Regional Library Telecommunications Aid Request
Regional Public Library Systems
Backgrounder/Talking Points

The Minnesota Library Association (MLA) and Information and Technology Educators of Minnesota (ITEM) support a continued appropriation of $2,300,000 annually for Regional Library Telecommunication Aid (RLTA) and statutory changes to strengthen data networks and public technology services in Minnesota's Regional Public Library Systems.

Under the RLTA program, Minnesota public libraries receive state support to help pay for high-speed Internet services and related equipment. The annual appropriation for this program is $2.3 million.

Internet access is mission critical for public libraries. Libraries need Internet access to manage collections and to serve as valued public technology hubs. Digital content, increasingly accessed over mobile devices, requires ever-higher levels of bandwidth. Users logged onto Internet-connected public library computers 4.5 million times in 2017 and initiated 6.4 million wireless sessions over free public library networks with their personal devices.

These functions test the capacities of both wired and wireless library networks. Public libraries offer ever-expanding and updated broadband networks for use by their patrons and staff. Public demand for free, reliable Internet services at public libraries requires continual system stability. Public libraries also need to provide end-user security for the protection and safety of library patrons and their private data.

Examples of how broadband access is delivered by public libraries include:
- Residents without broadband connections at home or who lack proficient computer skills rely on public library technology services to access the ever-growing online world.
- Students use school-owned devices at the public library to complete homework after school, in the evenings and on the weekends.
- Families with dial-up or low-bandwidth connections use public library Internet access for projects and software that require faster speeds.
- People with wireless devices log into public library wireless networks whenever they are in the building to access online resources and services.
- Citizens depend on public libraries to offer education and training on digital literacy skills and a variety of software platforms, tools and applications.

Bandwidth unit prices may be dropping, but costs for network expansion, equipment replacement, and data integrity maintenance are growing. With data networks under constant threat of attack, heightened security protections are needed. These should be included among program-eligible costs under RLTA.

Public libraries are evolving to meet the demands of their communities. The growth of accessible, remote, and secure storage lockers in commercial settings (think Amazon pick-up locations) has triggered requests for similar library self-service options. Telecommunication costs associated with providing public library services, regardless of delivery point, should also be eligible for RLTA support.

RLTA FUNDING FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES RESULTS IN A BETTER MINNESOTA
Support comprehensive, reliable, and secure telecommunication networks for
Minnesota's 12 public regional library systems and their users.