

1615 New Hampshire Ave, NW
First Floor
Washington, DC 20009-2520
USA

Telephone 202 628 8410
Fax 202 628 8419
E-mail: alawash@alawash.org
<http://www.alawash.org>

Washington Office

ALAAmericanLibraryAssociation

Opening the “Window to a Larger World” Libraries’ Role in Changing America

**Report to President-Elect Obama &
Vice-President-Elect Biden Transition Team**

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**Respectfully submitted by the
American Library Association**

Opening the “Window to a Larger World” *Libraries’ Role in Changing America*

As President-elect Obama has stated, libraries are “**sanctuaries of learning**” that represent “a window to a larger world,” and during this time of transition for our nation, libraries of all types – public, school, academic, federal and research – are resources the American public and new Administration can use to help people find jobs, support education and lifelong learning, provide access to information and telecommunications services, empower families, and enable civic engagement as well as promote literacy and connect communities.

Libraries continue to “**level the playing field**” by meeting the day-to-day information needs of all Americans regardless of age, economic status, educational background or geographical location. Across the country, libraries are **helping Americans get back to work** by assisting people with job searching, providing financial information, and aiding small-business owners with obtaining information available nowhere else.

American Library Association (ALA) research shows that public libraries are the sole source of **no-fee access to the Internet for 73 percent of Americans** without connectivity at home or work. That number rises to 83 percent in rural communities. In addition to utilizing everyday uses of the Internet, such as gathering and renewing contacts and using e-mail to stay in touch with friends and family, Americans use their local libraries to gain access to and assistance with e-government services such as online access to Social Security and Medicare information as well as tax preparation and filing. With all levels of government providing online services, and in some cases only online, such access is absolutely necessary for large parts of the American public. This has also created an essential role for libraries in disaster management in responding to community emergencies with pertinent local information and serving as a place where people can use online services for dealing with disasters through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Libraries are critical to openness and transparency in government. The public must have access to government information as well as online tools to participate in open government. Access to the Internet, online communities and even e-mail are available through libraries to promote civic engagement. Online government information as well as traditional services such as the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) are available through all types of libraries. Libraries routinely offer voter registration and current information on government activities such as the digital TV transition and many other daily concerns. And, across the country, library facilities are used for town hall meetings and other venues for civic involvement.

Amidst the evolving resources, libraries still shine on as traditional “sanctuaries of learning” – **a safe place for children** to meet after school or to attend school and public library reading programs, a place where families can always afford to give their children one of the greatest advantages any child can have: early literacy, a place where students of all ages find resources for formal and informal learning.

Libraries share President-elect Obama’s emphasis on broadband infrastructure deployment and focus on providing universal, affordable telecommunications services. To protect and promote these benefits for all Americans, ALA has extensively participated in national policy debates as a voice for the American public on

access and equity issues. Our members are committed to contributing to these national debates in order for our libraries to continue to serve the needs of the American public through all types of libraries and in every community.

As a result of the increased need for access to digital and online resources as well as the “traditional” services that libraries offer, **Americans are using libraries now more than ever.** In addition to online and digital resources, libraries find that the demand for traditional services has also increased because the online technologies make it possible for people to know more about what is available at libraries and how to obtain materials.

During this time of economic downturn, library services are in great demand. Unfortunately, just when the need for libraries increases, their budgets – whether in public, school or academic communities – are often the first cut. Just when the challenges to the American workforce are greatest, services and hours are cut, making job searching and training information less available. Just when families need to use books, story hours and traditional services even more, library hours are shorter. Just when students need information literacy instruction to succeed, school libraries are threatened, usually in those very communities with the biggest economic threats and the highest unemployment. In this new era of open, transparent government, the American public needs libraries and the librarians who help the public find information and gain literacy skills.

The library community has long been involved at the national level in many areas of public policy, and the ALA approaches these discussions with a solid commitment to enabling the public’s right to access information, protecting personal privacy, and promoting civil liberties. Librarians take very seriously their responsibility to **serve as guardians for the public in assuring access to the most trusted, unbiased information.** The ALA is ready to work with the new Administration to see President-elect Obama’s commitments to openness, transparency and equity fully realized. Libraries and librarians are critical resources for meeting these goals.

