



COVID-Related Funding and Expenditures

Montana State Library (MSL)

September 7, 2021

Introduction

During stay-at-home orders enacted at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Montana libraries, with the support of the Montana State Library, rapidly pivoted their services to support online learning and a remote workforce. Conceived as pilot prior to the pandemic, MSL launched a statewide mobile Wi-Fi hotspot and device lending program, and contracted for technology services that support remote reading and engagement. MSL also rapidly increased investment in online education resources. These programs were initially funded through a combination of State Fiscal Year 2020 General Fund, FY 2019 Federal Library

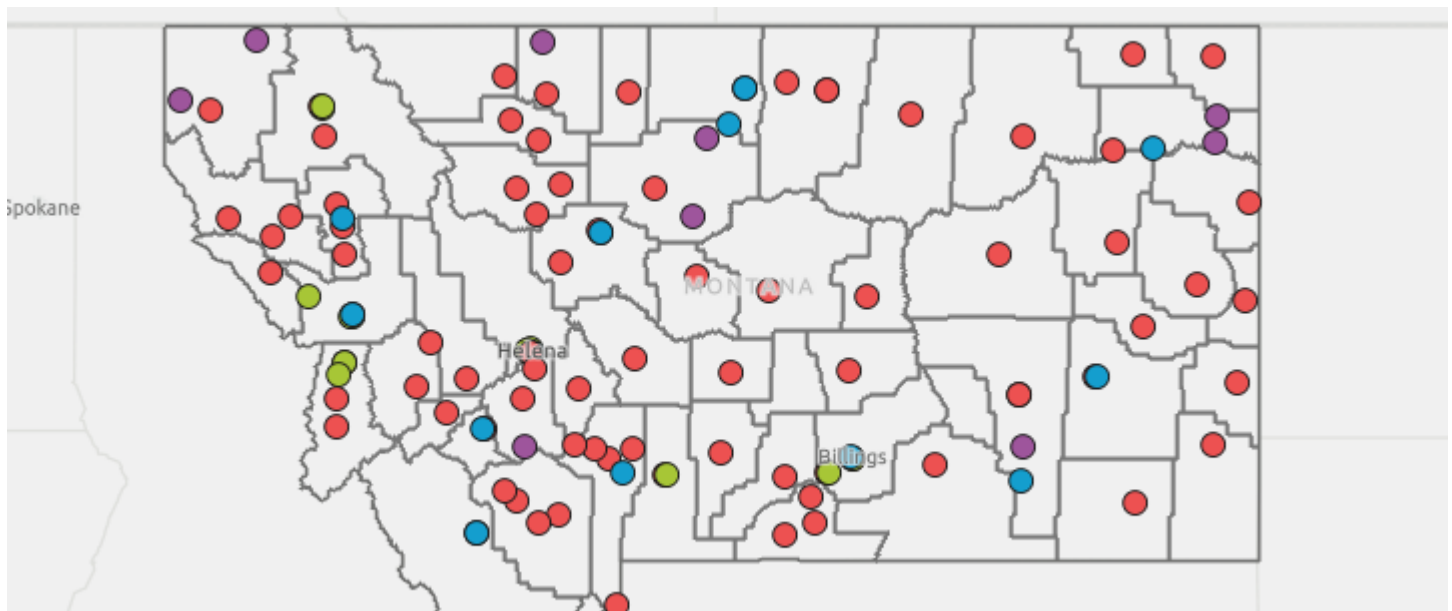
Services and Technology Act (LSTA) dollars and CARES Act funds awarded to MSL through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds.

As the pandemic persists, and barriers to the access of e-learning resources and internet access remain present throughout Montana, the Montana State Library continues to support programs through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

MSL COVID Funding Status as of FY2021								
Funding Source	Funding Deadline	Budget	E-Content	Hotspots	ReadSquared	Newsline	Total	Remaining
COVID GF 2020	06/30/20	\$136,000	\$96,573	\$13,456	\$25,980		\$136,000	\$0
LSTA 19 COVID	09/30/20	\$60,450		\$60,450			\$60,450	\$0
CARES 1: ECONTENT	12/31/20	\$250,000	\$250,000				\$250,000	\$0
CARES 1: GEER	06/30/21	\$500,000		\$500,000			\$500,000	\$0
CARES 1: IMLS	09/30/21	\$96,573		\$1,706			\$1,706	\$94,867
ARPA-ECONTENT	12/31/22	\$1,000,000					\$0	\$100,000
ARPA-HOTSPOT	12/31/22	\$1,235,444		\$1,415			\$1,415	\$1,234,029
ARPA-NEWSLINE	06/30/22	\$120,000					\$0	\$120,000
Total		\$3,398,476	\$346,573	\$577,028	\$25,980	\$0	\$949,581	\$2,448,896

