

Digital Literacy Education in Maine's Public Libraries

by Michelle K. Conners

ABSTRACT

In today's rapidly advancing technological environment, digital literacy skills are crucial for active engagement in society. Maine's public libraries have initiated efforts to provide digital literacy education to their communities. However, these endeavors face challenges due to inadequate resources. This study investigates how Maine's public libraries tackle digital literacy education, the required resources, and the associated opportunities and challenges. The findings highlight the urgent need for federal and state support to adequately fund digital literacy education as existing funding and staffing models struggle to meet community demands. Additionally, as digital literacy becomes indispensable for accessing essential services like medical appointments and government documents, addressing the gap between access and knowledge requires comprehensive educational initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Digital literacy education is a common service in public libraries. It may be one-on-one help sessions, classroom-like instruction, or instructional materials found in libraries or on their websites. The term digital literacy is typically attributed to author Paul Gilster from the mid-1990s (Huvila 2012). Digital literacy encompasses several subtopics. The first of these is the ability to use physical devices such as smartphones or computers. The next is the ability to use software such as word processing or photo editing. Internet navigation is another area and often includes the ability to protect personal information online, find information, and identify its accuracy. Additional internet skills include knowing how to apply for jobs and access health care. Communicating in the digital world is another component and can refer to social media, email, or messaging. Digital literacy can also include content creation, such as blogs, social media posts, and videos.

Generally speaking, digital literacy runs the gamut from basic physical manipulation of devices to deep understanding of advanced software. Despite the increased need for digital literacy skills, there are few ways for adults to acquire these skills, with the notable exception of through the offerings of public libraries. Yet, public

libraries do not always have the resources needed to fulfill this role.

METHODOLOGY

This study looks at how Maine's public libraries provide their communities with digital literacy education through interviews with library staff. Using a two-tiered strategy of a short survey followed by semistructured interviews, I sent the link to the questionnaire to Maine library listservs. Thirty-three people replied to the five-question survey. Of those 33, I conducted 19 semistructured interviews. Each participant was interviewed once. Interviews were recorded and took place via videoconference.

I used a manual coding process that I revisited several times. After the preliminary jottings and coding, I split the data, revisited codes, and lumped them together (Saldaña 2021). I approached the research through the lens of library social responsibility, a theoretical framework developed by Aliza Racelis (2018). The framework proposes a simple cycle of social justice efforts: planning and critical discourse, information justice, assistive technologies, and inclusive education. In the end, the paper touches on what I consider a central tenet of librarianship: libraries do what they can for everyone, even when they do not necessarily have the resources to do as much as they truly want. I used this framework, along with my research and interview questions, to create the a priori codes for data analysis and to help narrow my focus when coding once interviews were completed.

FINDINGS

The primary question examined in this study was, How are Maine's public libraries addressing digital literacy education? Two secondary questions were considered as well: What resources do Maine's public libraries need to deliver digital literacy education in their communities? What are the opportunities and challenges of digital literacy education in Maine's public libraries?

