

# ALA Office for Information Technology Policy

## *Internet Access Principles*

### ***Background***

The *Internet Access Principles* articulated below build on the document *The Library in the Networked World* released by the Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) in 2002.

With basic Internet connectivity in our nation's libraries approaching 100%, connectivity by itself is no longer a major issue in the library community. However, the *quality* of that connectivity is still very much an issue in many libraries. For example, in the 2006 report *Public Libraries and the Internet*<sup>1</sup>, 45.5% of public libraries have a network connectivity speed insufficient to meet patron demand some or all of the time. Work that OITP has done demonstrates that there are a wide variety of factors that impact the quality of a given library's Internet connection. For example, in some instances the telecommunications infrastructure is inadequate. For some libraries the cost of sufficient bandwidth is simply more than the library can afford. In other localities bandwidth has yet to become an important enough issue to warrant the leadership commitment needed at the local, regional or state level to address the issue. With the Internet, and especially the Web, becoming a more interactive and personalized medium, the quality of a library's Internet access will continue to be a major issue in the library community.

### ***Introduction***

With more information being made available via the Internet—and some information being available only via the Internet—access to such information is critical to maintaining an informed citizenry in a rapidly evolving global knowledge society. Libraries are unique and critical institutions in providing such access to networked information. In this regard,

- ALA supports the Federal Communications Commission's broadband Internet access principles<sup>2</sup>
- ALA endorses equitable access for all to the Internet
- ALA endorses equitable access for all Internet content providers, including individuals and libraries
- ALA endorses preserving the integrity of Internet access to services including e-government and first responders

### **Universal Service**

- Universal service is essential to help libraries provide equitable and affordable access to current and emerging Internet technologies in order to provide critical public services.
- Every library should have the necessary resources for network connectivity to support current, new, and innovative services.

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<sup>1</sup> *Public Libraries and the Internet*. By John Bertot, Charles McClure, Paul Jaeger, and Joe Ryan. The report is sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the ALA. It is available at [http://www.ii.fsu.edu/plinternet\\_reports.cfm](http://www.ii.fsu.edu/plinternet_reports.cfm).

<sup>2</sup> FCC *Broadband Policy Statement and Internet Access Principles*. Released September 2005. ([http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs\\_public/attachmatch/FCC-05-151A1.pdf](http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-05-151A1.pdf))

- Libraries should work with allies and decision-makers to ensure the continuation and growth of universal service programs and the requisite mechanisms to support network access.
- ALA continues to support the Universal Service E-rate program, encourage library participation, and advocate for program reform.
- The concept of universal service should incorporate universal access to networked information via the library.

### **Broadband**

- All libraries must have sufficient broadband network access to meet current and anticipated needs. Broadband must be continuously evaluated to ensure it is meeting the evolving needs of the library.
- Library broadband access must be fair, affordable, and accessible.
- Libraries are critical partners during any broadband planning and build out.
- As first responders, in terms of information, infrastructure, and the creation of a safe community center, libraries must have reliable broadband access.
- Libraries should have the option to select broadband access from a variety of providers using a variety of technologies. There should be no onerous restrictions on a library's choice of broadband access.
- Broadband is critical for libraries to meet the needs of their communities and constituents. Broadband access leads to community economic development, lifelong learning, access to e-government services, and increased public safety.
- Because broadband is an unregulated information service, ALA encourages the Federal Communications Commission to take any needed action to preserve and promote the vibrant, open, interconnected and neutral character of the Internet.
- ALA supports open and equitable access to library networked content, subject to appropriate library policies. Broadband providers should not control access to lawful services or content or favor some services or content over others.
- ALA supports a robust, competitive market for Internet access and services, with regulation kept at a minimum. At the same time, we hold that net neutrality—focused on the nondiscrimination of access and content—is a fundamental principle of the Internet that has permitted it to become a critical information and communication resource for libraries, their missions, and their patrons.

### **Municipal Networks**

- Local or regional units of government (e.g., cities, counties) should have the right to develop and manage networks for use by public and private-sector agencies and the public at large. There should be no state or federal statutory impediments to the establishment of municipal networks.
- Municipalities are encouraged to form public/private partnerships when feasible and when such partnerships are in the interest of the public and the library.
- Municipalities should have the right to implement any technology (e.g., wireline, wireless) as need requires.
- Libraries are an important source of network access and should be part of any municipal network planning and development efforts.

**Adopted by the Office for Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee, June 2007.**