**** Sample Library Op-ed

*An op-ed can be submitted to your local newspaper to express the importance of the public computers and Internet connection at your library. The sample op-ed below has placeholders to insert information about your library from your web survey report or the statistics your library reports to the Institute of Museum and Library Services.*

*For maximum impact, interview frequent users about how they specifically use library computers and Internet access. To help frame an interview, ask about some of the specific types of activities in your survey report such as job seeking, getting health information, or doing school work. Be sure to ask about outcomes of each patron’s use such as finding a job, making a change to diet or exercise habits, or getting admitted to college. You can use anecdotes from these interviews to put a human face on your op-ed and to demonstrate more clearly the impact Internet access has on the members of your community.*

*Prior to submitting an op-ed to your local paper, you may want to call the editor to explain your intent and how your submission connects to the recently released national study or another current local issue relevant to readers.*

Every year, millions of people head to their local public library to access the online information they need to pursue their version of the American dream: a better job, a college degree, American citizenship. In today’s challenging economy, even more people – including an increasing number of middle-income families squeezed by the recession – turn to computers at their local public library to seek and find jobs, access training, or apply for government services.

The [YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY] began offering public access computers in [YEAR] and now, thanks to funding from [DESCRIBE FUNDING SOURCES, e.g., federal, state, local, foundation, etc] has [NUMBER OF COMPUTER TERMINALS] computers available for public use (and a wireless network that patrons with their own laptops can use to access the Internet, if applicable). The [YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY] also provides [LIST TECHNOLOGY SERVICES, e.g., one-on-one help, training classes, other support]. Last year patrons logged [NUMBER OF SESSIONS] sessions at the library’s computers.

One of these users recently shared how [BRIEF ANECDOTE from a patron impacted by use of your library’s computer services].

The [YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY] provides computer and Internet access to all members of our community. For many people in our community who lack Internet accesses at home, the local public library is *the* place to get connected. (Include if applicable: In [YOUR CITY/TOWN], the [YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY] is the only place that provides free Internet access.)

Nearly one-third of Americans age 14 or older – roughly 77 million people – used a public library computer or wireless network to connect to the Internet in the past year, according to a national report. In [YOUR CITY/TOWN], this means that approximately [multiply legal service area population by 0.2549 and round down to nearest whole number] people each year use the computers (and wireless network, if applicable) at the [YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY].

The report, **Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries**, is based on the first large-scale study of who uses public computers and Internet access in public libraries, the ways library patrons use this free technology service, and how it affects their lives. The study was conducted by the University of Washington Information School and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

A recent survey of [YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY] patrons found that of those who used the library’s computers and Internet connection:

* [insert top domain use statistics here, including end outcomes: e.g., X percent used the library’s computers and Internet connection for employment purposes. Of these users, X percent of users searched for jobs, X percent worked on their resume, and X percent applied for a job. Of these users, X percent were hired. We suggest focusing on domains that reflect current local policy objectives, such as employment , education, or health)
* [insert 2nd highest domain use here]
* [insert 3rd highest domain use here]

Despite providing these valuable and well-used services, the [YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY] has experienced [DECREASED OR FLAT FUNDING] over the last year. As a result, the library struggles to maintain an adequate number of computers and sufficient bandwidth to meet the growing technological needs of our patrons. Such connectivity means the world to a laid off father filling out an online job application or a distance-learning student taking her final exam.

We must ensure that libraries can keep pace with technology. Otherwise, public access technology at the library could become obsolete and unusable for the people who depend on it.

Now is the time for [YOUR CITY/TOWN] to step up and support the public library. Funding for the [YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY] must be sustained so the library can continue to provide the free computer and Internet services that our citizens need for better, brighter futures.