



## PRIORITIES FOR THE 85<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE SESSION

### *Increase Broadband Access for Texas Communities*

The Texas Library Association's (TLA) almost 7,000 member librarians support the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) exceptional item 5 budget request for funding to increase and encourage library participation in the E-Rate discount program.

**\$1 million to bring affordable high-speed Internet service to Texas communities through the E-Rate discount program**

#### The Need

Anyone who has been frustrated watching the rotating color wheel spin on a computer screen for what seems like an hour fully understands the importance of high-speed Internet connections.

- 94% of Texans do not have access to adequate Internet speeds at their public libraries\*
- In 60% of our communities, public libraries are the ONLY PLACE where people can access the Internet for free
- In 2014, 73 million Texans visited a public library and logged 26 million Internet sessions

### **Broadband Access for Texas Communities (exceptional item #5)**

**\$1 million to increase the number of public libraries with affordable high-speed Internet**

#### Affordability & the E-Rate Program

- High-speed Internet can cost between \$24,000 and \$48,000 per year, per location
- Costs can be reduced to \$6,000 to \$12,000 per year, a 75% average discount for public libraries that access the federal E-Rate program
- Only 23% of Texas public libraries currently receive E-Rate discounts, compared to 65% of all U.S. public libraries

The E-Rate application process is extremely cumbersome, complicated and time-consuming. Many Texas public libraries lack the expertise and resources to successfully complete the application.

TSLAC will contract with an expert consultant to assist up to 100 libraries in applying for E-Rate funding, and will provide one year of support for increased broadband expense incurred at the discounted rates. The money is there waiting in the Universal Service Fund. Texas libraries that successfully complete the application, supply the required documentation, and have a provider in their area are basically guaranteed to get the discount.

A few years ago, we formed a local committee to help guide us through the E-Rate application process. It was extremely challenging and time consuming, and unfortunately we were unsuccessful. I would like to apply again, but I simply do not have the expertise needed. Our community qualifies for the 90% discount, and having a professional consultant help us with the application process would benefit us tremendously!

*- Norma Fultz, Director, Rio Grande City Public Library*



## Last Word

Students, jobseekers, small business owners, entrepreneurs, and many other rely on public libraries as a vital link to online information. Without access to high-speed Internet, Texans cannot be competitive in education, workforce, and economic development.

Enabling TSLAC increase access to affordable broadband Internet connections at more public libraries not only makes excellent fiscal sense, but also ensures that Texans have access to content and technology that is essential to a competitive workforce.

The FCC recommended minimum download speed for public libraries serving up to 50,000 people is 100 Megabits per second. My city management was shocked and dismayed when the TSLAC speed test revealed that our download speed was a dismal 1.019 Mbps, or one percent of the minimum. Our long-suffering clients were thrilled that this spurred management to authorize an immediate upgrade to our bandwidth.

*- Rebecca Sullivan, Terrell Public Library*

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