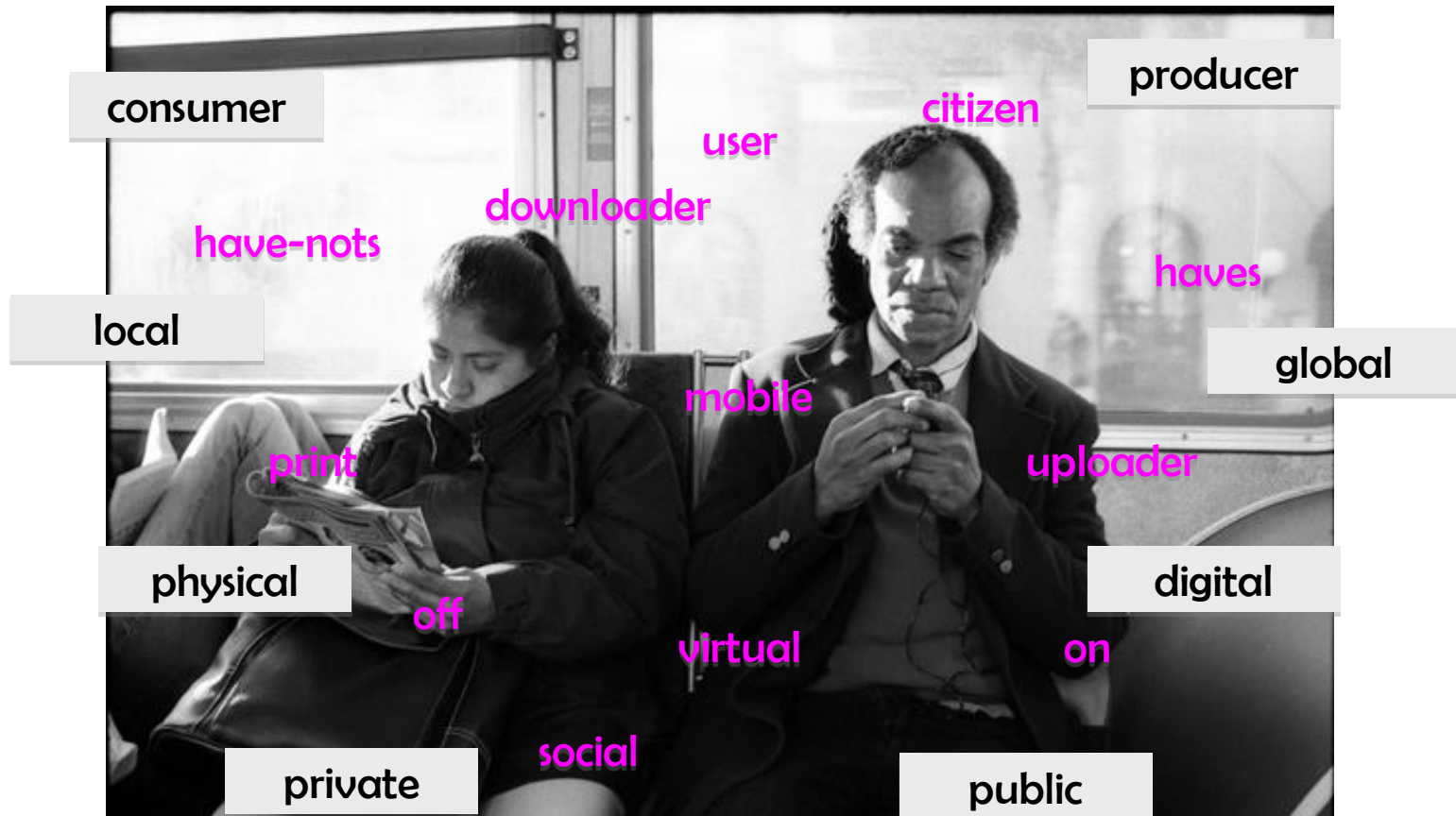# A Community Informatics Approach to Libraries and the Digital Divide

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University of Illinois, USA
January 25, 2010

Community informatics

A field rooted in libraries but also in
the digital revolution, the information revolution

consumer
producer
citizen
user
downloader
have-nots
haves
local
global
mobile
print
uploader
physical
digital
off
virtual
on
private
social
public

Community informatics

A field rooted in libraries but also in
the digital revolution, the information revolution