FIGURE 1: Participating Libraries Operating Budgets

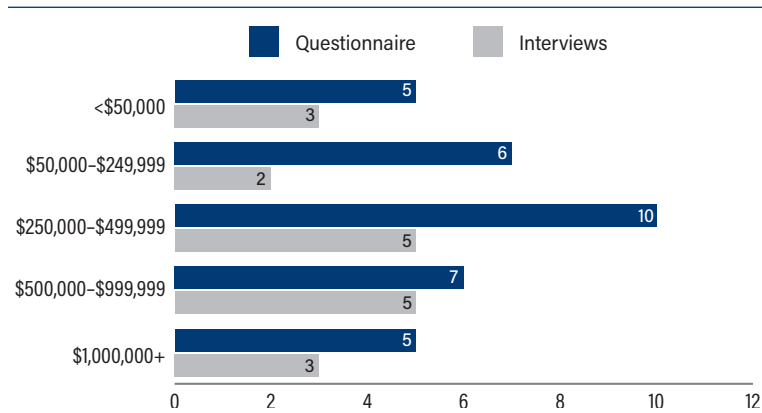


FIGURE 1: Participating Libraries Service Populations

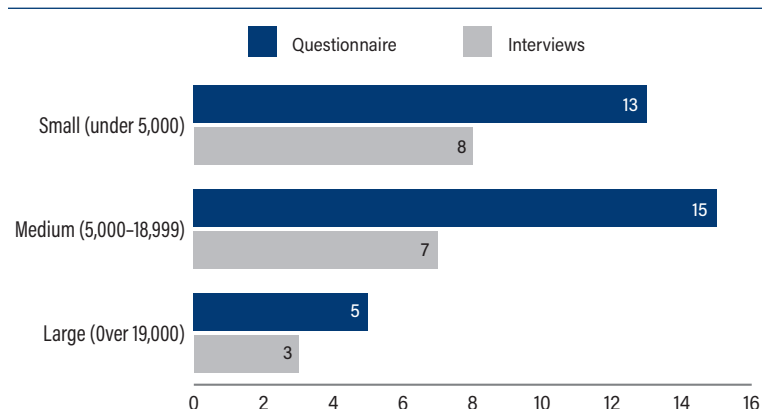
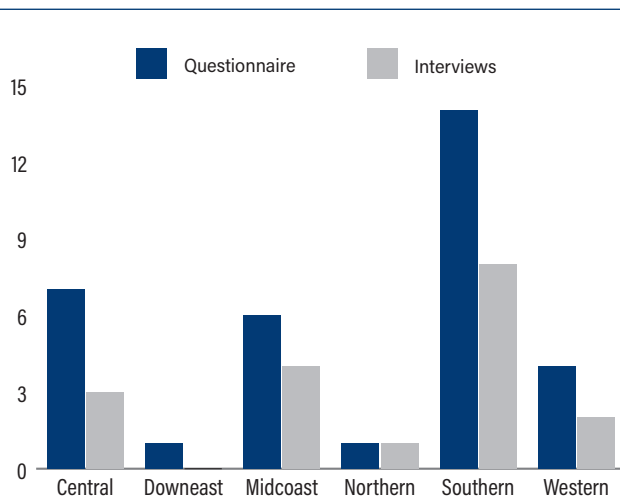


FIGURE 1: Participating Libraries Geographic Regions



Four prevailing themes related to the research questions were evident. All participants highlighted the importance of resources, whether through services, staffing, or funding. The user experience theme was universal among participants and discussed through the categories of need, ability, and gratitude. Most participants discussed the third theme, responsibility, regarding commitment, adaptability, and equity. The fourth theme, awareness, was discussed by nearly all participants, either as patrons aware of the library and what it offers or as librarians unaware that what they are performing is digital literacy education.

Resources

Services

When discussing the types of programs offered, participants referred to the definitions and digital literacy examples I provided along with the interview questions before their interview. Responses varied widely in that few spoke of the same combination of programs, but ultimately, every library offered digital literacy education. For example, libraries offered some combination of group classes, one-on-one appointments, on-the-fly help, weekly tech time, and in-person tech assistance, both scheduled and walk-in.

Most respondents felt that one-on-one was the preferred delivery method over classes because, according to one participant, “getting enough people with the same type of questions in one place at the same time seems unlikely.” In addition, library staff do not always know what people need and classes do not work for someone who needs an issue resolved at the moment. Another librarian said, “It’s hard for tech help times to be convenient for a person who’s having a tech problem that is kind of disrupting them enough that they would come asking for help about it.” One librarian offered hybrid classes, both online and in-person and recorded them for uploading to the library’s YouTube channel. Some libraries offer classes when they hear many people asking the same questions.

The decision to offer scheduled or drop-in one-on-one sessions was another discussion point. Respondents felt that drop-in programs work best because people do not show up for scheduled time slots and a specific time

for tech help did not meet everyone's needs. One library helped someone if the issue took around 5 to 15 minutes, but if it went longer, they asked the patron to schedule a time to return. And while scheduled appointments work for some patrons, others need help "right now."

Participants also talked about the kinds of things with which their patrons frequently needed help. Some people were asking how to find information on filing taxes, medical appointments, and printing. Printing from social media was a particular need. Patrons knew how to navigate social media on their phones, but when they brought it up on a desktop, they were unsure what steps to take. Other respondents mentioned patrons needed help with either telehealth or viewing their medical record, but one respondent reported not having the time to sit with them, get them online, and ensure the technology worked.

The phrase "survival type stuff," was used to cover people needing help applying for jobs and government services and setting up email accounts. Additionally, some libraries reported patrons needing guidance on basics such as Microsoft Word to create resumes and attaching files to emails. In a step beyond basics, one interviewee, however, said his library had a waiting list for their program on learning how to use databases. He also found that some patrons use technology help at his library because it was closer than going to a business like the Apple Store, even though they could afford to go elsewhere.