MSL COVID Funding Status as of FY2021

E-Content



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MontanaLibrary2Go

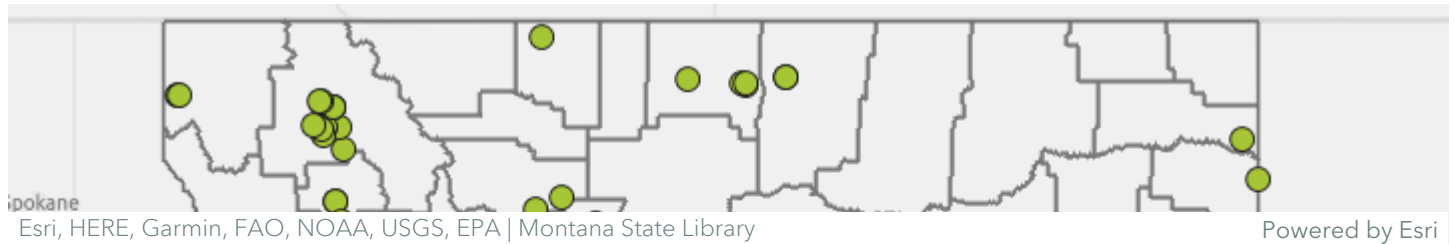
MontanaLibrary2Go is an online service that offers library patrons of participating libraries free access to a collection of contemporary, classic, and bestseller audiobooks and e-books (books in electronic, or digital, format). By the end of 2020 nearly 117,000 Montanans (or more than 10% of the total population) were registered users of MontanaLibrary2Go. During the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, when most Montana libraries closed to the public, requests for reading material from patrons increased by 20%. Overall newly registered users of MontanaLibrary2Go increased by 28% in 2020 over 2019.

With LSTA and CARES funding MSL increased the budget for new MontanaLibrary2Go content by \$10,000 each month which allowed Montana librarians to purchase 200 additional copies of in-demand titles each month. As a result of this increase in spending, average holds wait times Montanans experienced were reduced from 43 days to 36 days.

In addition to procuring e-content for MontanaLibrary2Go, MSL shared \$250,000 of GEER CARES Act funds with Montana schools and academic libraries.

