

## **Public Access Computing**

Public library computers serve a vital role in connecting patrons to employment information, government programs, and far-away loved ones. According to an ALA study on public funding and technology access, nearly 75% of Kentucky libraries offer the only free access to the Internet in their communities. For more information on the state summaries of this study, go to:

[http://www.ala.org/research/sites/ala.org.research/files/content/initiatives/plftas/2011\\_2012/plftas12\\_statetables.pdf](http://www.ala.org/research/sites/ala.org.research/files/content/initiatives/plftas/2011_2012/plftas12_statetables.pdf)

Providing computers and access to the Internet is an essential service. This section provides a framework from the Kentucky Public Library Standards, and explores other issues, including hardware and software management and resources for discounted equipment, staff training, and more information.

### **Standards**

Standards provide a guide to excellence, and help define the public library services that should be available to all Kentuckians. The [Kentucky Public Library Standards](#) were developed by members of the Kentucky Public Library Association's (KPLA) Standards Committee. The Standards are revised every few years, and contain a section devoted to technology.

To meet the Essential Level, library computer hardware and software is up-to-date and reliable, and adequate network protection is provided with firewalls and anti-virus software. Equipment is regularly maintained by trained personnel (library staff or consultants), and funding is allocated for staff technology training. Files are backed up regularly, and network equipment (such as servers and routers) is kept in a secured area. Inventories of all computer equipment and software licenses are conducted on a regular basis. At least one public computer is provided per 2,500 residents.

In addition to hardware, the Essential Level also requires the library to provide access to the Kentucky Virtual Library (KYVL). Access to the catalog is offered through an Integrated Library System (ILS) with an online catalog. An Internet Use Policy is in effect, and if the library chooses to filter Internet access, procedures are in place to lift the filter in response to legitimate requests for information. At least one publicly advertised email address is monitored during the library's hours of operation.

For the full standards, including requirements for the Enhanced and Exemplary Levels, please see the [KPLA](#) or [KDLA](#) websites.

## Software and Hardware Management

According to the [Statistical Report of Kentucky Public Libraries](#), library computers were used nearly 5 million times during the 2011-2012 year. Antivirus and other protection software is a critical investment to safeguard the library's computer hardware and to handle the high volume of traffic.

Antivirus software provides an insurance policy against viruses, malware, spyware, and other nasty bits of code that can be picked up while browsing the Internet. Antivirus software providers include [AVG](#), [Avast!](#), [Kaspersky](#), and [Trend Micro](#). Earlier this year, the license for Microsoft Security Essentials was updated to exclude government use. See their [terms](#) for more details.

Another vital component of stress-free public computing is a program to restore each computer to its original state and discard any changes made by individual users. [Deep Freeze](#), [Clean Slate](#), and [Smart Shield](#) are examples of restore software.

Investing in robust antivirus and restore software will improve patrons' computer experience and reduce maintenance and support issues.

Many libraries use software to schedule computer sessions and release print jobs. Time management software can save staff valuable time and energy, reduce computer wait times, and cut down on the monitoring of patrons. As one director related in a BTOP project report: "We are very impressed with TLM. It has been a lifesaver!" Time management software packages include [Time Limit Manager](#), [Cybrarian](#), and Envisionware's [PC Reservation](#). Print management solutions include [Pharos](#) and Envisionware's [LPT:One](#).

## Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)

The [Children's Internet Protection Act](#), or CIPA, was enacted in 2000 to address lawmakers' concerns that federal funds could be used to support the viewing of illegal or harmful material. CIPA applies only to libraries applying for certain types of funding. Libraries applying for E-rate funding in any category but Telecommunications (Internet Access or Internal Connections) must comply with CIPA, as do libraries applying for funding for computers or Internet access through LSTA.

CIPA includes three components:

1. Technology protection measure. This portion of the law requires that all library computers must be filtered, including staff computers. The filter is required to block images (visual depictions only, not words or text) that are classified as (a) obscene, (b) child pornography, or (c) harmful to minors (those 16 and under).

