Community Digital Assets in Tennessee Municipalities

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Executive Summary

Introduction

A team of MTAS staff conducted an evaluation of the digital assets made available to the community in each city across the state of Tennessee. The purpose of this study is to identify and document digital assets and resources being made publicly available in Tennessee municipalities as well as identifying any trends and municipalities who may require further assistance in this area.

Methods

To gain further insight into the range of which cities have digital assets, a survey was developed and administered to 325 cities across all three grand divisions in Tennessee. A total of 127 responses were recorded, yielding a response rate of 39%. On average, 6.5% of survey invitation emails "failed to be delivered" or bounced. Initially, a lack of responses was troubling, though through additional contacts to each unresponsive city, the number of responses increased.

Once data were gathered, content analysis was used to identify patterns and trends as well as areas of success in some cities and areas of need in other cities.

Summary of Findings

The amount of free Wi-Fi offered varies greatly based on the city. In general, about 50% of cities that responded reported offering free public access to Wi-Fi within their municipality. The most reported location where cities offered free Wi-Fi was their town hall (32 responses) followed by the public library (18 responses).

Regarding computer services offered to residents, 20 cities have free public computer access in one or more municipal buildings. Three cities have computer equipment loaner programs, and six cities provide training programs for basic computer literacy to their residents.

Regarding marketing tactics for their digital access services, most cities do not make the community aware of the digital access services provided. Of the cities that do, the most common form of communication was printed materials.

Most digital access programs/services are funded by the municipal operating budget, though some mentioned their programs/services were funded by third-party programs.

When looking for the top priority areas for improvement for these cities, the most common response was having more access to the services mentioned in the survey, followed by having more grants/funding so they can provide more services to their municipalities.

Access to Free Public Wi-Fi

In the survey, the cities were asked several questions regarding their services of free public Wi-Fi. About 50% of the cities that responded offered free public access to Wi-Fi somewhere within their municipalities. Cities were then asked which buildings within their municipality had free public access to Wi-Fi. The most common response was the town hall (32 responses) followed by public libraries within their municipalities. (See Figure 1 below)
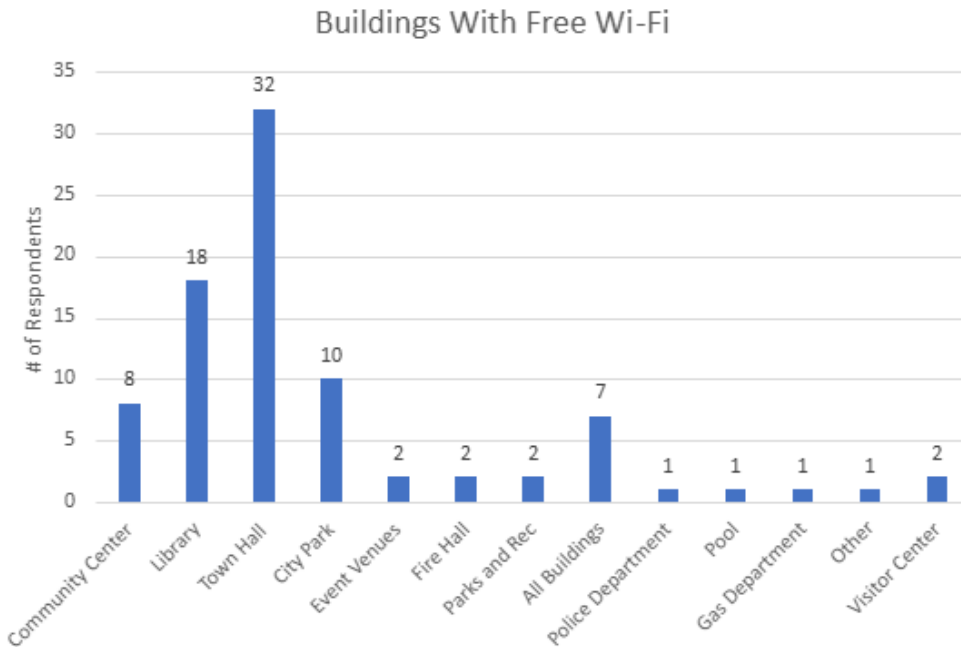
Figure 1. Public buildings with free Wi-Fi

Cities were also asked if they provided a free outdoor public wireless network. 19.35% of respondents said they offered this service to their residents (24 cities). A list of those who offer free outdoor public wireless networks is listed in Table 1 below.