MontanaLibrary2Go Statistics

MontanaLibrary2Go Website

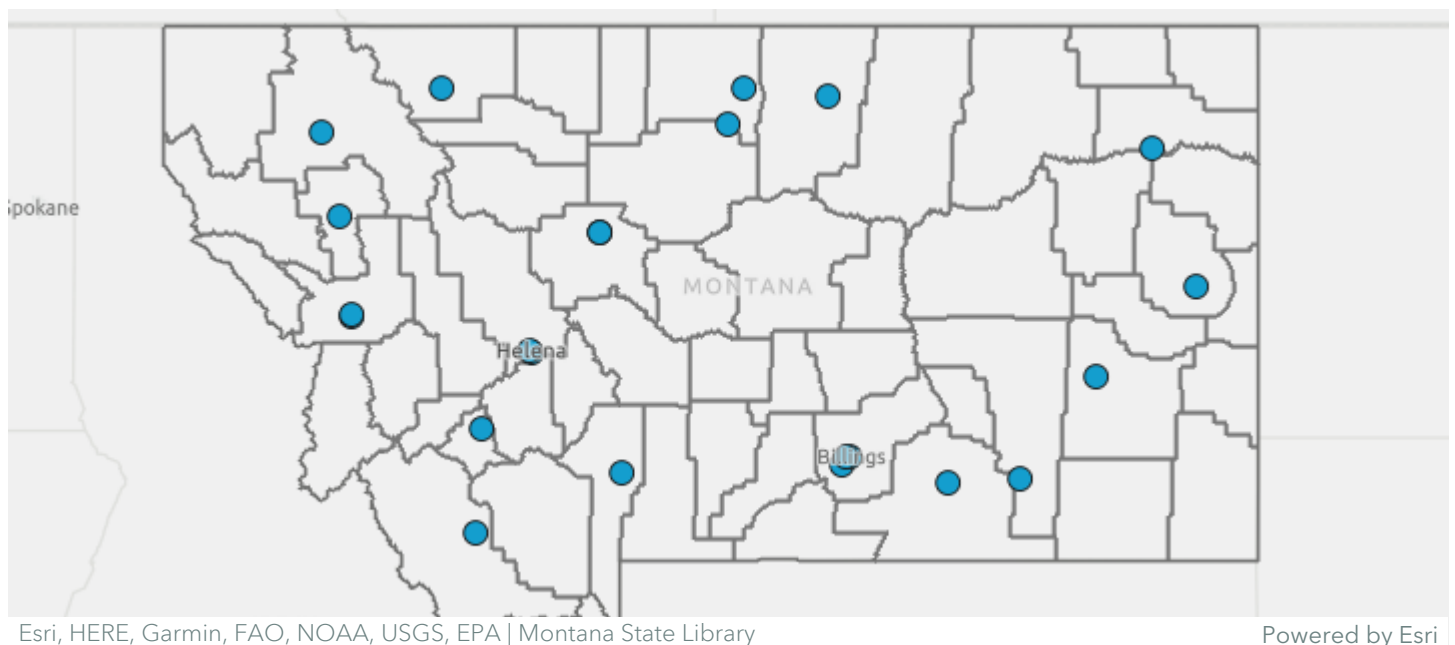


Montana Schools Shared E-books Collection

Funds allowed 30 new schools to join the Montana Schools OverDrive program, a cooperative of schools that jointly procure a platform and e-content to support K-12 curriculum in Montana. With additional funding for the collection budget in 2020, students in 117 Montana schools checked out over 70,000 items, up from 49,581 in 2019.

MSL also launched an online service called Public Library Connect through which students can discover age-appropriate titles available through MontanaLibrary2Go directly through their school e-content app, Sora, further increasing access to educational e-resources.

Schools E-book Collection Website



TRAILS Academic Consortium

The Treasure State Academic Information & Library Services (TRAILS) Consortium used their GEER CARES Act funds to purchase academic e-content to support:

- Black History
- Disability Studies
- Indigenous Studies
- LGBTQ Studies
- Race, Class, and Gender

The titles are available to more than 49,500 students, faculty, and registered patrons of the 24 Montana academic institutions that are TRAILS member. The addition of these collections to TRAILS information resources have provided Montana's faculty, students and researchers unlimited access to hundreds of e-books supporting diverse and inclusive studies.

TRAILS Website

MSL intends to spend \$750,000 in ARPA funds to continue to increase the amount of e-resources available to Montanans. MSL is currently seeking input from Montana libraries about additional e-content to support educational and workforce needs.



MMP Contributors

Libraries, Museums and Archives

Jennifer Birnel
March 10, 2021

[Statewide Contributors](#)

[Glacier Country](#)

[Central Montana](#)

[Missouri River Country](#)

[Southwest Montana](#)

[Yellowstone Country](#)

[Southeast Montana](#)