Local, historical
communities

+

Information and
communications
technologies
digital tools

CONTINUITY

meeting

TRANSFORMATION

Three studies from the CI Lab

1. Public access computers: Libraries bridging the digital divide

2. Technology Opportunities Program: The library experience with a major funding opportunity

3. Cybernavigators: Towards a new library staff

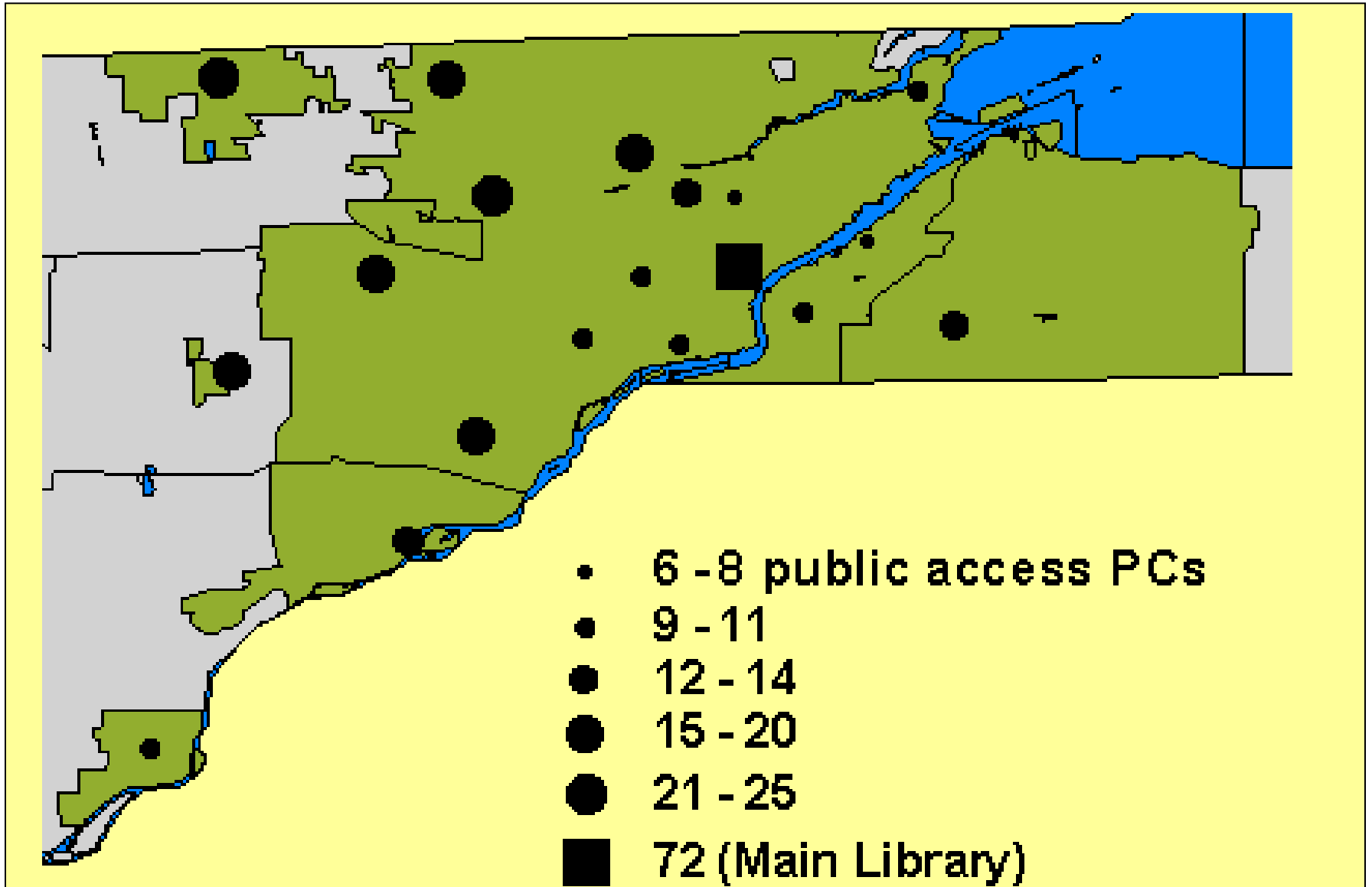# 1. Public access computers in the library as bridges across the DD