2. Internet Safety Policy. This is a policy regulating Internet access in the library. Sample policies can be found on KDLA's [sample policies page](#). The second example in the Internet Use Policy contains the language required by CIPA. The policy must address these 5 elements:
  - a. access by minors to inappropriate matter on the Internet;
  - b. the safety and security of minors when using electronic mail, chat rooms and other forms of direct electronic communications;
  - c. unauthorized access, including so-called "hacking," and other unlawful activities by minors online;
  - d. unauthorized disclosure, use, and dissemination of personal information regarding minors; and
  - e. measures restricting minors' access to materials harmful to them.
3. Public Hearing. This only needs to be held once, when the CIPA-compliant Internet Safety Policy is first adopted. The hearing requirements are the same for hearings on setting tax rates. For more information, see this [trustee tip on public hearings](#).

### **Hiring an IT Service Provider Versus a Library Employee**

Depending on the size of your library and the depth of its technology needs, contracting with an IT services provider can be more cost-effective than hiring a library IT employee. [Libsynergy](#) and [PC Solutions Plus](#) are two examples of IT service providers.

Hiring an IT manager can reduce the burden on your staff and ensure that your systems are running smoothly. Laura Solomon of the Ohio Public Library Information Network has an excellent series of posts on her blog called [How to hire a library tech](#). To summarize, the most important qualities in IT staff are the same as for regular library staff: flexibility and excellent customer service skills. Technical skills can be acquired as needed.

### **Resources**

Many resources exist to help directors manage their public computing needs. KDLA maintains the KY Tech listserv, which is open to anyone interested in technology in libraries. The mailing list includes directors as well as technology staff. Traffic is not high, but it is an excellent forum to ask questions related to technology issues and learn what other libraries are doing. For more information, see KDLA's [listserv page](#).

Other valuable resources include other library directors, who are always ready to share their solutions. If a nearby library has a knowledgeable tech person, their director may be willing to briefly loan their expertise. The school system's technology staff could be another resource. Several libraries use school technology staff to provide part-time support after school hours.

Numerous resources exist online for help with public computing issues. [Webjunction](#), the online “learning place for libraries,” has pages devoted to both managing and networking public computers, in addition to many other technology topics. Resources include hour-long webinars, documents, and checklists.

[TechSoup](#) is indispensable for several reasons. First, and most importantly, the non-profit offers deep discounts on software and hardware donated by companies like Microsoft and Adobe. Libraries and other non-profits are qualified to purchase through TechSoup. Libraries are not required to have 501(c)(3) status to qualify. For more information, visit their [library donations page](#) or subscribe to new product alerts. Click on the envelope in the upper left corner of the [TechSoup page](#) and add your email address to subscribe.

[TechSoup for Libraries](#) is a one-stop shop for information and technology needs. The [blog](#) is updated frequently and provides brief informational articles and announcements for upcoming free webinars. The technology [Cookbooks](#) include tips and techniques for managing public computers, and include direct quotes from librarians in the field. The cookbooks provide an excellent introduction to basic challenges and solutions of public computing, though they are a bit dated (information about specific software may be out-of-date). These three cookbooks can be downloaded in their entirety: [Planning for Success](#), [Recipes for a Five Star Library](#), and [Small and Rural Libraries](#).

### **Professional Development/Staff Training**

Keeping up with technology can be a challenge. If you’re a member of the American Library Association, the [AL Direct](#) newsletter is a weekly digest of library news, and includes features from book reviews to innovative library programs and emerging technology. On a more local level, the KY Library Digest occasionally includes articles about technology. To subscribe to the digest, send an email to Nikole Wolfe ([nikole.wolfe@ky.gov](mailto:nikole.wolfe@ky.gov)). Non-library resources for keeping up to date include the New York Times’ [Bits blog](#), [Wired](#), and [Ars Technica](#).

Other possible resources for providing training include consultants and vendors. Basic tutorials for common software programs can frequently be found free online; for example, [office.com](#) and [gcflearnfree.org](#) both offer introductions to Microsoft Office software. New continuing education opportunities can also be found on the KDLA [CE calendar](#).