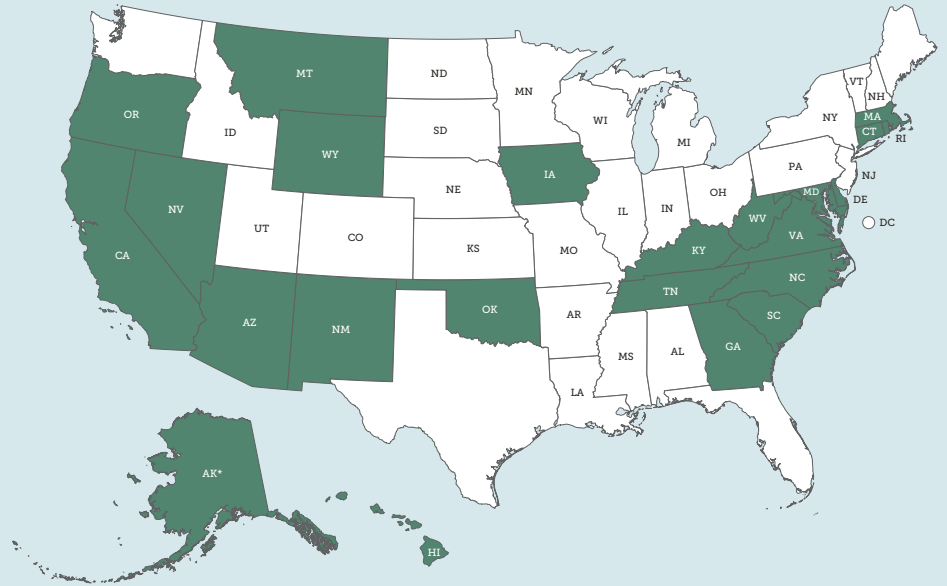


How Public Libraries Adapted to Serve Their Communities at the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 Pandemic impacted the ways public libraries serve their communities. This analysis summarizes the findings from **2,616** public libraries with a data reporting period of July 2019–June 2020 in the **23** highlighted states.¹



¹ Missing data were not imputed and libraries not responding to individual items were included in each denominator.

*Alaska has a total of 80 public libraries, but 6 were excluded from analysis because their data reporting period ended in December 2019, before the pandemic began.

As access to physical materials became limited due to closures, public libraries ensured that their patrons had access to services:



93% continued to provide services to the public even while their buildings were closed.

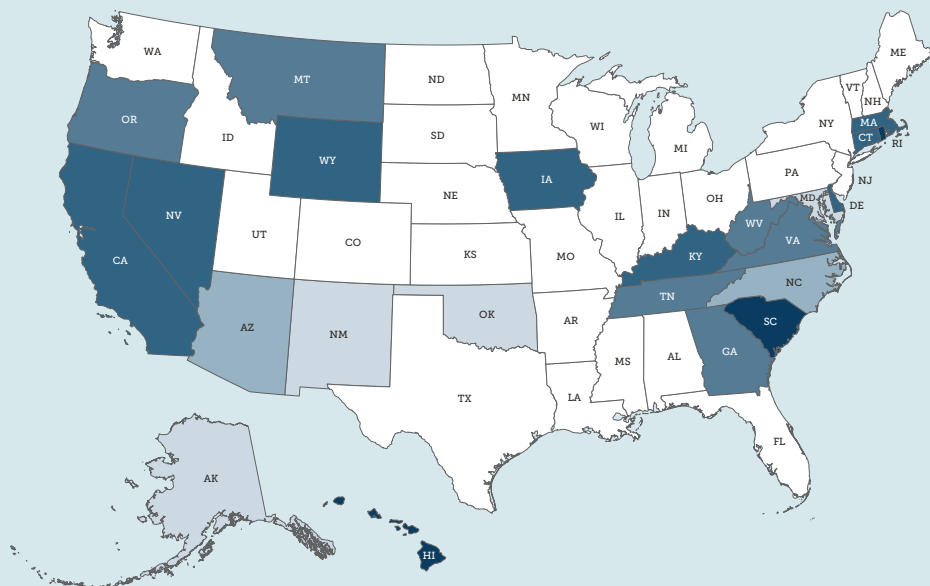


65% increased the electronic materials available to the public (e.g., e-books, downloadable audiobooks).

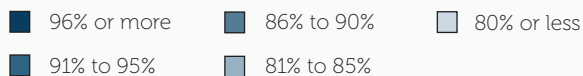
68% offered electronic library cards, more than twice as many as before the pandemic.



60% of library systems offered virtual live programs during the pandemic, and about the same proportion offered recorded program content via the Internet.



Percent of libraries that provided "outside" service for checking out physical materials at one or more buildings.



88% of libraries provided "outside" service for checking out physical materials (e.g., books, DVDs) while buildings were closed to the public.

69% provided Wi-Fi service outside the building (e.g., parking lot or mobile facilities) at one or more locations during the pandemic.

Of these libraries **44%** increased outdoor Wi-Fi access.



In addition to providing library services, some library staff assisted other agencies in providing vital community services during the pandemic.

18% of libraries reassigned their staff to work for other government agencies or nonprofit organizations.

Key Terms

- 1. Public library:** An administrative entity that (1) contains an organized collection of printed or other library materials, or a combination thereof, (2) has paid staff, (3) has an established schedule in which the services of the staff are available to the public, (4) has the facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule, and (5) is supported in whole or in part with public funds. (This definition was developed by the Federal State Cooperative System.) Public libraries may be a single location library or a multiple-branch library system.
- 2. Electronic materials:** Library materials that are distributed digitally online and can be accessed via a computer, the Internet, or a portable device such as an e-book reader. Types of electronic materials include e-books and downloadable video and audio files.
- 3. Physical materials:** Library materials that include print materials like books and government documents, audio records, audiocassettes, audio cartridges, audio discs (including audio-CD-ROMS), audio reels, talking books, and other sound recordings, and video tapes, DVDs, video CD-ROMs.