Libraries offer a stable Wi-Fi connection and sometimes offer assistance with setup. Many people use the library for Wi-Fi because they had poor or no connection at home. One respondent reported people using Wi-Fi from the library's parking lot. According to one interviewee, "a fair amount of remote workers...come in and use the library because their internet service that we can get here [in town] is very slow."

Across the board, patrons needed the most help with their phones. This included apps, accessing the library's Wi-Fi through their phone, and sharing photos. In addition, patrons sought help using their tablets and laptops. Two participants mentioned individuals who brought their printers to the library to emphasize their willingness to help with whatever came their way. Few participants mentioned something with which they could not help: the only example being a librarian unable to answer a patron's question because it moved into the realm of legal advice, which libraries cannot provide.

Although I did not ask participants about their digital literacy skill levels or that of their patrons, it was frequently part of their answers. Sometimes, it was brief,

such as responses that people mostly need help with basic or low-level stuff. One participant said, "Most of the digital literacy questions here are more remedial than complex." According to another librarian, her library is so focused on the basics that they ignore users who are ready for next steps. She was interested in teaching advanced material, but lacks the time and ability and said, "The need for the basic stuff is so loud and vital."

To deliver digital literacy education, libraries also need up-to-date technology and the physical space to meet with patrons. Although patrons most frequently sought help for their personal devices (e.g., phones, laptops), some individuals still use the desktop computers that belong to the library. Some librarians, however, felt they did not have enough computers to serve their community. The number of available computers limits efforts to teach computer skills and librarians try to balance good turnout with enough computer access.

Library buildings were also discussed as an obstruction in delivering digital literacy education because they sometimes make it difficult to provide services. Some libraries lack private, quiet space, or are too small to accommodate classes. Another interviewee's library was an old stone building, and although their Wi-Fi strength would typically reach the immediate areas surrounding her building, the signal could not penetrate through the walls.

Digital literacy education services were sometimes delivered in partnerships between a library and its community. Colleges, adult education programs, and non-profit organizations were all recognized as library partners in digital literacy education. One librarian reported contacting her community's adult education provider to identify the needs and gaps her library could fill. In contrast, another participant considered her library to be "the niche bridge to get people... 'over the hump' and into something else [adult education] if they need to." Collaboration can work because libraries have built-in audiences and can stream and upload presentations to YouTube. At the same time, partner organizations can provide the specific know-how. For example, one library used college students with a background in computer science to teach digital literacy classes.

Notably, when responding to the survey prompt "Briefly describe the resources you have to provide digital literacy education in your community," many librarians could only point to the intangible things they provide, as opposed to physical things such as Wi-Fi coverage or classroom space. Examples included "no shame basic skills classes for technology," "ongoing day-to-day help

with everything imaginable,” and “we provide drop-in one-on-one tech help twice a week, create how-to videos and libguides for patrons, and try to be available to assist patrons with tech help at the front desk if not busy.” Although most participants discussed organizations that came into the library to share their skills, librarians also went to the community, working with a local college to teach students about evaluating databases or with a nearby church to teach a class on how to avoid scams, for example.

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Staffing

All interviewees reported providing digital literacy education, but few libraries had staff dedicated to it. Of those with technology as part of their job title, it was only one aspect among other duties and generally affiliated with adult and reference services. What was relatively universal was that almost every staff member in the library contributed to digital literacy education, from part-time assistants to the director. Further, there was never enough staffing, even in libraries with librarians dedicated to digital literacy education. There was also a reliance on volunteers. Volunteers may be general library volunteers who are asked digital literacy questions or community members with a specialty who host a program. Lastly, the need for stronger staff education in digital literacy topics was a common thread.

When asked, “What are the greatest challenges your library faces in providing digital literacy education?” staffing rose to the top. Even participants with well-staffed reference departments said they could use more staff. On the other hand, according to responses, the likelihood of finding a librarian or someone working in the library who can assist with digital literacy education was high. Libraries understood who on staff was more knowledgeable to address certain types of questions, devices, or operating systems, and they would respond accordingly.