Algood	Henderson	Obion
Arlington	Jefferson City	Paris
Camden	Lakesite	Pleasant HIll
Clarksville	Lewisburg	Smithville
Clinton	Linden	Sweetwater
Dayton	Lookout Mountain	Troy
Dyer	Martin	White Pine
Gleason	McLemoresville	Woodland Mills

Table 1. Cities that offer free outdoor public wireless networks

Next, we asked cities about reduced-cost broadband access. Three cities said they offered broadband access at a reduced cost to low-income residents (LaFollette, Lewisburg, Mountain City). Two cities said they offered broadband access at a reduced cost to those in public housing (Lewisburg and Mountain City).

Access to Computer Services

Cities were then asked several questions related to the computer services they offer. First, they were asked if they operate any public access computer labs in any of their municipal buildings. 20% of responding to cities reported having publicly accessible computer labs (25 cities). Those with publicly accessible computer labs are listed in Table 2 below.

Algood	Clinton	Gates	LaFollette	Mountain City
Arlington	Dayton	Gleason	Lewisburg	Oak Rdige
Bartlett	Dyersburg	Goodlettesville	Linden	Philadelphia
Camden	Englewood	Graysville	Martin	Sweetwater
Chapel Hill	Forest Hills	Henning	Mosheim	Union City

Table 2. Cities with publicly accessible computer labs

Cities were asked if they provided computer kiosks in city hall or other municipal buildings and 16% of respondents reported having computer kiosks in their city hall or other municipal buildings. The cities with computer kiosks available are listed in Table 3 below.

Atoka	Dyersburg	Goodlettesville	Martin
Bartlett	Englewood	Graysville	Oak Ridge
Camden	Farragut	Henning	Philadelphia
Clarksville	Forrest Hills	Jefferson City	Surgoinsville
Coopertown	Gleason	Lewisburg	White Pine

Table 3. Cities with publicly available computer kiosks

Cities were also asked if they have computer equipment loaner programs with three cities responded saying they did have technology loaner programs available to their residents (Martin, McLemoresville, Oak Ridge). As a follow-up, the cities who responded that they do offer computer equipment loaner programs, were then asked what type of equipment they offer for loan. Those three cities offer tablets, laptops, and hotspots as loaners to their residents.

Finally, cities were asked if they provide any training or educational opportunities on

computer literacy and six cities noted that they do provide these types of programs.

As a follow-up question, respondents were asked what topics are covered in these training and education programs. The most reported responses were the basic operations of a computer. (Arlington, Dayton, Lakeland, Martin, Mosheim, Oak Ridge) (See Figure 2 below)

Figure 2. Topics covered in training programs

Cities were also asked if they provide incentives to participate in their computer literacy programs. The city of Lakeland noted that they did offer incentives to participate in their computer literacy program. [1]

Communications about Digital Access Services

We asked respondents about how they make their communities aware of the digital access services they offer the community, and 36 cities reported having a communications program. Most often that communication is in the form of printed

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[1] https://lakelandpl.libcal.com/calendar/?cid=2787&t=d&d=0000-00-00&cal=2787&audience=109&ct=45827&inc=2

