

**Ann Hokanson, Executive Director, Traverse des Sioux Regional Library System**  
***Literacy Minnesota — Digital Equity Community Report Response***

Traverse Des Sioux Regional Library System, like all public libraries and systems in the state, have consistently worked to close the digital divide for decades. This abbreviated report focuses on actions taken since March 2020 to expand digital access. Opinions and recommendations are my own.

Resources that address digital inclusion in our community:

- Pivoting from a focus on place-based in library access, with in-person support, to short-term at home access, with little to no formal support.
  - Libraries closed or severely limited access to in library public computer stations
  - Libraries rapidly deployed hotspots, prioritizing distance learners
- Gaps in digital inclusion
  - Families across all socio-economic levels could not rapidly adapt on their own
  - Devices and bandwidth were inadequate or in short supply, or delayed
  - People who primarily rely on wireless access through their phones suddenly had needs that far outstripped their data limits
  - People in households suddenly need simultaneous access to bandwidth, devices, and even workspaces
  - School solutions, like Kajeet, do not cover every inch of a district, library hotspots with Verizon had wider coverage
  - Students who live in multiple places throughout the week or month need portable solutions
  - The focus has been on students, leaving out many people who need access for work, looking for work, social connection, and normal day-to-day life tasks.
- Paths for sustainability
  - Best practices for schools to deliver a hybrid blend of in-real-time and on-your-own-time online instruction that is less dependent on everyone having high-quality connections to participate.
  - Ensuring that government is accessible to all. We design websites so they are accessible for everyone regardless of their physical abilities; we need to design them so they function well and completely from older technologies and phones with limited capacity, that are sensitive to data limits.
  - Requiring land use planning to include digital access, tying digital access improvement requirements to state grants given for various development projects; requiring schools to include digital access info on their student profiles, requiring any one-to-one device initiatives to come with provided data
  - Making it illegal in Minnesota to require an online job application for any job that

does not require computer and/or online skills, or to discriminate against those that submit paper applications.

Suggested questions:

- What is your organization's greatest success story in 2020? Feel free to note additional success stories, and please explain why you see these stories as successful.
- Maintaining a sense of community and connection by providing in-person, safe public library service as much as possible, while simultaneously investing in additional digital content and device access for remote users. People visit their libraries for many reasons--a very important one is person-to-person interaction, especially for those that are socially isolated. Libraries recognize that another serious health pandemic is loneliness.
- Libraries quickly capitalized on our user's new-found use of platforms like Zoom; virtual programming has taken off, with increasing success. The future of library programming will continue to include virtual programming.
  
- How does your organization address issues of equity in your community? For example, implementing culturally competent programming, language services, and/or outreach.
- We constantly look for and try to eliminate barriers to access and participation. In addition to the example given in the prompt, this includes recruiting staff with strong connections to underserved communities, and investing in library materials and programs that are diverse
  
- What strategies has your organization employed to address digital inclusion? What has worked or has not worked well? And why do you believe that it has or has not worked?
- When a new technology emerges, classes work. AS it becomes more widely adopted, classes work less well. I think because the people who are slower to adopt a technology have a variety of reasons for not adopting, and do so when they have a true need, and then need one-on-one help that solves the given issues and gets them further along towards adoption. Libraries do this with walk-in help service; but it is not widely known or used.
  
- How has your organization reached clients/participants since March? Do you have recommendations for adoption of services or community outreach strategies?

- Libraries are usually part of government and can use city newsletters etc. They are a physical place, so they hang banners and post signs. They use their facebook pages, word of mouth newsletters.
- What recommendations do you have for organizations to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or expand digital access? Or what would you recommend to *your organization* if you could return to March and coordinate a response?
- Most libraries know their heavy in-person computer users. Many are low-income, or socially isolated, or have challenging living situations. I wish we could have/could set those people up with service that works for them.