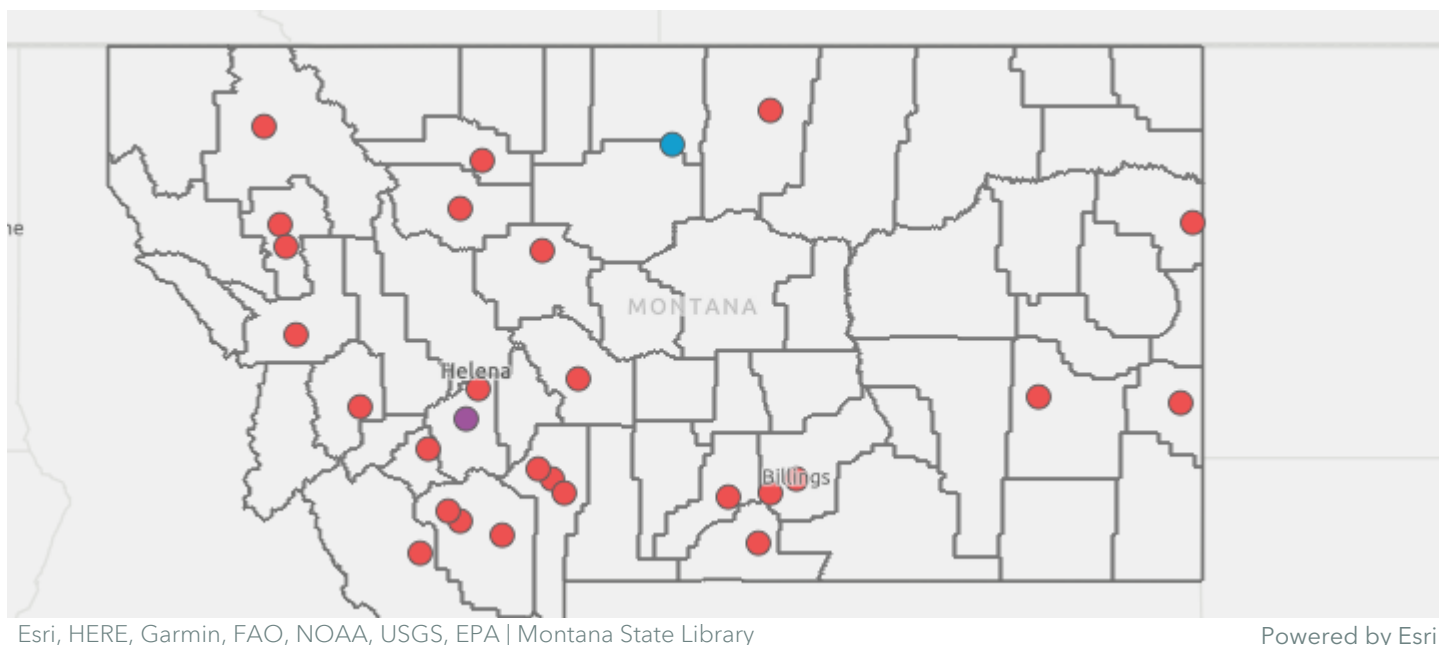
Montana Memory Project

In addition to procuring commercial e-content, MSL will spend \$250,000 to support the creation of additional Montana-specific digital content. Made available through the Montana Memory Project (MMP), historic and contemporary primary resources in digital form are essential resources to support Montana-focused curriculum. With ARPA funds, MSL intends to target digital content creation in those counties currently absent from the MMP.

Additionally, MSL will work with the Montana Historical Society and Montana educators to create lesson plans that feature MMP content. The success of this learning is reflected in the widespread participation in the annual MMP writing contest sponsored by MSL in partnership with the publication *Distinctly Montana*. In January 2021 64 students in grades 3-6 and 56 students in grades 7-12 submitted short stories inspired by their favorite MMP content. The contest winners were announced in the spring and the winning stories will be published in *Distinctly Montana's* fall issue.