Multiple interviewees used “everyone” or a similar term. However, a slight difference in the wording of the full response potentially impacted the interpretation. One participant said everyone on staff could help with digital literacy education except for one person, another said all staff members could offer assistance, and third said his director expected staff to be willing and able. For other libraries, all staff members shared duties to some extent or everyone helped with digital literacy education questions.

Sometimes, questions were addressed through a hierarchy, where a question worked its way up the ladder to those with more digital skills and knowledge. One library had four full-time staff members who could respond to digital literacy questions, but technology-tutoring sessions were usually handled by the director or cataloger, who were savvier. Another library tried to funnel people to the staff person whose primary job description addressed digital literacy. A technology librarian who conducted the one-on-one technology help sessions with patrons said, “There’s definitely more demand than there is supply in terms of teaching time for it, and I try to mitigate that by directing people to the reference desk.” So, even though there was a clear chain of command in the library, the need for technology assistance was so great that she identified shorter questions that she could send to other staff members.

Maine’s public libraries often relied on subject experts to volunteer their knowledge and time for various topics, and digital literacy was no exception. One librarian described hosting programs because people from the community offered to discuss specific topics: the local police chief provided a program about avoiding scams, and a local IT consultant taught about online fraud. Other libraries reported using trustees to keep websites up-to-date and consulting with family members on IT questions.

When libraries rely on volunteer staff, it can be difficult to find volunteers with the right level of skills for direct digital literacy education. According to one respondent, “It takes a very specific volunteer to make it so that they’re not frustrated and make it useful, and who would enjoy doing that.” Some libraries promote that technology help was available while acknowledging that not every person can help.

It was not just library volunteers who struggled with the knowledge base needed to deliver digital literacy education, however; participants reported an overall need for

staff education. Some participants wanted to become more knowledgeable to be better able to train other staff members. One librarian described a community member who purchased devices for library staff so the staff could learn how to use them and then address the questions about the devices from the public. In this case, the lack of access to a specific device left the staff unable to offer much help, but once they were able to practice with it, they were more prepared.

Although the replies about libraries' digital literacy education resources focused on services, most responses to what resources were lacking mentioned staffing. "We could easily employ one person to cover the needs of our customers and community," said one respondent. Some replies mentioned staffing related to time, such as, "Honestly, the digital divide's so wide that a lot of people... need long-term, one-on-one classwork to be able to noticeably increase their skill set. So perhaps one resource we're lacking in is just simply 'time.'"

Funding

I directly asked participants whether they had funds budgeted for digital literacy education, and no one reported having funds specifically for this purpose. Most commonly, technology and programming budgets are used to purchase devices. When asked this question, one participant immediately laughed, indicating his lack of funding. He apologized quickly afterward, but given the general feedback from participants, his reaction was understandable and accurate. Concerning budgeting, some librarians considered digital literacy education part of the regular library function, absorbed into the library's normal operations. Others thought it could fall under the staff salaries or wages of the person providing the service or was nestled under the technology line in their budget or covered under their programming budget line.

Grants were the only condition under which participants reported they received designated funds for digital literacy education. At the time of this study, two grants were repeatedly discussed among participants; the first was the Public Library Association Literacy Workshop Incentive supported by AT&T, often referred to as the PLA AT&T grant, and the second was the Remote Work Through Libraries Grant through the Department of Economic and Community Development and the Maine State Library.

One library that received a PLA AT&T grant initially considered using the money to add a laptop cart, but decided against this idea because no future funding had been

secured so the library was unsure of how to replace the laptops once the original money was spent. That library ended up using the funding to expand his library's computer resources. Another library that received a PLA AT&T grant planned to turn it down because the requirements for the number of patrons needed to be reached was high, given the community's small population. Efforts to communicate with the grantors about this concern were unsuccessful. However, the Remote Work Through Libraries Grant was helping this same library create a remote shared workspace. It also assisted other libraries with infrastructure and purchasing laptops.

Some replies mentioned grants but did not provide additional details about the source of the funding: hotspots, Chromebooks, or laptops purchased through grants, for example. One participant noted they had nothing budgeted for digital literacy except through grants.

Overall, Maine librarians were addressing digital literacy education as far as their resources would allow them. Even though librarians were providing services, the participants felt they, and their libraries, could be doing more, but were limited by staff time, out-of-date technologies, and a lack of budgetary support. If those resources were provided, however, the core knowledge base was present for almost any librarian to step in and assist with digital literacy education.

