

Before the
Institute for Museum and Library Services
Libraries and Broadband: Urgency and Impact
COMMENTS OF THE KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT FOR LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES
Wayne Onkst, State Librarian and Commissioner

The Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives (KDLA) is grateful to Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Director Susan H. Hildreth and The National Museum and Library Services Board (NMLSB) for the opportunity to provide a statement for the record on the critical issue of libraries and broadband.

Background

KDLA actively supports public library service in all 120 counties in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. These public libraries serve the state's population of 4.37 million residents. Kentucky public libraries are extremely diverse. The largest public library system in the state serves an urban population of 750,828 with a budget of \$16.4 million and a staff of 267. The smallest system serves a remote rural population of 4,784 with a budget of \$19,862 and a paid staff of one¹.

Kentucky's public libraries provide essential services to some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable populations. More than a quarter of the state's children live below the poverty level,² and more than half of children arrive unprepared for Kindergarten.³ Educational attainment is also a focus, with only a third of the population over 25 having graduated from high school, and 21% having a bachelor's degree or higher⁴. The unemployment level in Kentucky is also higher than the national average. The statewide level is 7.9%, but in some counties, such as rural Jackson County, the unemployment level is much higher, at 20.4%⁵.

Demand for public library service is at near-record levels, and unfortunately libraries are managing this demand with declining budgets. KDLA has provided direct aid to public libraries since 1952. However,

¹ See Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Statistical Report for Kentucky Public Libraries: Fiscal Year 2011-2012,

available at <http://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/plssd/Documents/KDLA1112.pdf> (last visited April 23, 2014).

² See Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS Count Data Center: Child Poverty Rate (Single Year Estimates), available at

<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#KY/2/0> (last visited April 23, 2014).

³ See Governor's Office of Early Childhood, 2014 Early Childhood Profile, available at

http://kcews.ky.gov/Reports/EarlyChildhoodProfile/ECP_2014_Statewide.pdf (last visited April 23, 2014).

⁴ See United States Census Bureau, American Fact Finder: Educational Attainment: 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year

Estimates, available at

<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk> (last visited April 23, 2014).

⁵ See Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics: Current Unemployment Rates for States and

Historical Highs/Lows Seasonally Adjusted, available at <http://www.bls.gov/web/laus/lauhsthl.htm> (last visited April 23, 2014) and Press Release, Kentucky Office of Employment and Training, County jobless rates released for February 2013 to February 2014 (March 27, 2014), available at

<https://kylmi.ky.gov/gsipub/index.asp?docid=514> (last visited April 23, 2014).

the amount of state aid has decreased by nearly one-third (32%) since 2008⁶. Local support for public libraries has also declined or plateaued in the past 5 years⁷. Public libraries rely on federal grants and programs like E-rate to make up the difference.

Kentucky Public Libraries and E-rate

E-rate has provided crucial financial support for connecting Kentucky's libraries and communities to a wealth of internet-enabled resources and services. The recent data-sharing project between IMLS and the FCC revealed that more than 90% of U.S. public libraries have benefitted from the E-rate program, with an average participation rate of 63% to 73% nationwide.⁸ In Kentucky, 95% of libraries have participated in the E-rate program since its inception. State results mirror the IMLS findings in another significant way; program participation has doubled since the onset of the Great Recession in 2008.

The Commonwealth's public libraries have benefitted from nearly \$9 million in E-rate funding since the program's inception. \$965,048 was disbursed in 2012 alone, nearly double the amount disbursed in 2008. E-rate funds allow libraries to sustainably increase their broadband capacity, and can also serve as a catalyst for innovation and collaboration. Several library directors have provided input on the impact of the program on their libraries:⁹

In partnership with Windstream and the University of Kentucky, and because of E-rate discounts, the Jessamine County Public Library will be among the first public libraries in the country able to obtain a Gigabit connection to Internet2 (as well as the Internet as most of us recognize it). We hope to then partner further with the Internet2 community and the Gigabit community and serve as a pilot library exploring the possibilities of such connectivity. This would cost over \$115,000 (even more without the partnerships with Windstream and the University of Kentucky), and through our E-rate discount we can provide this technology to tens of thousands of citizens for approximately \$10,000. E-rate is key to our exploration, to our advancement of information, ideas, and cultural opportunity for our citizens regardless of any socio-economic barrier--that is the power of E-rate in our library and in public libraries around the country.

The 80% discount we receive through E-rate allowed us to increase our bandwidth last year. This meant we could add an additional 32 ports to support our partnership with Owensboro Community and Technical College, the Adult Education provider in our county. The GED [is now] entirely computer-based, and our improvements have allowed them to offer their keyboarding classes at the library. These classes were made possible because of the increased bandwidth paid for by E-rate discounts.

