
From: Grumet, Lori <Lori.Grumet@abilenetx.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 07, 2015 7:11 PM
To: BOCrfc2015
Subject: how the federal government can expand and promote broadband adoption and digital inclusion

Since its inception, I have been frustrated as a librarian and library director with the policies and procedures required for libraries to tap into universal service funds. The requirement that bids be obtained for services is restrictive in that libraries that are a unit of local government are subject to their municipal or county policy decisions relative to IT issues and have no latitude to bid out or even obtain quotes for their internet and phone services. This centralized control by cities and counties means that libraries, especially those in mid-sized cities or cities with home rule, are not able to qualify for these funds, yet we often have to struggle to serve the disenfranchised in our community and physically bridge the digital divide with resources that are often antiquated, and over-utilized. Frequently we experience times when every computer terminal in the library is in use and there is a waiting list for more service. Users are frustrated – especially learners – with short access intervals of 30 minutes to one hour, depending on location.

For the universal service fund to reach the disenfranchised through public libraries, the requirements for bidding out for service needs to be replaced with some other set of criteria that allows for parent organizations to control overall access and be reimbursed for the amount of service that is provided through the public library resources. Number of sessions provided to the public, as opposed to number of staff sessions, is easily able to be determined based on use statistics. I feel strongly that it should be less about providing equal access to the vendors to receive money for their services and should be more about providing service to those members of our community that cannot afford access in their homes – a service that public libraries strive to provide, albeit often on limited budgets and without support of federal dollars.

Additionally, while emphasis on Museums is important to communities, I feel that IMLS should place a stronger emphasis in the use of their funding in support of libraries. A nearby rural library closed here in Mid-Texas last month due to a lack of resources to remain open. That small community is now completely disconnected from the services provided by libraries that aim to support reading readiness, educational support, workforce development assistance, etc. How sad, that this country, that can mandate so many unfunded policies, cannot do something simple like distributing the income from universal service fund charges, that we all pay, in a more equitable, less competitive manner – to support all citizens.

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