

Northeast Georgia Regional Library System Technology Plan 2022-2027

Current Technology Environment Overview

The Northeast Georgia Regional Library System (NEGRLS) is made up of six public libraries and one administrative office serving Habersham, White, Rabun, and Stephens counties. There are approximately 70 computers for public use at the libraries, which are a combination of PCs and Chrome Boxes. In addition to the public computers, there are approximately one dozen computers that provide access to the PINES catalog as well as roughly 30 staff computers. There are approximately 19 Chromebooks available for check out across the region. All locations have at least two, and as many as seven Wi-Fi hotspots that can be checked out. Printing and copying services are provided at all six locations. Scanning and fax services are currently provided at five locations. All locations provide free access to Wi-Fi as well as access to a secure Wi-Fi network.

We currently use North Georgia Networks as our Internet provider. Our contract runs until June 30, 2023. In late 2019 and early 2020, improvements were made to each location. Internet bandwidth at all six locations was recently increased from 100 Mbps to 200 Mbps with an option to increase as needed up to 500 Mbps. Network switches were replaced. Our buildings were rewired, installed with VoIP phone systems, as well as installed more robust Wi-Fi networks. New uninterruptible power supplies to protect network equipment were also installed at each location.

All of our locations currently employ a proxy server firewall for network security, as well as Microsoft and google firewalls on the individual machines. Deepfreeze is used to protect individual machines at the user level. Deepfreeze is a reboot to restore software applications. Libdata is a software program currently used to manage guest sessions and printing at each of our locations.

Guiding IT Principles

NEGRLS will use the following principles as a guide when developing and implementing the technology plan.

- Employ technologies that enhance customer service and access to library resources and provide operational efficiencies.

- Provide innovative and relevant technologies that provide value to the residents of the four counties that NEGRLS serves.

- Maintain technological relevance for the public.

Goals

The following are goals that NEGRLS would like to see implemented in the next five years. These goals are meant to improve the services NEGRLS provides. Furthermore, they are meant to be amended and added to as the public's technological and informational needs evolve.

1. Develop a Standard for Tech Services that are Offered

NEGRLS realizes the need to provide relatively consistent services across the region. This allows patrons to know what to expect when utilizing a service at any of the affiliate libraries. All libraries in the region should provide the following services for their patrons:

- Public computers with Internet access
- The ability to scan, print, or copy documents in both black and white and color;
- Public computers with software for playing videos and music, word processors, paint programs;
- The ability to print wirelessly from a phone or mobile device.
- A method for making payments with a credit or debit card.

2. Grow Internet Capacity as needed

With the growth of web-based software and operating systems, it is crucial that NEGRLS maintain sufficient Internet speeds to support its patrons. NEGRLS will evaluate its current speed of 200 Mbps regularly to ensure patrons' needs are being met and will increase the Internet service capacity as needed.

3. Maintaining Technology Relevance

NEGRLS recognizes the need for ongoing upgrades and replacement of technology hardware to obsolescence and wear and tear from daily use. Having up-to-date software versions that meet the needs of the patrons is necessary to remain technologically relevant. NEGRLS will frequently check to see what updates are needed for current programs and applications to remain compliant with the manufacturer's support lifecycle; as well as, evaluate new software releases to see what new programs could be useful to the patrons of NEGRLS.

4. Provide a more seamless experience for patrons through the use of technology

Technology has the ability to provide an easy smooth experience for the patron. One of the main reasons someone who does not normally visit the library might visit is to print and/or make copies of documents. It is important that they have a pleasant experience so that they will be likely to use the library again in the future. NEGRLS recognizes the need to create a more seamless experience for the patron by having wireless printing services, allowing patrons to print directly from their phone or tablet without having to log onto one of our computers which they might not be familiar with. Accepting different forms of payment other than cash and check is also important in today's world where more and more of the public are using some form of electronic payment for transactions instead of cash.

5. Enhance the patrons' experience through self-service technology Self-service checkout and payment stations are common in many businesses. Many patrons enjoy the option of checking out their own materials for a variety of reasons. These can include privacy, anonymity, and social distancing in times of pandemics. Providing a self-payment option allows the patron the ability to settle any fines or charges on their account privately without the fear of judgment of staff or bystanders.

6. Staff Training

NEGRLS recognizes the importance of having a knowledgeable staff to assist and provide the public with their technology needs. Staff training is important for staff to gain the knowledge needed to use the technology that the library offers for public use. Staff will be encouraged to participate in software webinars and online tutorials as well as any in-person teaching or classes provided by the regional or state IT departments.

Staff should understand basic methods to print images from the web and documents attached to an email. It is important that patrons have the option to receive knowledgeable assistance from staff.

Staff should be trained in basic cyber security issues, including password security and the ability to recognize phishing emails and other information gathering schemes with the intent of fraudulent activity.

NEGRLS will set up in-person training sessions at each affiliate library to ensure the staff has a general understanding of downloading attachments from email and printing documents from flash drives, web pages, emails, and other formats.

7. Library Technology Spaces

NEGRLS encourages the libraries within the region to explore providing new interactive technologies as a service for the public. Interactive technologies can include 3D printers, color printers and scanners, and drawing pads; as well as, creative software such as the Adobe creative suites. These devices and software can be costly and may not see a lot of use or interest from the public; therefore, it is recommended that libraries pursue these services when it is economically viable and makes sense as a service for their patrons. Many times, the acquisition costs for these types of technologies can be covered by grants available to libraries.

8. Increase the libraries' ability to adapt to extreme weather events and power and Internet outages.

NEGRLS will strive to improve the libraries' ability to remain open and functional during periods where Internet connection or power is lost due to weather or accidents. This includes making sure that every library has a Wi-Fi hotspot and at least one laptop that is registered and set up as a workstation with the Georgia PINES Integrated Library Service (ILS) loaded onto it to ensure that the library can perform basic duties such as checking in and out items, searching the catalog and placing holds on materials. This will allow the libraries to function and perform their most basic duties.

9. Maintain a secure network, monitor cyber security, and make improvements as needed.

NEGRLS will monitor and make necessary improvements to maintain a secure network. This includes firewall and software upgrades, participating in cybersecurity assessments, and staff training. Staff training will focus on recognizing basic scamming methods and phishing emails hackers employ.