



MEMO

To: MSL Commissioners
From: Jennie Stapp, State Librarian
Subject: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARPA) final report
Date: April 1, 2023

The Montana State Library (MSL) is pleased to share the outcomes of the investment of \$2.2M in federal ARPA dollars that were awarded to the Montana State Library (MSL) by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The ARPA was passed by Congress during the 2021 Montana Legislative Session and, as such, the \$2.2M award was appropriated to MSL by the Legislature in two tranches, broadband access, and e-content.

MSL enhanced internet access for Montanans to and through libraries by offering a hot spot lending program through public and school libraries and by upgrading the wiring and networking equipment in libraries to support higher internet speeds for library patrons.

MSL also procured and created electronic information resources to support lifelong learning through public, K-12 and academic libraries. In addition to procuring ebooks, e-audio and research databases, MSL partnered with the Foundation for Montana History to fund to Montana digital collections, and digitized Montana laws dating to 1871.

More information follows and is also available online at: [COVID-Related Funding & Expenditures \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com).

American Rescue Plan Act

Montana Library Connectivity

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 allows citizens to do internet-intensive activities like online job interviews. **2 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).

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 FY 2022, Montanans visited the library for...



1,456,050 Wi-Fi
sessions



290,708 public
computer sessions



52,160 technology
assistance sessions

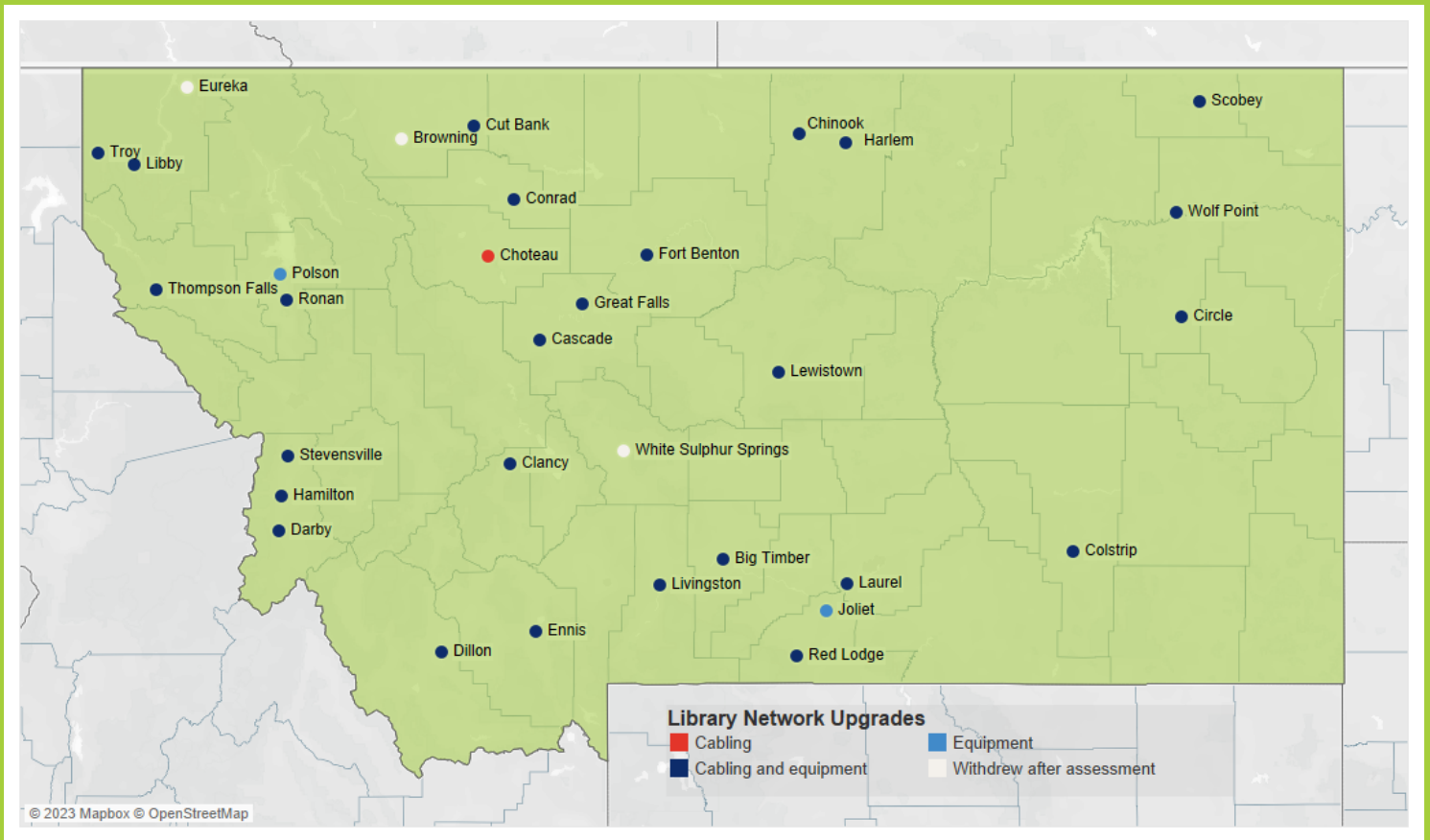
Improving broadband access

In 2019, MSL commissioned a study of the broadband capacity of Montana public libraries, including subscribed broadband speeds and internal broadband capacity. Despite being the **only source of freely available Wi-Fi in nearly 24% of Montana communities**, the study revealed that 40% of libraries have outdated wiring and Wi-Fi equipment including routers older than five years. This finding became even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic as many Montanans turned to the library for internet access and support in a new remote work and school environment. MSL invested \$1.2M in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to address library connectivity.

MSL completed cabling installation at 28 libraries and equipment upgrades at 29 libraries resulting in more reliable networks. Libraries such as Darby Community Library reported significant success from this program. Before cabling and equipment were installed, the library reported wired download speeds of 30 Mbps. **After the project, they reported download speeds of 423 Mbps.**

Ninety-five libraries further bridge access to the internet in their communities by loaning hot spots. Residents in 53 counties can borrow one of 912 hotspots procured and supported with ARPA funds. **48% of library hot spot users report using the devices for educational or work-related purposes** such as completing homework, working remotely, or applying for jobs.

Libraries participating in the internal wiring and equipment upgrade project



Montana library patron feedback

