HIGH SPEED INTERNET

AND LIBRARIES

OVERVIEW

When libraries are connected to high speed Internet, the neighboring community benefits. Public libraries serve as critical gateways to information outside one's own community, and in the Information Age this role has become even more important. Libraries give people without home computers free access to the Internet, helping America close the digital divide. As reliance upon public libraries to provide broadband telecommunications services for their community increases, it becomes essential to have universal high speed connectivity in libraries across the country.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Although the need for libraries to provide broadband access is increasing, many libraries are ill-equipped to meet this need. Virtually all public libraries provide public access to the Internet, but more than half indicate that the connection speed is inadequate to satisfy their community's needs.

BENEFITS OF HIGH SPEED INTERNET

- Students use connected libraries to download educational videos, view course lectures and access scholarly journals.
- Librarians use the Internet for business functions, such as running online catalogs, managing digitized content and serving patrons through e-mail and online reference.
- Residents in underserved communities such as rural or low income areas where most homes lack access to high speed Internet rely on Internet connectivity from their local public library.
- As central public meeting spaces within communities, libraries connected to high speed Internet can serve as disaster response centers, such as during a flood, fire or hurricane.
- Senior citizens, many of whom do not own home computers, find public libraries helpful for finding information on health issues or government programs, and maintaining connections with family and friends who live far away.
- Many libraries provide information literacy training that allows less tech-savvy individuals to engage the Internet in ways that otherwise wouldn't.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy makers focus on delivering one gigabyte of capacity to institutions that anchor our communities – libraries, schools and hospitals – so that all Americans will benefit from the build out of a high speed broadband infrastructure.
- Library connectivity should be a priority in efforts to increase broadband proliferation, especially in underserved areas where a library is the community's only source of Internet.
- The federal E-rate program should continue its highly-successful program of subsidies for Internet connections for libraries and schools.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit ala.org and speedmatters.org

ALAAmericanLibraryAssociation

www.speedmatters.org

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