



E-Rate Consultant and the Connecting Oregon Libraries Fund Support Broadband Funding for Libraries

Broadband Problem: 10% of Oregon’s public libraries have internet speeds lower than the FCC’s current (and outdated) definition for broadband: 25 Mbps for downloads and 3 Mbps for uploads. With the FCC considering updating the definition of broadband to speeds of 100 Mbps download and 100 upload we’re risking up to 40% of Oregon public libraries not meeting this baseline for service.

E-Rate Program Basics:

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) runs the E-Rate program that provides discounts for internet connectivity and network infrastructure to eligible schools and libraries. Discounts range from 20% to 90% based on the poverty level of the schools in the region. In many cases, we see Oregon libraries qualifying for 80% and 90% discounts. The Federal government will cover the majority of the connection fees and infrastructure costs for large broadband projects for our libraries, however, only 30% of libraries are currently accessing the available E-Rate discounts. The discounts cover broadband infrastructure investments, on-going reductions on internet bills and on-going network monitoring and maintenance.

Barriers to Access:

Many libraries are small and under-resourced, lacking staff capacity to apply for the E-Rate discount. The application and procurement process are also extremely challenging. Many libraries have to hire specialized consultants to guide them through the E-Rate application process. That is why we see less than one-third of Oregon’s libraries applying for and accessing E-Rate.

Requests:

With the help of Sen. Dembrow and Rep. Marsh, OLA has introduced [SB 885](#), which includes the following and is identical to a policy option package (POP) the State Library of Oregon requested:

1. OLA is asking for a part-time consultant to contract with the State Library to act as a E-Rate consultant for all of Oregon’s public libraries. This E-Rate consultant would be similar to the one schools requested and received from the legislature previously.
2. OLA is also asking for \$750,000 to be directed to the newly created Connecting Oregon Libraries Fund, established by HB 4092 in 2022. This funding would be used to cover the remainder of the broadband infrastructure projects, not covered by an E-Rate discount. (i.e. if a library has an \$10,000 project and gets \$8,000 (80%) in E-rate discounts, the library would be on the hook for \$2,000, which could be cost prohibitive for our small libraries. This funding would cover the remaining post E-rate technology costs.)

Community Benefit:

Internet access is now one of the most sought after public library services, used by nearly half of all visitors. People of all ages, incomes, races, and levels of education go to the library for free internet access, regardless of if they have a home connection or not. The free internet provided by libraries is a critical technological lifeline for those in need with 44 percent of people in households living below the federal poverty line (\$22,000/year for a family of four) using public library internet and computers¹.

For more information:

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¹ Samantha Becker et al. “Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries” March 2010