User Experience

Need

Participants provided multiple examples of the ways libraries could address their communities' digital literacy needs. One participant described helping patrons with their businesses. One patron was having difficulty transferring photos from his phone to his computer for his antique business, but it turned out to be a bad cable, and the librarian was able to provide a new one. Another time, someone came in with his business laptop, which the patron believed had stopped working entirely but was just a matter of adjusting the brightness on the screen.

Not all digital literacy needs were so simple, though, particularly when the federal government was involved. For example, one librarian helped an individual get veteran's benefits, which required creating an email address and then figuring out how to reissue his social security card. In another example, a patron needed help concerning a request by the US Census Bureau about her vehicle. The patron was concerned because she was receiving notifications that she would be taken to court if she did not

comply, so the librarian confirmed that it was not a scam. He went on to say, “The questions were pretty absurd. Not only was the form difficult to fill out, they wanted questions about her vehicle that are typically filled in by a VIN number, like the curb weight of her vehicle.”

Some librarians brought up another challenge: although patrons were coming in with questions about digital literacy, they also sought social engagement. Scheduling fixed times helped minimize socialization, so librarians could remain focused on their tech session. Another challenge was that patrons recognized the need to become more adept with digital literacy, but they would hold off until something urgent came up. To this, one participant said, “It’s really hard to get people to come out for the boring stuff.”

Ability

The generally low level of many patrons’ digital literacy skills was also a factor in the user experience. Some of these patrons were highly critical of themselves. In one case, the librarian described an occasion where a patron would not attend a class because they were too embarrassed to participate. In other scenarios, patrons grew frustrated; one librarian described having one patron who was so frustrated that he could not work his phone that he became loud and belligerent. In another library, not all patrons liked it when they were required to carry out each step of the process independently as opposed to having the librarian doing it for them.

Librarians are there to teach people how to access information, not just troubleshoot an issue, so respondents felt it is important to promote independence and build confidence in their patron’s digital literacy skills. First, though, patrons need to feel comfortable enough to ask a question. One participant, for example, shared that she had a woman who was hesitant to ask for help on how to text. She told her grandchildren that she could do it and did not want to admit that she could not. Some people felt some level of confidence but not enough to move forward without the help of a librarian. In describing digital literacy as a marriage between how to manage the feelings around technology and the technology itself, one participant said, “I often think that I’m a technology therapist.”

In one library, the director emphasized the importance of providing a friendly and welcoming environment to everyone who walked in. She wanted to ensure patrons knew they could approach the desk at any time and that the librarians were there for them as a way to counter the

fear many patrons express toward technology. Other librarians reported noticing an uptick in sophisticated scams and patrons asking about them, or patrons who were curious about but wary of AI.

The delicate balance that librarians had to navigate when assisting with technology questions was clear. For example, one librarian described unintentionally making a patron feel she had been talked down to when he too quickly helped copy and rename a file for her. In contrast, another librarian spoke about how she helped a few patrons practice their skills regularly. Because of the regularity, she knew their skills levels to remain mostly hands off, but that did not stop them from seeking the same help repeatedly.

Gratitude

Patrons often expressed gratitude for a positive user experience. According to one respondent, “It’s the littlest things where people have the most gratitude.” As another librarian worked with a patron repeatedly over the years and watched her questions grow more advanced, the patron admitted, “I would never have been able to do this without you.” In another library, a patron’s son told the librarian that she worked miracles after helping this man’s father learn how to text on his iPhone.

Participants said the user experience was a common factor in addressing digital literacy education at their libraries. Most of the time, patrons who visited the library for digital literacy assistance did so due to a need, not just for entertainment purposes. These needs could be complex and, in some cases, urgent. Further, a patron’s lack of digital literacy skills could affect their confidence. Ultimately, librarians reported, despite these challenges, patrons generally felt grateful for the help they received.

Responsibility

Participants discussed responsibility in terms of commitment, adaptability, and equity. Although this theme provides examples that echo those of the user experience theme, there is more emphasis on the librarian’s involvement in and approach to the interaction. Librarians felt committed to delivering digital literacy education even when patrons were not engaged and often found the time to make a technology help session work for a patron outside of scheduled hours. They also quickly adapted to situations and were willing to “figure it out.” Equity was addressed in terms of rurality and those experiencing homelessness.