Montana Memory Project Statistics

Montana Memory Project Website



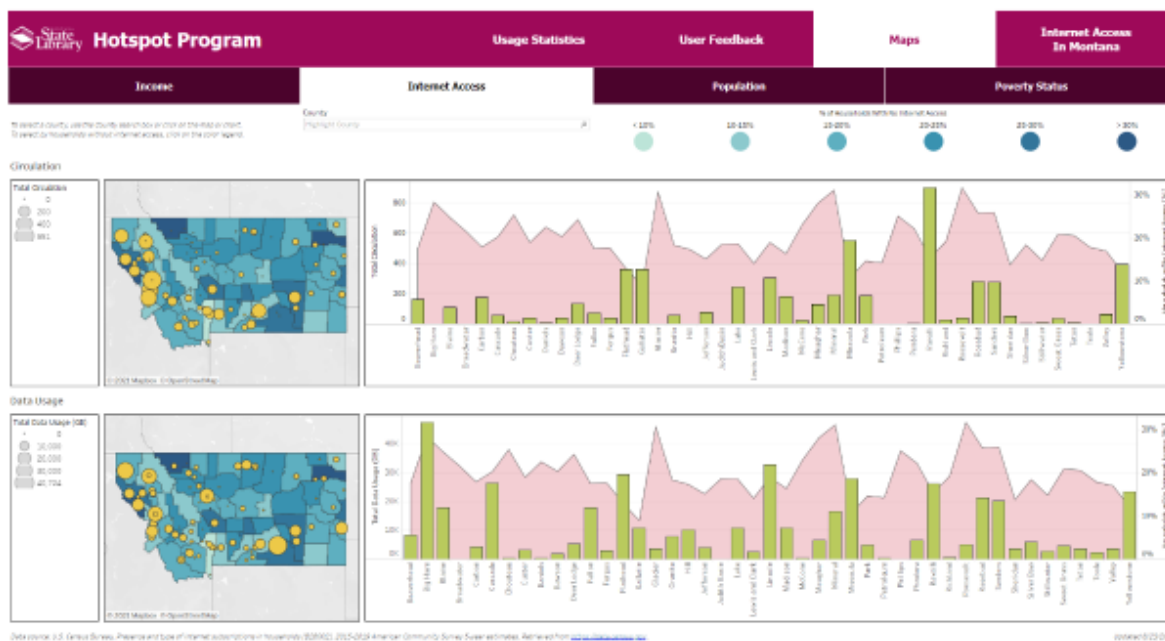
Summer Reading Program

During the summer, Montana public libraries provide summer reading programs to encourage reading and to prevent the summer reading slide. This is an essential service provided by all public libraries in Montana. In order to maintain this program during stay-at-home orders and while library buildings were closed to the public, MSL procured a two-year statewide contract with ReadSquared to offer summer reading programs online. 28 of Montana's public libraries (34%) offered online summer reading through ReadSquared in 2020 and 2021. Some libraries are exploring how to use the service to offer hybrid reading programs throughout the year as the pandemic lingers.

[ReadSquared Website](#)

Broadband

According to [BroadbandNow](#), Montana ranks 50th across all US states in access to highspeed broadband. Prior to the pandemic, four Montana libraries circulated mobile Wi-Fi hotspots to patrons that did not otherwise have internet access. Those libraries found that their hotspots were in constant circulation, showing the demand for the service. The need for internet access increased dramatically during the pandemic as families use the internet to work, attend online classes, apply for unemployment, communicate with healthcare providers through telemedicine services, and stay connected with friends and love-ones. In order to address this need, MSL invested in hotspots and mobile tablets to increase online access for Montanans.



Hotspot Program

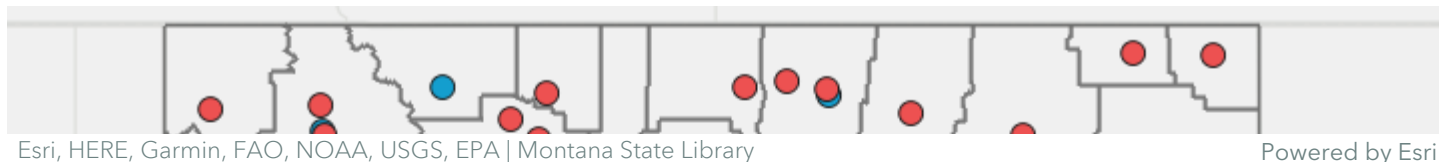
Montana public, school, and academic libraries are circulating mobile Wi-Fi hotspots to their patrons to increase internet access at home or wherever internet access is needed. Making use of State of Montana term contracts and an agreement with Nemont, MSL provides the devices and pays for unlimited mobile data plans. Montanans report using the hotspots to attend school and complete homework, apply for employment, keep informed of current events, complete

government forms, access health information and telehealth information and more.

Thank you for making the mobile hotspots available. We used it to live stream my uncle-in-law's funeral. He passed away unexpectedly and lots of family and friends were unable to travel to Butte for the service. With the hotspot we were able to share those moments with them even though the church did not have wifi. Thank you.

