



## MONTANANS BENEFIT FROM THE LIBRARY SERVICES AND TECHNOLOGY ACT (LSTA)

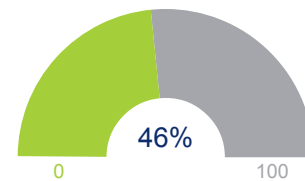
Administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, LSTA is the only federal program exclusively for libraries. Each state determines how best to use the grants based on local priorities. Montana uses LSTA funds to deliver continuing education, shared resources, and consulting services to public libraries. Three key examples include early literacy training, library Internet access, and mobile hot spot collections. Through these efforts, libraries help Montana communities thrive.

### What does LSTA mean for rural MT?

Lincoln County Libraries serves a population of 19,677 people spread across Libby, Eureka, and Troy. Every week families gather at the library for storytime where children learn, create, and make new friends in a positive environment. With support from the LSTA program, a Lincoln County librarian was able to join a "supercharged storytime" cohort. The program's curriculum focused on fundamental early literacy concepts, and the kids continue to benefit from the training she received. Last year, children and caregivers from Lincoln County participated 5,365 times in library programs designed for ages 0 to 5. After training, the librarian remarked, "storytime and early literacy is a long game." Early education is associated with positive long-term outcomes, in the classroom and beyond.

### Prioritizing Early Literacy

Fewer than half of Montana students read at or above grade level. LSTA helps tackle this serious issue.



Montana leverages LSTA funds to prioritize early literacy training and summer program development to help libraries build a foundation for literacy among the state's youngest learners. In 2023, librarians launched 5,542 research-backed early literacy programs to reach 97,744 kids. Events designed for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers empower parents and caregivers as their children's first and most important teachers so that they can prepare their kids for academic success.

### How does early literacy investment impact Montana families?

"Storytime at my library has been an amazing adventure for my granddaughter since she was 6 months old. I believe her time spent there has helped in the development of her speech and ability to interact with others. At 2 1/2, she looks forward to her time spent at her library and I am sure this experience will shape her lifetime." - Montana library patron, 2022

## More than 1 in 4 Montanans...

do not have access to 100 Megabits per second (Mbps) Internet. Montana ranks last among all states on this measure of access. 100 Mbps connections allow citizens to do Internet-intensive activities like online job interviews. Two in 10 Montanans do not have access to an Internet plan of at least 25 Mbps, the minimum broadband speed defined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

When Montanans do not have Internet access at home, they turn to their community library. In nearly 24% of Montana communities, the library is the only source of freely available Wi-Fi, making the library a vital resource for many families. Montana used LSTA and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to upgrade access and develop hot spot lending programs at libraries to meet this need. Increased Internet speeds and more stable wireless networks means more Montanans can access the Internet to achieve their goals for education, employment, and personal well-being.

## In 2023, Montanans visited the library for...

- 2,295,183 Wi-Fi sessions.
- 353,471 public computer sessions.
- 58,819 technology support sessions.

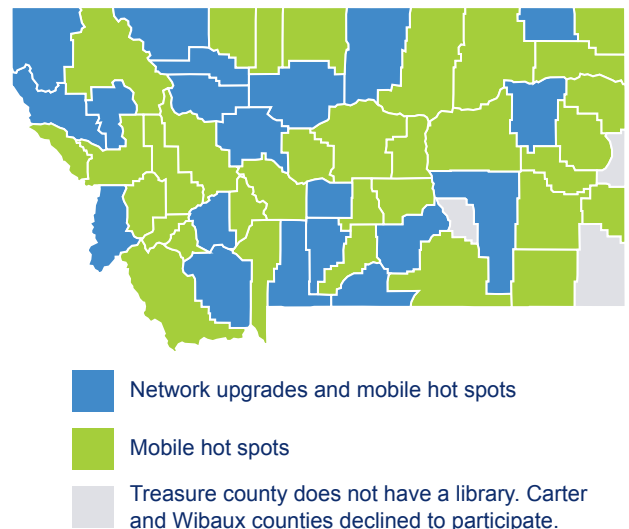
## How does library Internet and technology investment impact Montana families?

"The staff are so friendly and helpful. When I was out of work and needed to use the library computers to apply for jobs, they were so encouraging." - MT library patron, 2022

"Thank you so much - I am disabled, unable to afford wifi and being able to connect with the outside world is such a gift." - MT library patron, 2021

"Thank you for making the mobile hotspots available. We used it to live stream my uncle-in-law's funeral. He passed away unexpectedly and lots of family and friends were unable to travel to Butte for the service. With the hotspot we were able to share those moments with them even though the church did not have wifi." - MT library patron, 2021

## 53 out of 56 counties received library Internet and tech upgrades, thanks to LSTA and ARPA.



## Library Network Upgrades

In 2019, Montana State Library (MSL) commissioned a study of the broadband capacity of Montana public libraries, including subscribed broadband speeds and internal broadband capacity. The study revealed that 40% of libraries had outdated wiring and Wi-Fi equipment. MSL invested \$1.2M in federal ARPA funds to address library connectivity. Through this program, MSL installed cabling at 28 libraries and upgraded equipment at 29 libraries, resulting in more reliable networks. Libraries reported significant success from this program. Before cabling and equipment were installed, the Darby Community Library, for example, reported wired download speeds of 30 Mbps. After the project, they reported download speeds of 423 Mbps.

## Hot Spots Bridge Access

Ninety-five libraries further bridge access to the Internet in their communities by loaning hot spots. Residents in 53 counties can borrow one of more than 900 hotspots procured and supported with LSTA and ARPA funds. 48% of library hot spot users report using the devices for educational or work-related purposes such as completing homework or applying for jobs.