BROADBAND NETWORK / INFRASTRUCTURE FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

How does GPLS help?

Georgia Public Library Service provides consulting services to assist libraries in the evaluation and selection of Internet Service Providers for the procurement of broadband. GPLS's IT department supports libraries in conducting vendor assessments and contract negotiations and with filing for E-rate applications. GPLS funds the non-E-rated portion of broadband costs for each library system, ensuring that all patrons of Georgia's libraries, regardless of location, are afforded access to a high-speed connection to the Internet. In addition, the majority of patrons have access to a wireless network. GPLS also hosts cloud public-access computers in the majority of Georgia's libraries. The number of Internet computers for public use has increased by 29 percent in the past five years.

Along with email and Web hosting, GPLS also offers professional development and training to public library staff and a broad range of technical support for network, hardware and software technology issues.

Why do libraries need faster broadband?

Libraries are meeting the technology needs of Georgians, affording them the ability to apply for jobs and retirement benefits, get help with homework and even learn how to build a robot — and the backbone of every offering is broadband. Without adequate connectivity, not even the most basic public service is possible. While universities and technical colleges across Georgia are offering robotics and virtual reality-coding classes, those same technologies are currently available at many public libraries across the state, including more than two dozen systems with makerspaces and 3D printers and others equipped with early literacy computer stations. For those systems without makerspaces of their own, GPLS provides access to five Technology Loaner Kits (including one with a 3D printer), which 42 systems checked out for a total of 88 weeks during FY2016.

What have libraries done with faster speeds?

Libraries in Georgia empower their communities, support job seekers and provide educational opportunities for all ages. Faster speeds have allowed libraries to move to cloud computing — a faster, cheaper alternative to bulky desktops and expensive software. These savings have allowed public libraries to add more public-access computers, further decreasing wait time.

■ Employment

A librarian from the Chattahoochee Valley Libraries *(upgraded from 6.25Mbps to 100Mbps)* recently noticed a patron seeming lost while trying to navigate a public-access computer. The gentleman was a carpenter who had never before written a resume. Within the hour, the librarian helped him complete and upload one. Two weeks later, he returned to thank the librarian for helping him get the job.

■ Community Engagement

The Brooks County Public Library *(upgraded from 4Mbps to 100Mbps)* now serves as the community's connection to state and local services. With its high-speed connection, the library is the go-to place for printing forms, such as pay stubs and legal documents, and for online sign-ups, including job applications and those for government programs such as Social Security (the nearest local office for which is in Valdosta).

■ Education

At the Athens Regional Library *(upgraded from 4Mbps to 100Mbps)*, a mother recently confided in a librarian that she was worried that her daughters were not going to be able to pass the state's third grade criterion-referenced competency tests (CRCT). The library provided access to online practice exams that indicated the girls indeed needed more tutoring. The library arranged for assistance from university volunteers who worked with them, helping both girls pass every section of the CRCT.

High-speed broadband connections are instrumental in Georgia public libraries' roles as community resource centers, enabling them to provide almost limitless educational and innovation opportunities for all residents.

Bridging the 'digital divide' in Georgia

■ Average broadband speed across the state ranges between 50-70Mbps.

■ The minimum broadband speed in Georgia, even in the most remote locations, is 10Mbps.

■ The maximum broadband speed at Georgia's public libraries is 1Gbps!