



---

## Broadband and Telecommunications June 2009

Libraries provide essential services to the public through equitable public access to information and telecommunications services. All types of libraries – public, school and academic - need affordable “big pipe” broadband connectivity to meet the ever-increasing needs of library users. Because of the increased public demand for access, ALA’s agenda includes the following:

- **Build-out of high-speed, affordable national broadband services including “Fiber to the Library”;**
- **Stabilization of Universal Service (USF) and the E-rate**, discounts that have provided over \$600 million to public libraries over the 12-year life of the program;
- **Preservation of network neutrality**, to keep a vibrant diversity of viewpoints on the Internet while recognizing the need for innovation and transparency as well as appropriate network management techniques.

### Broadband Programs in the “Stimulus Act”

Because of the essential role that libraries serve in providing access to Internet and telecommunications services for those without access at home and because libraries of all types provide remote online access to library resources and other community and e-government services, ALA continually urges Congress and the Executive Branch to include “libraries” in all broadband and telecommunications programs. Broadband services are vital to libraries and the communities they serve.

Recent ALA Washington Office broadband activities have focused extensively on the broadband grant programs of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). For information about the broadband programs in ARRA and the related ongoing activities of ALA please see [www.ala.org/knowyourstimulus](http://www.ala.org/knowyourstimulus).

The library community appreciates the inclusion of libraries in the broadband stimulus programs for public computing centers; however, ALA knows that this requires a great amount of effort to benefit from this opportunity. ALA and local libraries are now planning to successfully participate in all of the broadband programs at the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) authorized as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA.)

### Fiber to the Library Initiative

Additionally, work moves forward on the “Fiber to the Library” project. For additional information about this effort see: <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oitp/index.cfm>.

### Universal Service Exemption from Antideficiency Act Rules

The E-rate discount program for public libraries and K-12 public and private schools, was frozen for several months in 2004, following a major shift in requirements that made the FCC comply with government accounting rules under the Antideficiency Act (ADA.) This sudden application of ADA cash-flow rules forced the FCC to freeze E-rate funds and temporarily halt pending commitments to E-rate participants for the subsequent year. In turn, there was major disruption for participants by withholding funds from vendors as well as libraries and schools and making it impossible for them to plan and budget for pending E-rate related services. The freeze was lifted when Congress passed a one-year exemption, which has had to be done again each year since.

ALA and others now seek a permanent exemption in order to provide stability and certainty to the E-rate program for participants and for service providers. After several years of one-year exemptions, the program has shown that reasonable cash-flow procedures at the FCC and at USAC continue to work and should not be

subject to ADA requirements. ALA urges passage of S. 348, a bill introduced by Sens. John D. Rockefeller (D-WV) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME), two of the original sponsors of the E-rate program. ALA urges passage of a companion bill, H.R. 2135, introduced by Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-MT). Both S. 348 and H.R. 2135 would amend Section 254 of the Communications Act of 1934 (which includes the Telecommunications Act of 1996.)

A matter of equity, the E-rate remains an important program to ensure that public libraries and K-12 public and private schools can afford the ongoing monthly costs of telecommunications services in order to serve students and library users of all ages. Every state has benefited with the deepest discounts going to the poorest communities. Over the 12 years of the program, public libraries have received telecommunications discounts of over \$600 million. School libraries benefit from the discounts for K-12 public and private schools.

ALA supports E-rate discounts for libraries and schools. Congress should pass a permanent exemption for USF funds from ADA accounting requirements.

### **Network Neutrality**

ALA supports net neutrality legislation that preserves the ability of library patrons to reach the content and services of their choice and for libraries to be able to virtually publish and make information available without threat of a “slow-down.” Open access to all types of online information services, including library Web sites, is important to maintain a viable and robust Internet. ALA supports efforts to ensure that the principle of net neutrality is preserved and enforced and will be actively involved in the network neutrality debates in Congress and at the FCC.

### ***Action Needed:***

As with ALA’s entire legislative agenda, grassroots advocacy is absolutely necessary to realize our goals to get “fiber to the library” in the coming months and years.

Library advocates should reach out to their members of Congress to voice their support for the telecommunications and broadband policies and legislation outlined in this brief.

To learn more about advocacy and to stay current with issues, go to the ALA Legislative Action Center (LAC) at [www.ala.org/oqr](http://www.ala.org/oqr) or <http://capwiz.com/ala/home/>.