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NEWS RELEASE

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Commission for Libraries Addresses Issue of Low Internet Access in Idaho

BOISE, Idaho — Too many Idaho residents lack access to high-speed Internet sources, but the Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL) is taking steps to close that gap with a statewide broadband deployment initiative.

According to a recent [report](#) by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), an estimated 232,000 Idahoans — primarily in the state’s vast rural areas — do not have high-speed Internet access, a rate that is nearly double the national average. Moreover, the report stated that an estimated 14 percent of Gem State residents live in areas without broadband availability.

However, the ICfL, through a grant from the Federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), has taken the lead in an initiative to increase broadband Internet connectivity in public libraries throughout the state. The larger bandwidth greatly enhances and expands public-access computing and online resources within the libraries participating in the “online @ your library” BTOP project. As part of the project, BTOP participating libraries are also eligible for new computers for library users to access the expanded services.

Recently, for example, the public library in Preston received 20 Mbps of broadband Internet connectivity and 12 new computers, and the library in Sandpoint received 45 Mbps and 22 new computers through BTOP. Currently, 56 public libraries — primarily in the state’s rural areas — participate in BTOP. In addition to increased broadband access and additional computers provided through the grant, most of the BTOP participating libraries receive Wi-Fi equipment that will enable users who bring their own computers to the library to access the Internet.

“Limited broadband capacity for libraries is noted in the FCC report as a further indicator that broadband ‘is not being reasonably and timely deployed and is not available to all Americans,’” said State Librarian Ann Joslin. “Nearly 70% of public libraries in Idaho report that they are the only local free public Internet access point in their communities and therefore libraries play a critical role in public access to online services and resources.”

A primary resource for users of expanded public-access computers in BTOP participating libraries is online assistance for job seekers and the underemployed. According to the FCC



report, job opportunities elude millions of mostly rural Americans because they lack access to high-speed Internet sources. The report said 26 million U.S. citizens are without the standard level of broadband service.

In addition to resources for job seekers such as LearningExpress Library and the Idaho Department of Labor's online services, e-government resources such as road maps, license renewal, and tax information are easily accessible at the public-access computers and statewide at any computer with Internet access. And, as a result of the partnership with Labor, many of the BTOP libraries will be offering additional help to their computer users in the form of tutors hired through Labor's WIA-funded Idaho Youth Corps.

See more about the "online @ your library" project at <http://libraries.idaho.gov/online>.