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The Role of Libraries in E-government

As local, state and federal government agencies move increasingly toward "e-government", libraries play a critical role especially as providers of information and as access points the public to access governmental services. The key roles for libraries in e-government include:

1. LIBRARIES ARE LEADERS IN ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT:

The concept of e-government - providing online transactions and services as well as information to the public from their government - is readily seen in library services. Libraries have long been leaders in the development and use of online information. Some of the first government online services were library bibliographic networks provided in many communities and higher education settings.

This early experience with the management and technology issues of online services (including such issues as authenticity, security, interoperability, etc.) have made libraries important team players in the mix of government agencies that must collaborate to make e-government effective. One can see the evolution from "merely" providing information online (such as bibliographic networks or copies of online governmental forms) to that next steps of providing actual transactions online (such as reserving and ordering books or library materials to submitting applications to local government agencies.)

2. LIBRARIES TEACH INFORMATION LITERACY:

Libraries are a rich and often sole source of training and information about the use of online services and e-government transactions to the general public. Libraries offer classes on use of the Internet and training about what kind of information and services can be found and used on the world wide web. This role in information literacy is critical to the effectiveness of e-government.

3. LIBRARIES PROVIDE INFORMATION; ORGANIZE AND DEVELOP DATABASES:

Libraries don't just provide access to information developed by others. Libraries collect, organize and provide access to unique local information. In many locales, including many higher education campuses, libraries have developed the first web sites about local government and community information. E-government first requires accurate and complete information. It is such resources that must be the basic foundation for the

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development of e-government transactions. The ability to manage online information is inherent to modern library services and demonstrates the skills and knowledge of the technical resources needed to evolve into full e-government.

4. THE PUBLIC NEEDS LIBRARIES AS ACCESS POINTS TO CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE:

Libraries are important access points for online services, especially, but not exclusively, for those without Internet/web access - for the Digital Divide still exists. Even for those not falling into the Digital Divide, libraries are used by people who have access through their homes or offices because of the support system and training provided at the local library. E-government cannot assure that all citizens can be fully and equitably served without the important role for libraries in providing public access. Additionally, library web sites and search engines are often the gateways into local government web-based information and services.

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