"I love our librarian and her in-depth knowledge of technology. She's extremely helpful and patiently guides me!"
- Montana library patron, Love My Library Survey, 2022

"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."
- Montana library patron, Love My Library Survey, 2022

"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. Thank you."
- Montana library patron, Hot Spot Lending Survey, 2021

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

"I see more and more people using the library every day. It is a valuable resource for our community. Rarely is someone not on the computer and frequently they are all in use."
- Montana library patron, Love My Library Survey, 2022

American Rescue Plan Act

Electronic Resources

Digital Checkouts



Montanans borrowed a record number of audiobooks and e-books from the shared digital library, MontanaLibrary2Go. The upward trend continues even as the pandemic subsides.



Montanans from 54 out of 56 counties checked out materials from MTLibrary2Go, including a new collection of 4,500 digital magazines.



Investment in the MTLibrary2Go collection budget reduced patron wait time for titles from 42 to 39 days, and the number of books borrowed each month increased 27%.



When compared to just prior to the pandemic, 87 more schools participated in the shared school digital collection, and 213% more students borrowed e-books.

Online Learning

As Montanans transitioned to an online work and school environment in 2020, MSL invested \$960K federal pandemic-relief funds to enhance the range of digital resources available to all learners.

Accessible through the MontanaLibrary2Go collection, self-paced courses delivered training on topics such as accounting and community development. **Montanans viewed over 13,000 lessons** through this program.

With the State Law Library of Montana, MSL digitized **375 historic print volumes (411,292 pages)** of Montana laws dating back to 1871, granting citizens permanent, digital access.

MSL added primary sources to the Montana History Portal, including teacher curated exhibits for K-12 education. **The Portal reached 6.9M people through social media** in FY 22, connecting new audiences with Montana's rich cultural history.



African American soldiers from Fort Missoula. Digitized by University of Montana Mansfield Library and available through the [Bicycles for the Army](#) Montana History Portal exhibit.

Montana State Library ARPA Financials

Broadband

| | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Budget | \$1,235,444.00 | | |
| | <i>EXPENDITURES</i> | <i>TO BE SPENT</i> | TOTAL |
| Personal Services | | | |
| Hot Spot | \$45,478.04 | | \$45,478.04 |
| Operations Services | | | |
| 4% Admin | \$49,417.76 | | \$49,417.76 |
| Hot Spot | \$640,410.05 | \$20,000.00 | \$660,410.05 |
| Internal Wiring | \$437,804.32 | \$42,333.83 | \$480,138.15 |
| Total | \$1,173,110.17 | \$62,333.83 | \$1,235,444.00 |

E-Content

| | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Budget | \$1,000,000.00 | | |
| | <i>EXPENDITURES</i> | <i>TO BE SPENT</i> | TOTAL |
| Personal Services | | | |
| E-content | \$135,975.12 | | \$135,975.12 |
| Montana History Portal | \$51,067.27 | | \$51,067.27 |
| Operations Services | | | |
| 4% Admin | \$40,000.00 | | \$40,000.00 |
| E-content | \$630,462.78 | \$22,000.00 | \$652,462.78 |
| Montana History Portal | \$27,066.15 | \$8,200.00 | \$35,266.15 |
| MCA Digitization | \$79,468.65 | \$5,760.03 | \$85,228.68 |
| Total | \$964,039.97 | \$35,960.03 | \$1,000,000.00 |