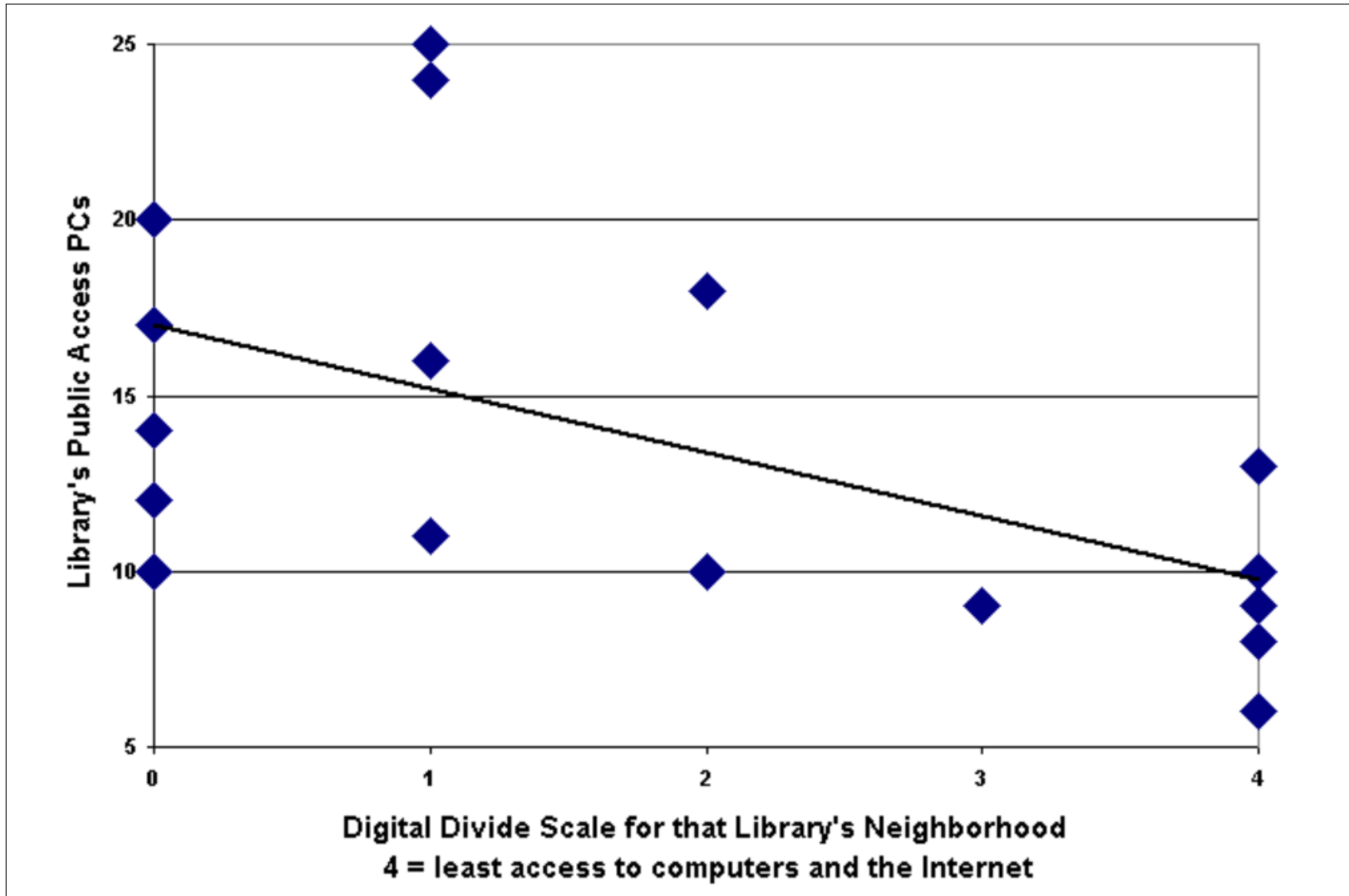# Tracking the arrival
# of public computing in US public libraries