Commitment

Participants' responses showed their commitment to the issue of digital literacy education. One interviewee spoke about a type of interaction with patrons who came in for a specific reason and did not have another option. They showed up to address that one issue and wanted it solved quickly. However, these patrons did not necessarily want to put in the effort. The librarian found these interactions challenging because he wanted to provide these patrons a good experience, but the circumstances under which the patrons visited the library have already put him at a disadvantage.

In another example of commitment, one librarian held classes during hours when her library was typically closed because it was her only available time. And although most participants felt scheduled times for technology help were best, several librarians reported accommodating time outside of that for those unavailable to attend. Although the participants did not directly express this, a recurring refrain was that nobody else out there was doing digital literacy education. According to one participant, "There's no one else doing this work," and she has noticed lately "how dependent people are on the library." Similarly, another participant stated, "I love that libraries are safe places for people to ask questions that just don't really have a home elsewhere."

Adaptability

Participants described their adaptability in addressing patrons' digital literacy needs. Several respondents admitted they often did not know the answer to patrons' questions but generally they were able to figure it out as they went. One participant said that he never knew what people will need, and "it's just that ability to go, 'okay, let's learn together and figure out what you want.'" According to another participant, it is a "building-the-plane-as-you're-flying-it kind of situation where people ask these questions, and need help, and we've got to figure it out too." These responses show librarians' adaptability. For example, one librarian offered patrons scheduled one-on-one help, but as most people would drop in when they had a problem, she ended up providing point-of-use services instead. Another participant noticed a significant shift in his colleagues' approach to digital literacy assistance over just a few years. When he first started at his library, librarians hesitated to address issues, but now they do as much as they can.

Equity

Librarians discussed equity in general terms of providing digital literacy education services to their communities. The word equity itself did not come up often in the interviews, but all respondents acknowledged the nature of libraries as existing to help all kinds of people. Because the digital world can be challenging for some segments of the population, libraries step up to help those groups achieve same footing as the rest of the world. For example, one participant works at a rural library where broadband access is spotty. He pointed out that in a recent month, there were 800 users on their Wi-Fi network, about one-fifth of the town's population.

... "I love that libraries are safe places for people to ask questions that just don't really have a home elsewhere."

In another library that serves a large population, the librarian saw a wide range of needs and noted two ends of the spectrum back-to-back. One patron experiencing homelessness received help from the reference department to access veterans' benefits and eventually was able to secure housing. To thank the library, he created a sculpture as a gift. Another man was working as a lawyer and also attending senior college. He raved about the services he got from the library, from the same desk that assisted the homeless veteran.

To address equity issues, this same library received a digital literacy grant that included funding for bus tickets because transportation was a barrier to attending classes. Transportation can also be a barrier to New Mainers who want to use the library. And equity also shows up in coastal communities, where those who live along the water and those who live in rural inland sections can have different needs.

Awareness

Overall, awareness proved to be a prevailing theme for most participants. This was a term used to cover both the public's awareness of digital literacy education services at the library and librarians being unaware that they are providing digital literacy education services.

Lack of Community Awareness

Librarians often did not know how to let their communities know what they have to offer. Some participants talked about the difficulty in reaching those who were not regular technology users in a culture where so much is communicated digitally. Librarians noted all free publicity was online, and advertising digital services to the digitally illiterate was a challenge. For example, one library currently had an online survey for feedback about digital needs, but the librarian feared they would not get responses because those who were online already have baseline knowledge. Another participant speculated that people were not accessing the library for digital literacy education because they did not know the library could help in that capacity.

One librarian said although his library got many visits and many materials circulated, he thought at least 10 times more people were unaware of the library. A few participants reported that other organizations have helped get the word out about what libraries had to offer, including the National Digital Equity Center (NDEC) and adult education classes. One respondent said that recent broadband expansion efforts exposed the need for digital literacy education. However, for a librarian from southern Maine, discussion of broadband was not as helpful for her community because there was a perception that broadband coverage was good and affordable for every person in her community. She said these assumptions needed to be challenged.

Librarians' Digital Literacy Disconnect

When I asked one interviewee her first question about what digital literacy education services her library offered, she replied they had an AT&T grant-funded workshop, but prior to that, they had not offered any. After I gave her follow-up examples and definitions to clarify what digital literacy education was, she went on to say that if someone on staff could assist, they would stop what they were doing and try to do so. She also talked about how they help patrons with printing, filling out resumes, or job hunting.

