The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021

The omnibus spending bill approved by Congress and signed by the president on December 27 both funds the federal government through the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 and provides a COVID relief package. The FY21 spending measure includes big wins for libraries on several fronts, such as increases for IMLS and IAL.

The $900 billion COVID relief portion of the bill includes nearly $82 billion in funding for K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, and delegates funding for governors for local education priorities. In addition, the bill provides $7 billion for broadband internet access. The package also extends aid to struggling families through stimulus checks, enhanced federal unemployment benefits, and financial support for small businesses. Relief provisions helpful to the library community include:

**EDUCATION STABILIZATION**

Funding of $81.9 billion for programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). This funding will help alleviate financial pressures for local schools making cuts to programs. Funding flows through the state educational agency (SEA), which will award subgrants to local educational agencies. School and academic library leaders are urged to coordinate with their local administrators in the coming weeks to advocate for funding to directly benefit library needs. The ED funding is broken down in the following manner:

- **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund** (Public K-12 schools): $54.3 billion
- **Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund**: $22.7 billion, which includes dedicated funds for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)
- **Governors Emergency Education Relief Fund**: $4.1 billion (includes $2.8 billion for private K-12 schools)
- **Relief for outlying areas and the Bureau of Indian Education**: $818.8 million

**501(c)(6) ORGANIZATIONS**

Many library organizations having 501(c)(6) status are now eligible for an additional $284 billion in funding through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), provided they:

- Do not receive more than 15 percent of receipts from lobbying activities
- Have lobbying activities that do not comprise more than 15 percent of total activities
- Do not have lobbying activities that exceeded $1 million in the most recent tax year that ended prior to February 15, 2020
- Have fewer than 300 employees

**THEODORE ROOSEVELT PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY**

The United States (via the Secretary of Agriculture) will sell specified forest lands to the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation at market price.
EMERGENCY BROADBAND BENEFIT

$3.2 billion for low-income families to access broadband through an FCC fund. Under the $3.2 billion fund, individuals are eligible for a $50 monthly internet subsidy, and providers can be reimbursed up to $100 for issuing a Wi-Fi connected device (one per household). Individuals/families are also eligible if a member of their family has participated in the free and reduced-price lunch program or received a Federal Pell grant.

OFFICE OF MINORITY BROADBAND

The bill also establishes an Office of Minority Broadband Initiatives. The pilot program, titled the “Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program,” would be funded at $285 million to purchase broadband internet access, related equipment or to hire and train information technology personnel at HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and other MSIs and coordinate with anchor institutions in communities. Among other duties, the Office would collaborate with HBCUs, HSIs, and other MSIs to promote broadband internet service at these institutions and surrounding communities.

GRANTS FOR BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY

$300 million given to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to provide Broadband Infrastructure Deployment grants to deploy fixed broadband services in underserved areas with minimum speeds of 25/3 Mbps, including latency that allows for real-time interactive applications. Libraries in eligible service areas could benefit from these deployment grants.

$1 billion for grants to expand access to and adoption of broadband on tribal lands, and remote learning, telework or telehealth resources during the pandemic. Entities that receive grant funds must commit to them within 180 days and utilize all funding within one year. In addition to broadband deployment and access purposes, funds may be used for distance learning, telehealth, digital inclusion efforts, and broadband adoption activities. Libraries that provide such services could be eligible to also receive funding as a subgrant recipient.

OFFICE OF INTERNET CONNECTIVITY AND GROWTH

NTIA IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

This newly established office will coordinate across federal agencies that have broadband programs aimed to increase effectiveness and efficiency of efforts. Libraries could be eligible in some of these federal programs. The Office will focus on outreach, communications, workshops, publications, training, toolkits, and white papers. It will track federal expenditures on broadband infrastructure and provide annual reporting on broadband deployment and impact. Scope of activities include federal programs with broadband-related activities. ALA endorsed this legislation when it was a standalone bill.