Public Library Internet Connectivity 1996-2007
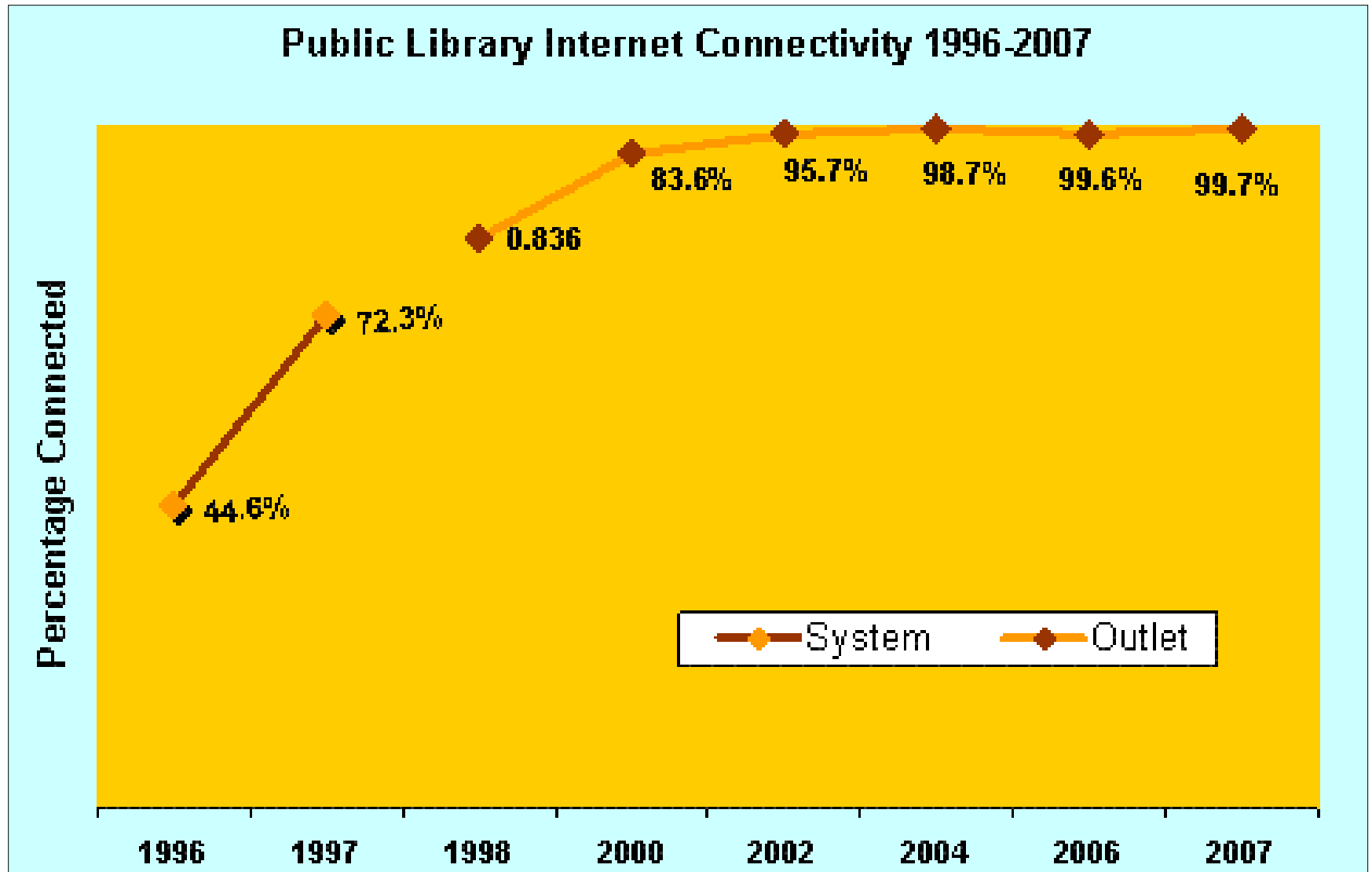
How do libraries
as public computing places
bridge the digital divide?
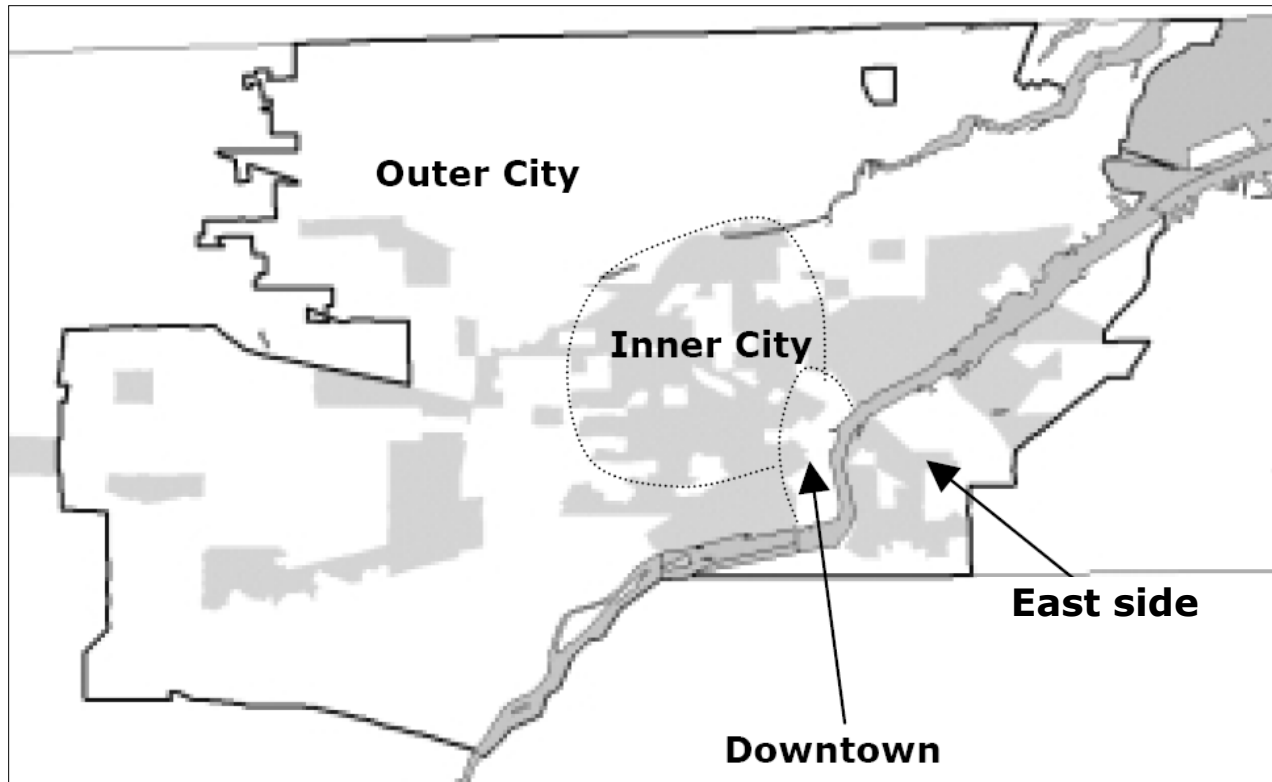
How many public access computers in each branch library?