In a similar conversation, when asked what digital literacy education services were in highest demand in her community, another librarian responded, "There's not really a lot that happens." Not realizing the connection, she listed the digital literacy services her library provides. Further, for almost the entirety of her interview, she was assisting a patron trying to print from her phone.

Another participant changed his career a few years ago to become a librarian. He admitted to previously not considering libraries as something he needed because he did not read fiction. Recently, he realized how much libraries had to offer, mainly regarding their services. He said, "I just think that digital literacy education is becoming synonymous with libraries." He went on to say, "I feel like this [digital literacy education] is almost the central calling of where our services and where our focus will continue and should be heading."

Participants were asked if their understanding of digital literacy changed due to their participation in this study or in the past few years, depending on their experience level and the conversation's direction. One interviewee said her understanding absolutely changed because she used to think digital literacy focused only on data and online databases. With the broader definition of digital literacy, she said, "We really do this every single day."

A librarian previously thought digital literacy was something reserved for higher education. When he first started in libraries, he thought libraries were just for kids and retirees. "But now that I see this digital literacy component, it really has answered that question in my mind, 'What do we do for adults?' It's like, 'All of this!'"

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlighted many variables that help or hinder digital literacy education in Maine's public libraries. Participants emphasized that, although the services they provide are well-received and well-attended, current funding and staffing models cannot keep up with the demands of their communities. Librarians provide digital literacy education services in a way that is adaptive to the needs and ability levels of their patrons. Working with patrons one-on-one reduces patron embarrassment and helps protect vulnerable populations. Digital literacy skills are necessary for accessing essentials services such as medical records and government documents. And when someone does not have the tools or the skills to use technology, there are few options besides the library, and even fewer of those options that come with no cost.

Policies for digital literacy education in public libraries have been largely absent. The Digital Equity Act passed in 2021 has established the most significant funding for digital literacy to date. Toward the conclusion of this project, the Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA) made available Connectivity Hub grant opportunities for which libraries are welcome to apply. They also released their

first-in-the-nation Digital Equity Plan, which recognizes libraries playing a crucial role (MCA 2024). However, due to the timing of this release, the content of this plan and the examination of grant opportunities were not considered in this study.

Federal policymakers must continue to fund state organizations like the MCA, and in turn, the MCA should expand its funding opportunities to Maine's public libraries, whether to individual libraries or through the Maine State Library. This funding should focus on digital literacy education and be ongoing and sustainable. Although the NDEC has hired digital navigators, it is important that NDEC recognizes that the public uses libraries as one-stop-shops and does not duplicate libraries' efforts. To address sustainability of funding, federal lawmakers need to pass the Digital Equity Foundation Act, first introduced in September 2022, which would establish a private charitable foundation to support digital equity through the funds raised by spectrum auctions.

Individual library-level policy is not a practical approach for Maine's public libraries. Reconfiguring current public library budgets to provide digital literacy education is not an option. Maine libraries need outside funding to avoid cannibalizing the funds from other library services to pay for digital literacy education programs. Libraries need to rely on federal policies that fund the Maine State Library and the Maine Connectivity Authority for the necessary resources.

Although they do not participate directly in policy-making, Maine librarians should increase their advocacy efforts, lending their voice to policy decisions. Library leaders should support their librarians who want to participate in advocacy, and municipalities and boards should support their library leaders in doing so. Librarians should highlight the impact digital literacy education services has on their communities through stories and statistics, not just lists of the library's services.

Library leaders should also provide opportunities for staff education specific to digital literacy education although not all Maine libraries have the resources to do so. A next step should be to create partnerships between better-resourced libraries and lesser-resourced ones. These partnerships have the potential to not only help with digital literacy education but also with other library issues as well. Further, library leaders need to ensure that they protect their staff, advising employees to create healthy barriers with their digital literacy education efforts to attend to other library matters or their emotional and mental health.

Digital literacy education has gained significant momentum in the last several years. Policymakers, however, are often unaware of the realities of digital literacy education and the roles of libraries in addressing the issue. Any policy that ignores the needs of libraries will place further burdens on them. Librarians must advocate for themselves and their libraries to reduce these burdens and guide policies to address what libraries truly need.

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Michelle Connors is the executive director at Kennebunk Free Library. This article is adapted from her recent Ph.D. dissertation of the same name. Connors loves an adventure, especially with her husband, Justin, and children, Sophia and Maximilian.