materials (either posted in a municipal building, school, or park) or through a website (school websites, city website, etc.). (See Figure 3 below)
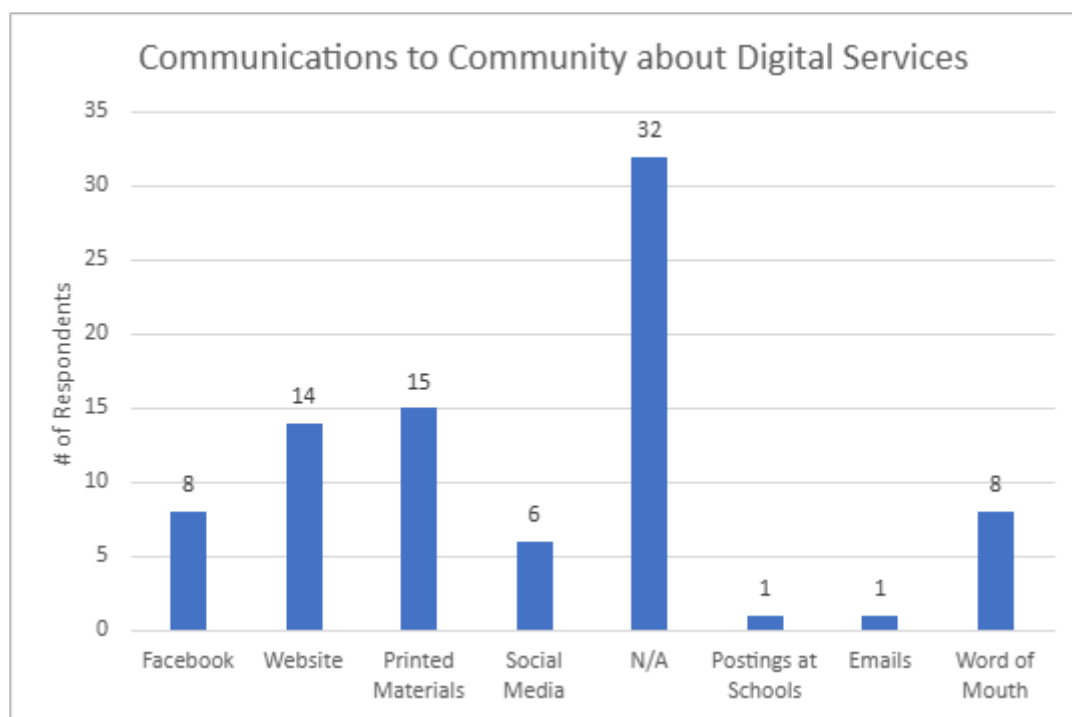

Figure 3. Communications promoting digital services

Digital Access Services Funding

Cities were also asked how their digital access programs/services are funded. 59% of respondents reported using the municipal operating budget to fund their digital access programs while 30% of respondents reported "Other" ways their digital access programs were funded. When asked to elaborate on their "Other" response, two respondents mentioned getting their funding from the regional library system, one had their digital access program donated by a broadband provider and one city got their funding from the county. (See Figure 4 below)
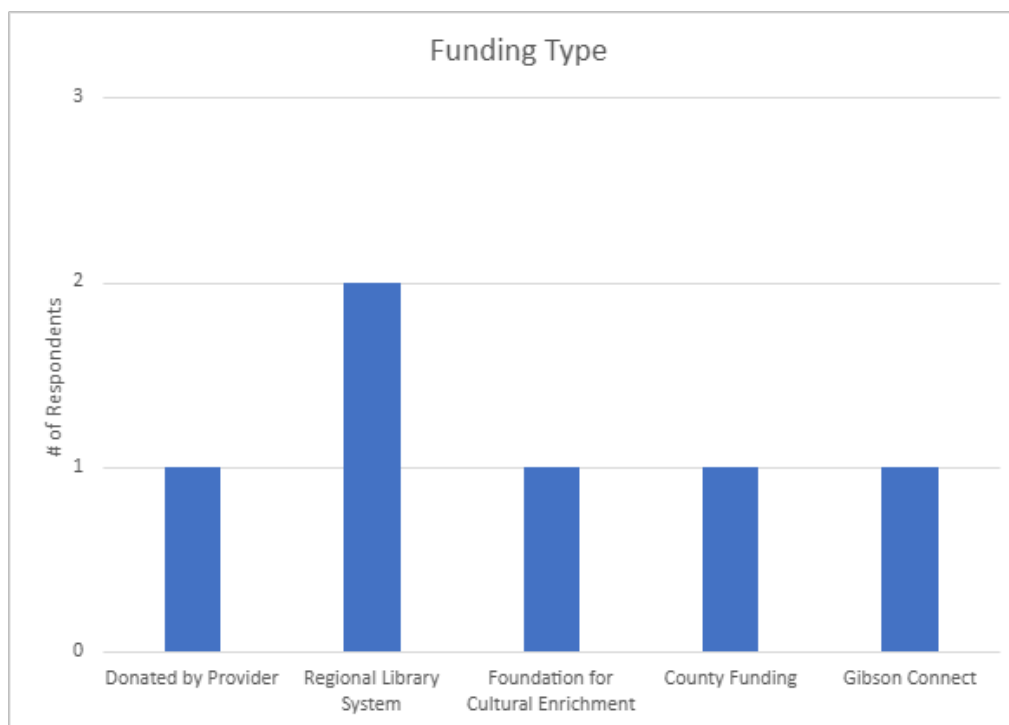
Figure 4. Funding types for digital services

Strategic Plan for Digital Access Services

Cities were also asked if they had a strategic plan or road map for the provision of digital access services and three cities responded saying they did have a strategic plan for maintaining their digital access services (Ashland City, Dayton, Henning).