- **·** 6 - 8 public access PCs
- **•** 9 - 11
- **●** 12 - 14
- **●** 15 - 20
- **●** 21 - 25
- **■** 72 (Main Library)

"Them that's got, shall get"
—singer Billie Holiday

2. Technology Opportunities Program (1994-2005): The library experience with a major funding opportunity

TOP 1994-2005: $230 million

| 606 TOP projects	
Led by…	
Community based organizations	26%
Colleges or universities	25%
Local governments	21%
Health providers	8%
Schools	5%
Foundations	4%
Libraries	3%
Other	8%
Technology as…	
Applications provided, used or developed	46%
Equipment	42%
Training	12%
Involving…	
Computing in public	64%
Computing in workplaces	25%
Computing at home	11%
Serving rural populations	40%

- Using technology to attacking local problems
- Partnerships were mandated
- Mobilizing local leadership or peer educators was a winning strategy

# BTOP 2010-2012: $7.2 billion

- Technology use as the goal
- Sustainability the objective
- Emphasis on community institutions & public computing
- National discussion underway
- Locally, univ-two cities partnership
- New approaches to data: Government 2.0
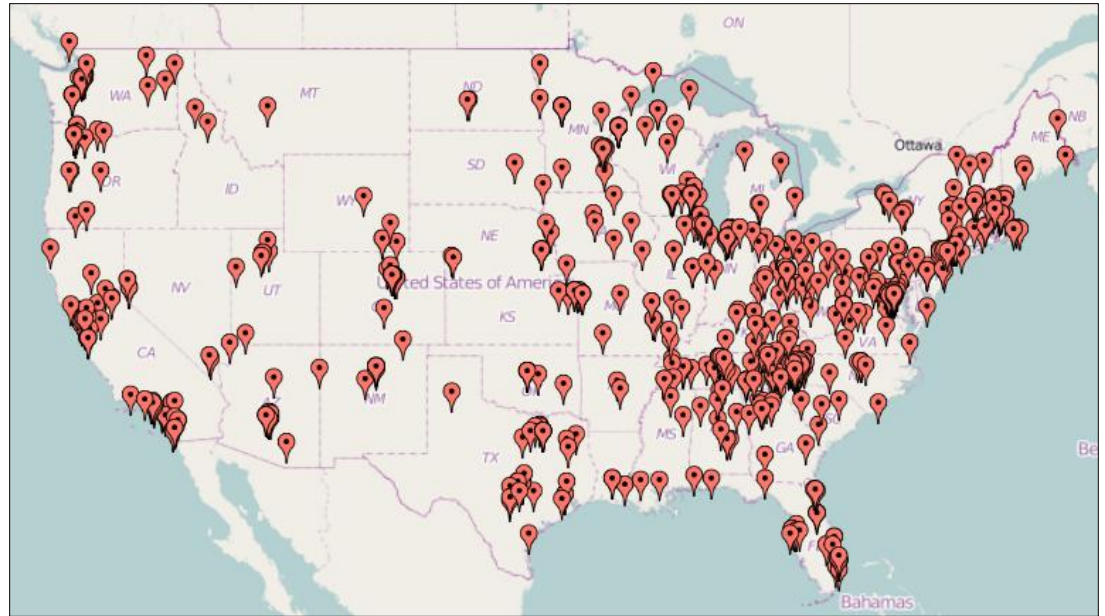
Libraries from across the US won 25 TOP grants
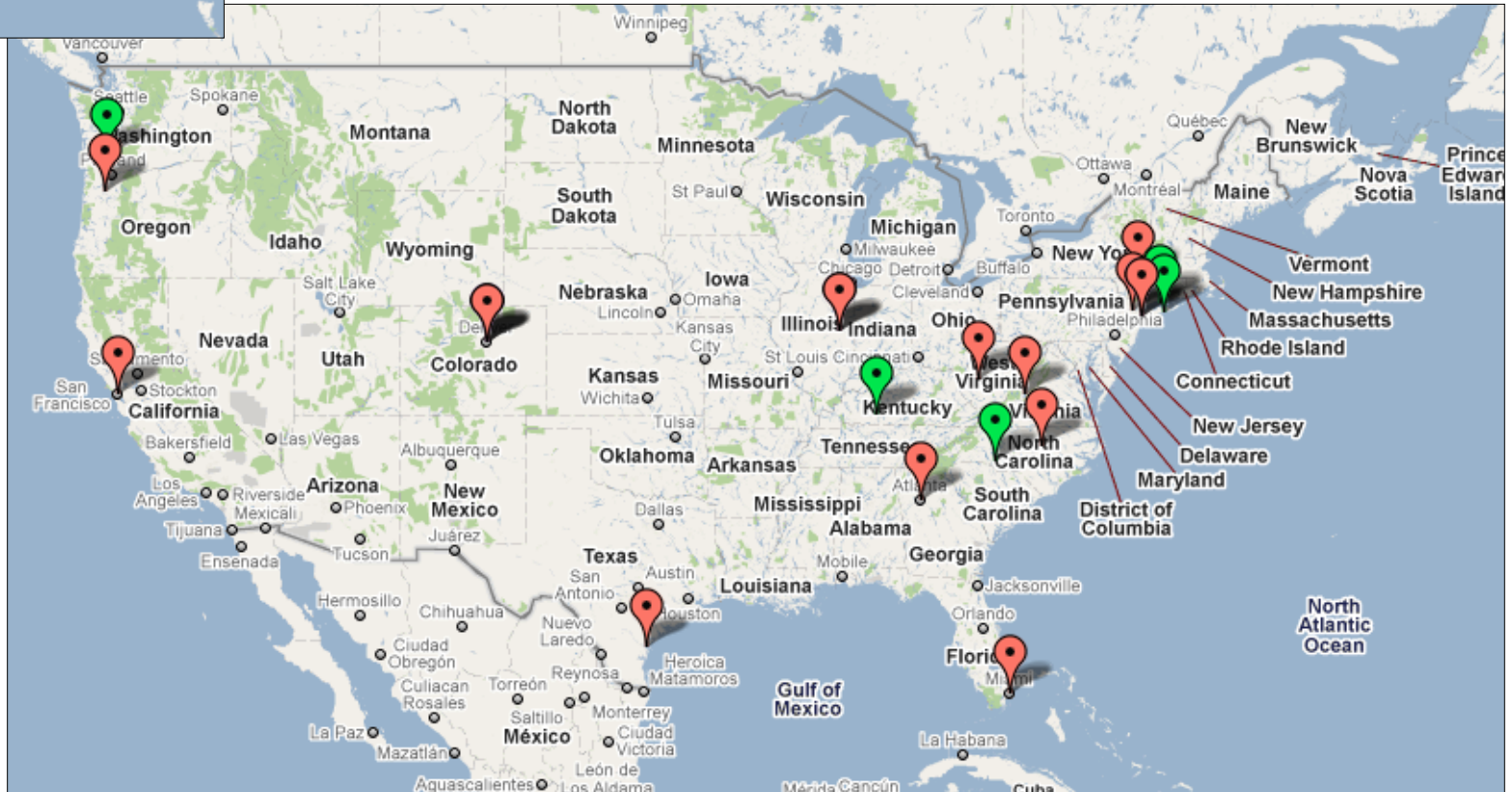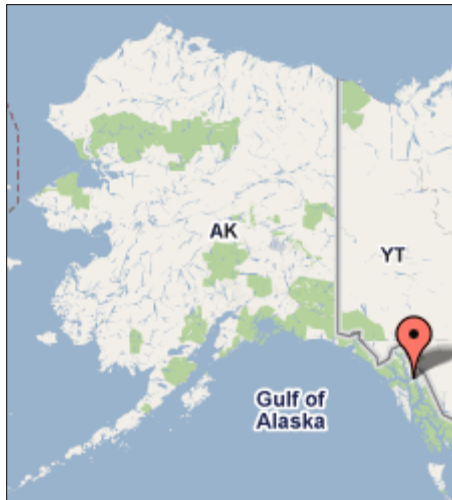
Our primary data is text generated by the projects – repurposed for research
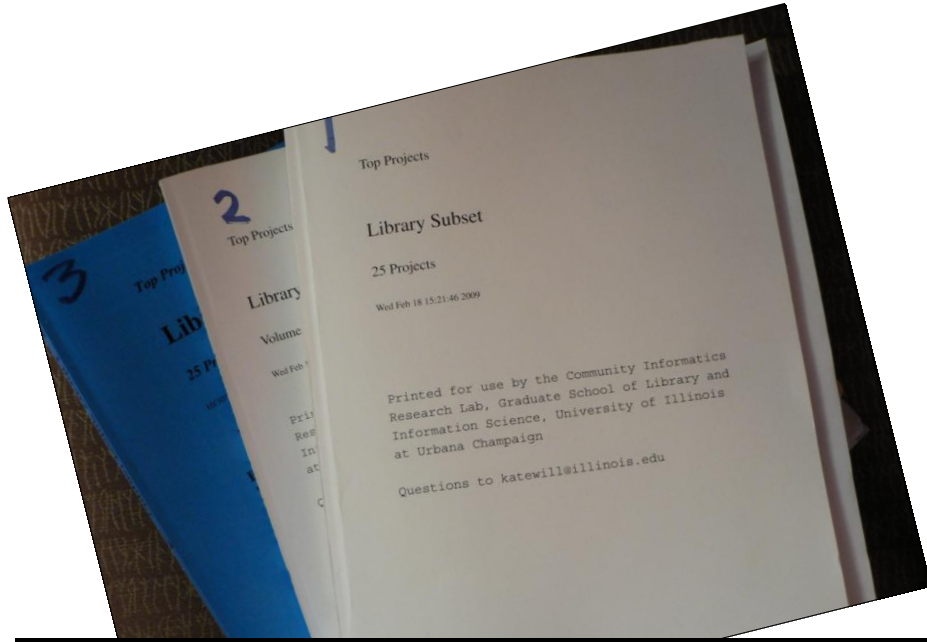
- Summaries
- Proposals
- Quarterly reports
- Final reports