ALA presents the following issues for consideration during the transition period:

BROADBAND BUILD-OUT AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS POLICY

- Develop and articulate strong broadband policy statements to be used by all agencies and spokespeople to inform the public about the crucial need for broadband in all communities and to promote the President-elect’s goals;
- Encourage connectivity data collection through legislative efforts and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), including information about the role of libraries and library connectivity;
- Recognize libraries as critical to equitable access to Internet and broadband resources; **include librarians as needed partners at the local, state and federal levels for both interim and long-range planning** to assure broadband for all;
- Develop specific and targeted strategies for broadband deployment based upon local community needs; balance marketplace demands with the “public interest, convenience and necessity”;
- Reform universal service maintaining e-rate discounts and similar policies to support broadband build-out; incorporate concept of “fiber to the library;”
- **Simplify the E-rate application process** and revise the E-rate program’s audit process to be more effective and efficient;

- Implement a permanent exemption for the Universal Service Fund programs, including E-rate, from Anti-Deficiency Act accounting rules to provide stability and funding predictability for participants in the program;
- Limit the list of E-rate eligible services to those within the program's mission;
- Assure an open Internet through **network neutrality** and oppose other policies that would seek to filter or inhibit open access;
- Reinvigorate the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and assure visionary leadership in NTIA and the Commerce Department to advance national broadband goals;
- Appoint a visionary FCC chairman who will advance broadband goals and ensure that the public's needs are as important as marketplace demands;
- Fund research study to **explore concept of "fiber to the library."**

SCHOOL LIBRARIES

- School libraries have become sophisticated, 21st century learning environments, offering a full range of print and electronic resources that **provide equal learning opportunities to all students**, regardless of the socio-economic or education levels of the community. Across the United States, numerous studies have shown that students in schools with strong school libraries learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized tests than their peers in schools without libraries.
- With limited funding and increased focus on school performance, administrators are trying to stretch dollars and cut funds across various programs to ensure that maximum resources are dedicated to improving student academic achievement;
- **Include school library media specialists and school librarians in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.**

FUNDING FOR LIBRARY PROGRAMS

- Support reauthorization of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) in the Museum and Library Services Act;
- Increase funding to at least \$171.5 million for grants to state library agencies administered by the Institute of Library and Museum Services, as part of the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill; smaller states, with some of the biggest economic challenges, would benefit without threatening other state grants in LSTA;
- Support authorized funding for the "Improving Literacy Through Schools Library Program" in No Child Left Behind (NCLB); as the only federal program devoted exclusively to school libraries, it has been consistently under funded and well below its authorized level; only a handful of school libraries have benefited despite the national need and the research that demonstrates that students in schools with strong school libraries learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized tests than their peers in schools without libraries;
- Support full funding for national and federal libraries including the Library of Congress, the National Agricultural Library, the National Library of Medicine, as well as agency libraries; effective library service is needed in all agencies to support the work of federal employees and provide transparency to the public;

- Support the full program funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities; libraries are one of the partners in these programs providing public access to endowment-funded projects.

ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT

E-government

- **Recognize and fund libraries as critical access points for e-government services**, often the only no-fee access points for the public to utilize these services and participate in all aspects of e-government;
- Promote build-out of broadband services so that libraries will have needed bandwidth to meet the need and demand for e-government services;
- Ensure that **all federal Web sites are user-friendly and include a search feature**, and that all government forms can be saved online to continue at a later time;
- Provide more channels and venues for the public to participate and comment on governmental activities, recognizing the important role that libraries serve in such access.

Government Information

- **Require all federal agencies to implement open access policies** that emphasize the value of public access to their documents, procedures and other information; hold agencies accountable if they do not meet the “openness” standards and do not provide long-term access to their documents, especially in digital formats;
- **Promote transparency and openness in government**, by supporting Government Printing Office (GPO), USA.gov and others that produce and provide access to government information; assure feasibility of access by including library representatives in planning and design of information products and online services;
- Direct appropriate government agencies to **respond to FOIA requests with an assumption of openness**, rather than a concept of withholding information;
- In conjunction with federal agencies, including the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), GPO, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the Library of Congress, and librarians serving the public, develop long-term plans for ongoing permanent public access of government information including “born digital” and legacy paper documents;
- Increase funding and develop long-term plans to maintain digital repositories for research and discovery of all types;
- Insist that all federally funded research reports be publicly accessible (ex. NIH Public Access Policy);
- Provide resources to modernize and maintain GPO’s Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP); the FDLP has been the unique source for government information for almost 200 years.

