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# Public Use of the Internet at the Beaverton City Library

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Through a unique volunteer program, The Beaverton City Library is able to provide public Internet access without a heavy demand on staff time. The volunteers have provided demonstrations and "Help Sessions" to over 1,000 library patrons.

Currently the Beaverton City Library has four Internet terminals for patrons to use. All access the Internet via a public network with high-speed (T1) Internet connections. One of the terminals is in the reference area of the library and the other three are in a small private Internet Room.

Use is first come, first served, at the terminal in the reference area and it is limited to 30 minutes when others are waiting. A clipboard for signing up to be on the waiting list is located beside the terminal. Reference staff offer help to the users as their time allows. The terminal is almost always in use.

The three terminals in the Internet Room are available to patrons who have attended a demonstration on Internet use given by a library volunteer, or to those whom the reference librarians assess as having sufficient understanding of the Internet to use the terminal on their own. The Internet Room is on the opposite side of the library from the reference desk, which, coupled with time constraints, makes it difficult for the librarians to provide assistance with searching.

Any patron who uses the Internet Room must sign Beaverton's acceptable use policy for the Internet, the "Rules of the Road." It outlines the expectations we have of those who wish to surf the net in our Internet Room. For those under 16, the Rules require a parent or a guardian's signature. Users must have a signed Rules form on file. The fact that a patron is qualified to use the Internet Room is recorded in his patron registration files in the Washington County Cooperative Library Services' circulation data base.

Sign-up to use the Internet Room is accomplished at the Circulation Desk where we keep three sign-up

clipboards, each for a specified terminal. A key to the Room is given to each patron who signs up (the Room is normally kept locked), identification is taken at the desk, and staff show the patron to the Internet Room.


A patron may sign up for a block of time up to one hour. This can be done in advance over the telephone as well as in person. If the terminal is not reserved for the following hour, the patron may continue to use it. The terminals are almost always in use.

Volunteer demonstrations have proved very popular. Patrons add their names to sign-up sheets posted in the library lobby. We attempt to limit the demonstrations to four people, but this is not always possible. Places are filled a month or more in advance. There are four or five demonstrations per week. Several of our Internet volunteers have also agreed to be present at "Help Sessions," where the public can sign up to call upon their expertise for assistance in using the Internet.

In August of this year demonstrators began giving out Internet Demonstration Evaluation forms to those attending each session. Initial results were presented at a demonstrator's meeting in September. Patron response was overwhelmingly positive at that time and continues to be so.

Problems have centered on balky printers, running out of paper for the printer, patrons adding their own bookmarks, and patrons needing more help than staff could provide. A trouble log, on which staff and volunteers can describe equipment problems, has helped. Several staff are gaining expertise as Internet troubleshooters, and one staff member has been designated Internet Room Assistant. She checks regularly to see that the printers have paper, the terminals are working, and the handouts that demonstrators use are in sufficient supply.

Although we are aware of a variety of filtering software, we are using none. To date we have had no problems with young people's use of the Internet.

The effort we have made to introduce our public to the possibilities of Internet use, though not without problems, has been very rewarding in terms of public response. All staff continue to contribute to this effort, as do our corps of expert volunteers. Their interest and expertise in Internet use has been a wonderful resource to the public. 

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