| Library and Location	Data
Lower Columbia College, Washington	146 pages
Queens Borough Public Library, New York	104
New York Public Library, New York	82
Bowling Green Public Library, Kentucky	78
Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, South Carolina	26

Five TOP library projects

- Lower Columbia College – Established education centers in two poor counties. Provided workforce training, language classes, high-school-equivalency education.

- Queens Borough PL – Started branch-to-branch teleconferencing. Queens Botanical Garden and others helped with programming.

- New York PL – Established an online community with resources for local businesses. Provided workshops on business topics.

- Bowling Green PL – Created a branch in an abandoned train depot in a poor neighborhood, with computer lab. And an online source for local info and resources.

- PL of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County – With a children's theatre organization, taught poor youth to use technology to express themselves creatively.

Preliminary findings

✓ Libraries do their thing, and more. Libraries here are using technology to extend their activities.
- o   More outreach, more formats
- o   Shifting from patrons <u>using</u> information resources to patrons creating resources

✓ Patterns to the partnerships
- o   Technology-building projects tend to have telecom partners
- o   Social and educational projects tend to have other community organizations as partners

? Do the partners imply power imbalances that affect project outcomes? We'll find out by:
- o   Studying the history of the libraries before and since the projects (by literature and news article searches)
- o   Interviewing project leaders still at the libraries

3. Cybernavigators:
Towards a new library staff

Libraries
are helping
patrons
in new ways
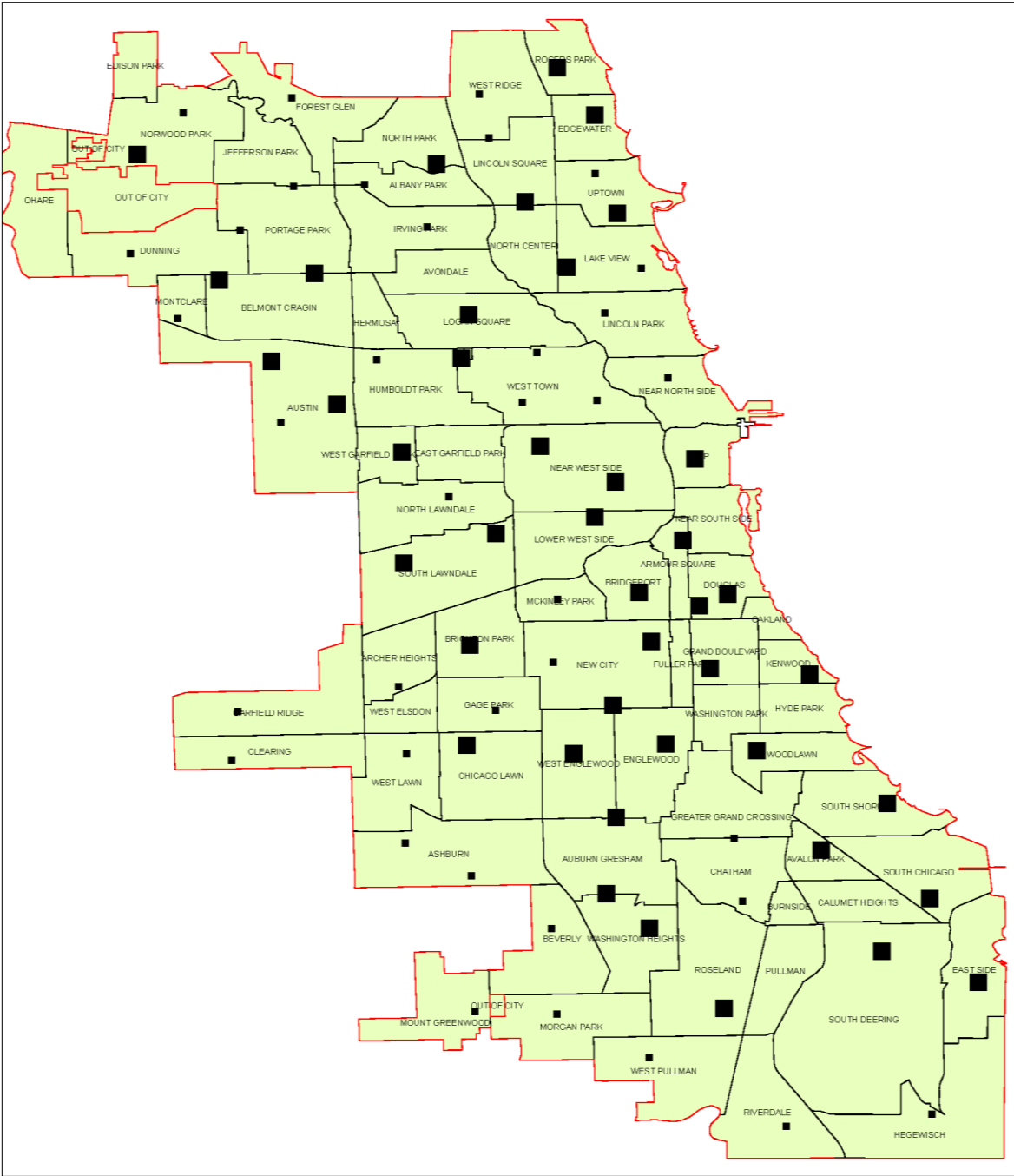
The reference interview 1960s, the informatics moment 2000s
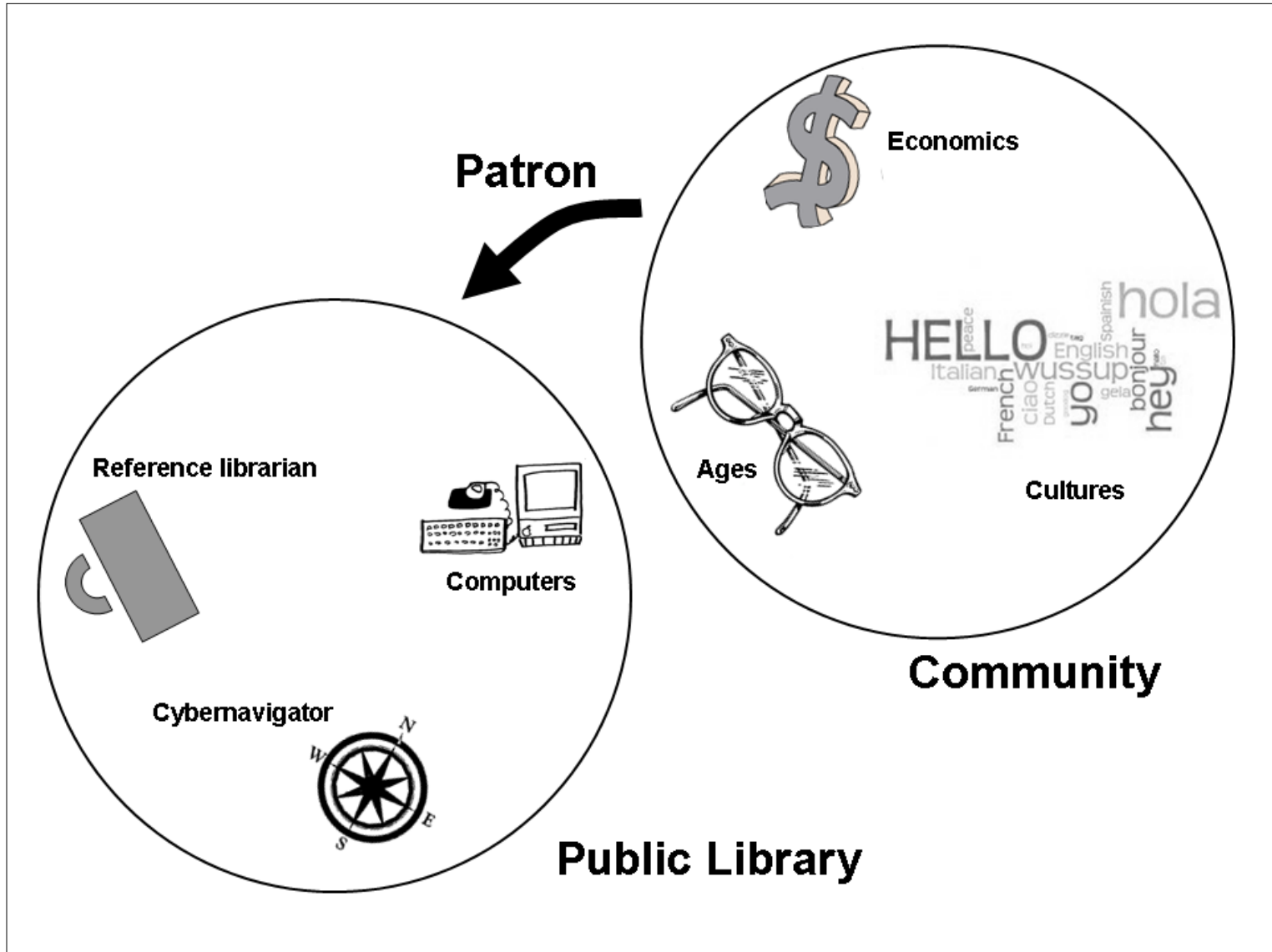
Informatics moment: a leap across the DD