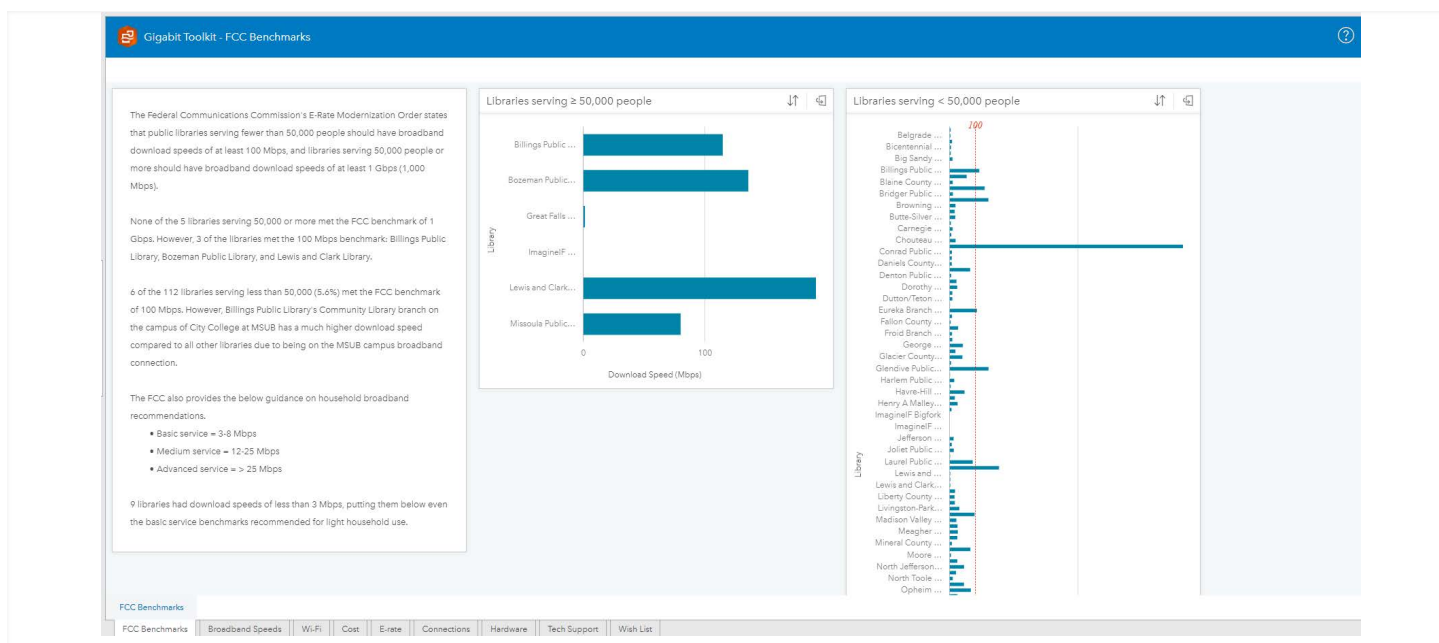
MSL intends to spend \$585,000 of ARPA funds, before the December 31, 2022 funding deadline, to sustain the existing hotspot lending program, to increase the number of hotspots available for circulation, and to grow the program to serve all Montana counties. Though MSL projects the need for this service will remain high while Montana works to address our broadband challenges, MSL does not have funds to maintain the program beyond 2022.

Hotspot Program Dashboard



Device Distribution

In addition to direct internet access afforded through the hotspot lending program, MSL procured 152 HP ProBooks and Apple iPads to lend through Montana public libraries for patrons who lack the technology necessary to get online.



Libraries' Internal Broadband Capacity

In 2019, MSL commissioned a study of Montana public libraries current broadband capacity including subscribed broadband speeds and internal broadband capacity. Despite being the only source of freely available Wi-Fi in nearly 24% of Montana communities, the study revealed that 40% of libraries have outdated wiring and Wi-Fi equipment including routers older than five years.

In the spring of 2021, MSL completed demonstration projects in Lewistown, Cascade, and Great Falls, where MSL funded wiring upgrades and procured managed Wi-Fi routers for the

participating libraries. As a result MSL a gained better understanding of the process and costs to deploy this equipment in small, medium and large libraries and the challenges to expect in a statewide effort. These libraries report more stable internet connections with better Wi-Fi for patrons and the library staff have more information to better manage and support their wide area networks.

