Posted by Jim Holt on Mary 29, 2018

County library gets $5 million to upgrade WiFi

News release issued by the Los Angeles County Library

Public computers and Wi-Fi access are among the most used library resources in LA County, but internet connection has been slow with an average speed of 10 to 20 MB per second. But that's going to change. LA County Library has been awarded approximately $5 million through the Federal Communications Commission's E-Rate Program. The funding will be used to improve internet connectivity and network speed throughout LA County Library locations.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) implemented the Schools and Libraries Program (commonly referred to as E-Rate) in 1996. It provides funding to eligible schools and libraries for broadband and internet services.

The funding will allow libraries to connect to the California Research and Education Network (CalREN), a high-capacity network that serves the vast majority of research and education institutions in the state. CalREN is operated by the non-profit Corporation for Education Network Initiatives in California (CENIC), and will deliver faster, more reliable wireless access to library customers, helping to close the technology gap and remove barriers to access.

LA County Library's service area covers a vast socioeconomic landscape. In a County where rent control continues to drop while housing costs rise, many lower income communities cannot afford the added luxury of internet access in their homes. This digital divide has adverse effects—students lacking access to digital educational materials from home may fall behind in school, while residents lacking access to general information may struggle to improve their lives.

"Because a large percentage of our customers come to the library for Wi-Fi and computer access, increasing the quality of our technology is essential to removing digital barriers and improving the Library as the center for learning for our customers, one of our strategic priorities" said LA County Library Director, Skye Patrick.

"Our current network quality is not at the level that our customers expect or deserve. This grant will allow us to upgrade our infrastructure to provide a high-speed internet connection, enabling our customers to learn and explore at a much faster pace, while hopefully also attracting more foot traffic to the Library," Patrick added.

LA County Library has experienced an overwhelming increase in online resource usage within the last year—in addition to facilitating over 1.72 million Wi-Fi sessions and 1.8 million public computer sessions, there was a 19 percent increase in OverDrive eBook and audiobook circulation, a 12 percent increase in digital magazine circulation, a 63 percent increase in Hoopla music and movie streaming, and a 85 percent increase in Lynda.com usage. The Library expects these upward trends to continue.

In an attempt to meet customer needs, LA County Library has already increased the number of computers at many locations throughout the past year, and worked toward simplifying the Wi-Fi log-in process. However, due to slow network connectivity, customers prefer to use other Wi-Fi hotspots to get better network service. The Library plans to offer speeds of up to 1 GB per second with the E-Rate funding.

The network installation project is phased for implementation in 2018.

About LA County Library

Founded in 1912, LA County Library is one of the largest and most innovative library systems in the US. It offers free public resources including books, music, multimedia materials, computer and internet access, and educational and recreational services to 3.4 million residents across 3,000 square miles through its 87 community libraries and mobile fleet of 18 vehicles, including 3 bookmobiles, 10 MākMō maker mobiles, and 5 Reading Machines. LA County Library is dedicated to reducing barriers and increasing access to and equity of public services for all. To learn more, visit LACountyLibrary.org.

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