	Literacy	Computer literacy	Advanced computer literacy	Library literacy	Functional activity
Daily		using the mouse or browser, getting or using email		printing, computer reservations	searching for work, applying for jobs
Weekly	writing reading		producing or updating a document besides resume, doing research, using other government websites besides benefits, using social networking sites	using the library catalog, using library databases	producing or updating resume, doing homework, getting or checking benefits
Monthly		taking a computer class	playing a game		looking into current events or cultural information, getting health information, banking/buying/selling/ other e-commerce, seeking resources relating to being homeless

Social ties are at play here

	Cybernavigator social capital
Daily	CN helps someone who knows his or her name
	CN helps someone he or she knows by name
	CN helps someone he or she recognizes but don't know by name
Weekly	CN helps someone that a community member referred to him or her
Monthly	CH helps a group of 2 or more working together on a task
	CN helps someone he or she knows from some community involvement
	CN brings their own laptop to work
	CN shares his or her own laptop with patron as part of help

More social capital > more kinds of IMs

1. Challenges: Printing, reservations, no flash drives, word processing in the browser

2. Challenge: teaching people mouse exercises not as effective as a game of solitaire

3. Many successful job hunts

4. Valuing a box of old money using eBay

5. Huddled around a laptop in Chinatown

6. "I'm just a step ahead"

7. Help, and conflicts over help: the dislocations of the information revolution in the library

Thank you for listening,
thank you in advance for questions

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