Support library and information services for veterans, active-duty military and their families

- Provide stable and dependable funding for base libraries to meet the needs of veterans, active-duty military and their families through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD), as appropriate;
- Develop baseline standards for DOD base libraries to **assure that there is equitable access across the services for active-duty personnel and their families**; evaluate their needs for lifelong learning, job training/searching and Internet training and access through base libraries, especially for spouses and children;
- Provide adequate resources for the VA to support new partnerships with public and academic libraries to better serve the needs of veterans and their families;
- Assure connectivity to broadband services and support the VA in its development of informational products for libraries to use to provide information about G.I. Bill benefits and counseling, job training, formal and informal education, e-government services, Internet and literacy training, and other needed library services.

ACCESS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES ISSUES

Surveillance

- Clearly state in President Obama's inaugural address and elsewhere that the nation **will return to the rule of law and balance civil liberties with the fight against terrorism**; emphasize that excesses will not be tolerated;
- Conduct a thorough review of the USA PATRIOT Act and investigate the abuses of national security letters and other law enforcement tools;
- Review implementation of these laws by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies to identify where abuses have damaged the delicate balance between Americans' civil liberties and the nation's need to thwart terrorism; include librarians and others in advisory groups during such reviews;
- Assess and change FBI directives and other policies to prevent further excesses;
- Seek legislative changes to the USA PATRIOT Act, National Security Letters (NSL) and Foreign Intelligence and Surveillance Act (FISA) laws;
- Support **amending Section 215 of the USA PATRIOT Act**, to protect reader privacy and related civil liberties;
- Fully cooperate with congressional oversight activities.

Privacy

- **Repeal the REAL I.D. Act** and eliminate the problems of a functional “national i.d. card” that too easily facilitates access to library and other personal records via the common identifier; local library services can be inappropriately denied to those individuals who cannot obtain such identification;
- Review existing and prohibit new data collection programs that needlessly collect personal information;
- **Assure protection of personal information** that has already been collected or will be collected with appropriate court oversight and legal review.

Safe Computing and Children

- Support legislation and fund programs that include **Internet safety education**, as opposed to Internet blocking and filtering;
- Emphasize the importance of **parental involvement in Internet training and safety**;
- Oppose any further filtering/blocking requirement for the E-rate and other programs; assure protection of First Amendment rights and other civil liberties in the online/digital environment;
- Support vigorous enforcement of existing child pornography laws; increase public awareness about reporting child porn and other illegal Internet activities;
- Conduct research on cyber-bullying and other types of behaviors on the Internet; promote discussion of First Amendment vs. personal privacy rights in the digital environment.

LITERACY AND LIFELONG LEARNING

- Promote partnerships between **early childhood literacy programs** and libraries; emphasize the contribution these literacy programs provide to aid in a child’s intellectual development;
- Promote and articulate the important role libraries serve in literacy efforts, including how libraries provide access to early learning activities for language acquisition and other learning and literacy skills for infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families;
- Create a **Presidential Early Learning Council**, as envisioned by President-elect Obama, to encourage necessary dialogue among programs at the federal, state and local levels;
- Include librarians as full participants in this learning council and other literacy advisory groups;
- Encourage private and nonprofit sectors to collect and disseminate the most valid and up-to-date research on early learning and highlight best practices and model programs at the state and local level;
- Review all types of federally supported literacy programs and assure appropriate planning and budgeting to support high school students and adult literacy;
- Require community partnerships between local literacy programs and local public libraries within adult literacy programs;
- Broadly promote and emphasize the need for literacy programs and the “right to read”; through public awareness programs, encourage those needing literacy training to use every opportunity; promote literacy as an important tool to obtain employment, gain formal and informal education and to participate in the full breadth of life’s activities;
- Promote literacy programs as a tool for “hope.”

COPYRIGHT

- Promote copyright law that **balances the rights of the public and the rights of copyright holders** as articulated in the U.S. Constitution;
- Advance **fair use** and other lawful uses of protected works by the public and the libraries that serve them;
- Support library community participation in the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) by meeting with library representatives prior to meetings to ensure diverse views are considered in the development of treaties;
- Seek input from the library community on potential candidates for the Executive Office of the President Coordinator for Intellectual Property and the Chief Technology Officer positions as well as the head of the Copyright Office at the appropriate time;
- Support the library community's efforts to **expand access to materials for the visually impaired**.