Kentucky Broadband Landscape

⁶ Email message from Charlene Davis, Acting Director, Field Services Division of KDLA received on August 9, 2013.

⁷ Email message from Jay Bank, State Data Consultant, KDLA received on August 12, 2013.

⁸ See New Data: More Than 90% of U.S. Public Libraries Have Used E-rate, *available at* <http://blog.imls.gov/?p=4778> (last visited April 18, 2014).

⁹ Email messages from Dr. Ron Critchfield, Director of the Jessamine County Public Library, and Aimee Newberry, Director of the McLean County Public Library, received on March 22, 2013.

74.4% of Kentucky libraries offer the only no-fee computer and internet access in their communities, more than 12% above the national average.¹⁰ Unfortunately, only 54% of rural Kentuckians have access to broadband at home, making Internet access a particularly valuable service at the Commonwealth's 99 rural libraries.¹¹ A recent study by the University of Kentucky found that only 18 of the state's 120 counties are nationally competitive in terms of broadband availability and adoption.¹²

The American Library Association (ALA) recently proposed that all libraries achieve Gigabit speeds by 2018.¹³ As an interim goal, ALA proposed that libraries serving a population of less than 50,000 have a broadband capacity of at least 100 Mbps, and those serving populations of 50,000 or greater have 1 Gbps speeds. 18 of Kentucky's 120 libraries serve populations of more than 50,000, and three of those libraries currently have connectivity of 1 Gbps. The remaining 15 libraries have an average speed of 30 Mbps.

85% of Kentucky's libraries provide service to populations under 50,000. The average connection speed of this subset of libraries participating in the E-rate program is 20 Mbps, and 21% have a connection of less than 10 Mbps. Only one of the state's rural libraries has achieved speeds of 1 Gbps. Action is urgently needed to ensure that Kentuckians have access to broadband speeds that support their needs.

BTOP Grant Outcomes

These comments are informed by KDLA's experience as the prime recipient of a Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) Public Computing Center (PCC) grant. Combined with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, \$1.74 million in grant funds enabled 46 public library sub-recipients to purchase over \$1 million in much-needed network and end-user equipment. 78% of sub-recipients increased their connectivity during the project.

BTOP grant sub-recipients delivered formal computer training to 16,190 people, and provided 37,308 hours of informal computer assistance to 129,507 people in their communities. This training increased digital literacy skills for individuals in a safe, welcoming environment. Improved digital literacy skills led to increased workforce capacity and expanded educational opportunities, as illustrated in these examples provided in sub-recipients' project reports:

[We had] a patron who attended several of our beginner computer and career classes. Recently laid off from a job where he had worked for many years, he had very limited experience with computers and was intimidated at the task of looking for and applying for a job online for the very first time. With the help

¹⁰ See Public Funding & Library Technology Access Survey, State Summary Data p. 62, available at http://www.ala.org/research/sites/ala.org.research/files/content/initiatives/plftas/2011_2012/plftas12_state_tables.pdf (last visited April 16, 2014).

¹¹ See Exploring the Digital Nation, Table B5: Home Broadband Use in Urban and Rural Areas by State, p. 57, available at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/report/2013/exploring-digital-nation-americas-emerging-online-experience> (last visited April 16, 2014).

See The Internet in Kentucky: Life in the Slow Lane, available at <http://cber.uky.edu/Downloads/CBER%20Issue%20Brief%209%20BB%20in%20KY.pdf> (last visited April 16, 2014).

¹³ See Comments of the American Library Association in response to Public Notice Seeking Focused Comment on E-rate Modernization (WC Docket 13-184), available at <http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=7521097243> (last visited April 23, 2014).

of our classes, he was able to learn how to use the Internet to begin searching for jobs, how to create a resume, and how to fill out an online job application. By his last class, he was confident enough to begin researching what kind of computer he wanted to buy for home.

I connected with a woman in the stacks when she was looking at the computer "how to" section. When I told her we had free computer classes she was so relieved. Her husband passed away two months ago and he had kept all of their finances in Excel and she had no idea how to open, read, or use it. Wow. She came to the Excel class and we also did a one on one class for her on computer basics. She brought her own laptop and we helped her find and open documents that she needed.

Conclusion

The Commonwealth's public libraries represent an investment in lifelong learning and Internet access for all, especially for the 54% of Kentuckians who lack home broadband access. KDLA stands ready to support the goals of IMLS and the participants in the Libraries and Broadband panel as we work toward accessible, affordable high capacity broadband. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement for the record.

Respectfully submitted, Wayne Onkst State Librarian and Commissioner Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives