.gov / 208-639-4175
- E-Rate, EOR, eBranch, and library technology: Library Technology Consultant Doug Baker, doug.baker@libraries.idaho.gov / 208-639-4173
- IDEA and LiLI: E-Resources Library Consultant Marina Rose, marina.rose@libraries.idaho.gov / 208-639-4165



This publication is brought to you by the Idaho Commission for Libraries and the Digital Access for All Idahoans Plan. For more information, visit libraries.idaho.gov/digital-access-for-all-idahoans.