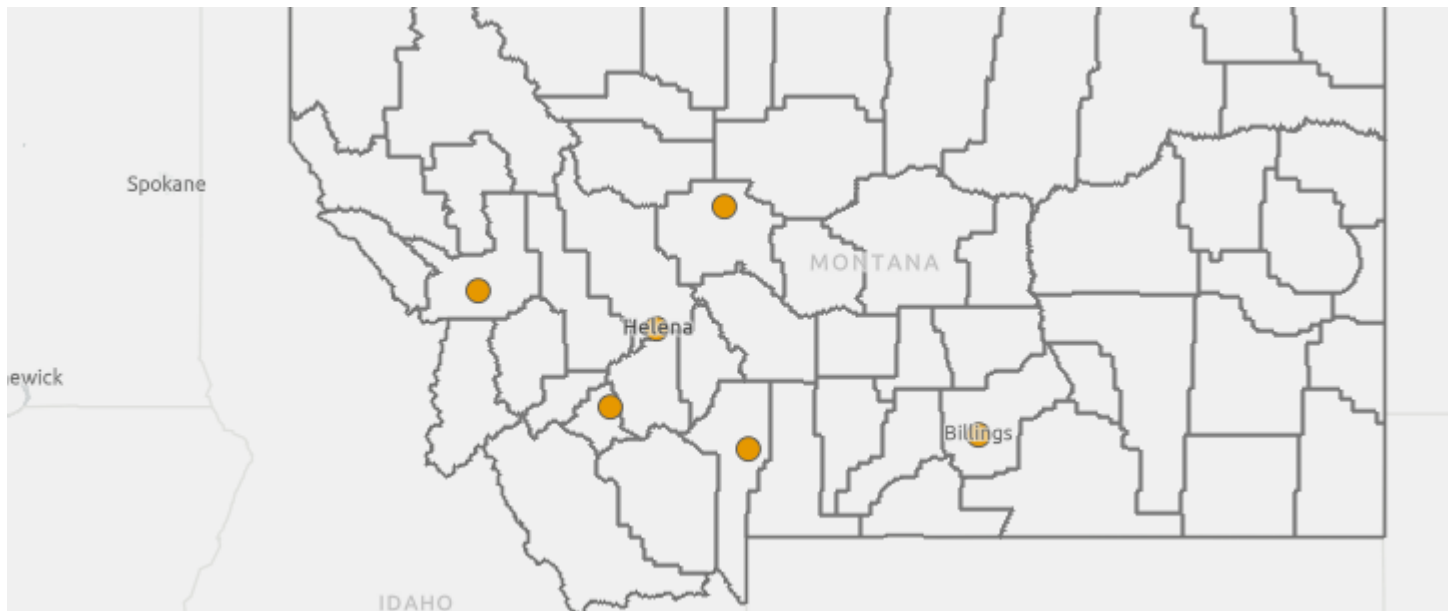
MSL will invest \$650,000 of ARPA funds to upgrade the internal internet capacity in Montana libraries. In order to benefit from the upgrades, libraries will be asked to commit to upgrading their internet subscriptions to a minimum of 100 Mbs, the minimum recommended speeds for libraries from the Federal Communications Commission. This investment in the broadband infrastructure in Montana libraries will ensure that, as libraries are able to increase broadband speeds, their internal connections do not render that investment moot. As a result, MSL expects that Montana library patrons will benefit from access to increased internet speeds and more stable wireless networks meaning that more Montanans will have access to the internet to achieve their desired goals for education, employment, and personal well-being.

Newsline

House Bill 632 appropriated \$120,000 of ARPA funds through the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) to sponsor Newsline, a program of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) that provides access to:

- National newspapers, including the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*
- Breaking news sources, including *CNN*, *BBC*, and *ESPN Online*

- International newspapers, including *Financial Times* and *Vancouver Sun*
- Magazines, including *Time*, *Consumer Reports*, *Guideposts*, and *Smithsonian*
- Emergency weather alerts and seven-day forecasts localized to your zip code or GPS location
- The information that scrolls along the bottom of your television screen during emergency alerts
- More than 100,000 job listings from two national job sources
- TV listings localized to subscribers zip codes
- Retail ads
- NFB's national channel, including the ebook *Building the Lives We Want*, the *Braille Monitor*, *Future Reflections*, and presidential releases



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With a sponsorship funded through ARPA funds, Montana subscribers will have access to following Montana newspapers:

- *Billings Gazette*
- *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*
- *Great Falls Tribune*
- *Helena Independent Record*

- *Missoulian*
- *Montana Standard*

MSL established a memorandum of understanding with DPHHS to pass the ARPA dollars through to MSL to fund a sponsorship contract with the NFB. Eligible Montanans now have access to all Newsline services. According to the terms of the contract, the NFB is expected to report provide use metrics to MSL to complete quarterly reporting to DPHHS and the Legislative Finance Committee.

Newsline Website

Montana State Library

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<http://msl.mt.gov>