

Texas State Library and Archives Commission Launches Statewide Effort to Improve Internet Access in Texas Public Libraries



Contact: **Derick Hackett, Communications Officer**
Texas State Library and Archives Commission
512-463-5514
Kasey McCrary, Public Affairs Director
Connected Nation
202-340-5776

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Library, local, and state leaders come together to discuss new strategies to improve and sustain high-speed Internet access for communities through public libraries

SAN ANTONIO - The Texas State Library and Archives Commission assembled nearly 200 public library leaders, community supporters, broadband providers, and local and state leaders for the Texas Opportunity Online Broadband Summit, on Thursday, October 8, 2009, in San Antonio, to discuss how to improve and sustain high quality Internet access in the Texas public libraries. The Texas Opportunity Online Broadband Summit provides an opportunity to understand the value of community partnerships and the possibilities of technology as well as in-depth discussion about possible connectivity solutions and next steps necessary to reach improved connectivity speed.

Currently, more than 200 Texas public library systems lack Internet connections fast enough to meet the most basic needs of patrons, and many more report speeds that are inadequate to meet the true demand of their community. Ironically, some of these public libraries offer the only technology lifeline to their communities.

This is the first of two Texas summits that is sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as part of its pilot Opportunity Online broadband grant program. Texas, along with six other states, has been invited to participate. The grant program supports public libraries as they seek to improve their broadband connectivity and calls for a broadband sustainability strategy, to be developed by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, to ensure that public libraries continue to improve and maintain adequate connectivity for patrons.

The summit included a comprehensive analysis of Texas' current broadband climate and the future of technology access in Texas public libraries. Stephen Abram, a library futurist, spoke about future library services and applications driven by technology that will influence how Americans use computers and the Internet, and why reliable, sustainable broadband connections in libraries will be essential to ensure library patrons can use these programs to improve their lives.

Keynote speaker Graham Richard, former mayor of Fort Wayne, Indiana and partner of public libraries, highlighted the importance of public and private partnerships on the local and state level to prioritize funding for improved connectivity in public libraries.

Peggy Rudd, Texas State Library and Archives Commission's director and librarian, led the summit and represented the agency.

“Every day we are reminded of the value of Texas’ public libraries,” Rudd said. “Today’s public libraries provide traditional services, but a growing number of patrons depend on library Internet access to apply for jobs, further their education, run businesses or stay connected with families and friends. This summit and grant program will help better meet these increasing personal and community needs by improving library connection speeds.”

Building on dialogue and ideas generated at the summit, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission is currently working with an advisory group—including Commissioner Todd Staples of the Texas Department of Agriculture, former Governor Mark White, Texas State Library and Archives Commission Chairman Sandra J. Pickett - to develop a strategy to increase and sustain broadband connections in all Texas public libraries. Texas State Library and Archives Commission will now work with libraries across the state to support their Internet connectivity upgrade and create a long-term state sustainability strategy.

“The summit highlights the vital role libraries play in connecting communities to information and knowledge through technology,” said Jill Nishi, deputy director of U.S. Libraries at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “What is needed now is long-term collaboration among government, business, communities, and library leaders to ensure that public libraries can continue to provide the high-speed Internet access their patrons need to improve their lives and thrive.”

Connected Nation worked closely with the Texas State Library and Archives Commission to support the event development and execution. For more information about the Texas Opportunity Online Summit, please visit www.opportunityonline.org/snapshots/texas/ or contact us at 1-866-882-3081 or tx1summit@opportunityonline.org.

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About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett. More information is available at www.gatesfoundation.org.

About the Texas State Library and Archives Commission

The mission of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission is to preserve the record of government for public scrutiny, to secure and make accessible historically significant records and other valuable resources, to meet the reading needs of Texans with disabilities, to build and sustain statewide partnerships to improve library programs and services, and to enhance the capacity for achievement of individuals and institutions with whom we work. Since 1909, TSLAC has carried out a commitment of making information work for all Texans by providing history and genealogical services, federal and state government documents, electronic research, and library services. TSLAC is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. For more information, go to www.tsl.state.tx.us or email pio@tsl.state.tx.us.

About Connected Nation

Connected Nation is a national nonprofit 501(c)3 organization that expands access to and use of broadband Internet and the related technologies that are enabled when individuals and communities have the opportunity and desire to connect. Connected Nation effectively raises the awareness of the value of broadband and related technologies by developing coalitions of influencers and enablers for improving technology availability and use. Connected Nation works with consumers, community leaders, states,

technology providers, and foundations, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to develop and implement technology expansion programs with core competencies centered around a mission to improve digital inclusion for people and places previously underserved or overlooked. Connected Nation is also working with technology leaders to implement Every Citizen OnlineSM, a public-private partnership program to enable computer ownership and broadband use in low-income and unconnected homes. For more information about Connected Nation, visit www.connectednation.org.