Priority Areas for Improvement

Finally, we asked an open-ended question about what these cities' priorities were for improving their digital access services. After analyzing the response text, the data fell into six main categories. The category with the most response was to improve access and equipment with 35% of responses in this category which included items such as more access points, updated computers, Wi-Fi zones in downtown and parks followed by infrastructure and facilities needs and next, funding and support for the services.
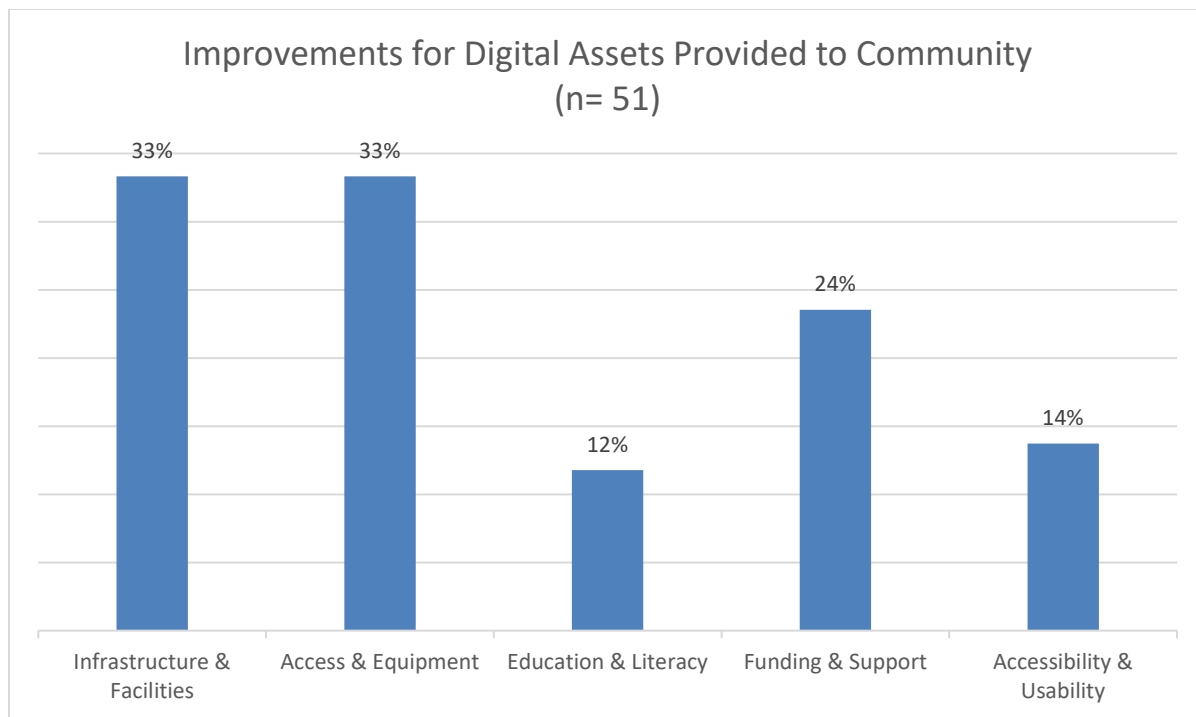
Improvements for Digital Assets Provided to Community (n= 51)

Figure 5. Priority areas for improving service provision to the community

Conclusion

In a survey completed by 127 Tennessee municipalities, roughly half indicated that they do make some type of digital assets/resources publicly available to their residents, mostly in the provision of free public Wi-Fi within certain municipal buildings/facilities. More advanced services, such as computer classes and equipment loaner programs, were not offered by most respondents. Overall, the most common source of funding for any publicly available digital resources was the municipal operating budget. Some cities that currently offer few or no publicly available digital resources expressed interest in offering such services in the future but cited a need for further information and funding.