



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

SAN ANTONIO PUBLIC LIBRARY

April 9, 2009

National Telecommunications and Information Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave.
NW Washington, DC 20230

To Whom It May Concern:

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) includes \$4.7 billion for a Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) to promote broadband deployment to unserved and underserved areas. No less than \$200 million is available for the sole purpose of expanding the capacity of public computer centers, including public libraries. The impact of the current economic situation on local communities is creating an almost daily increase in the demand for library services, including computers with broadband Internet access. As the community's reliance on the public library to provide access to broadband Internet access increases, sufficient bandwidth is needed to equip public libraries to meet the demand.

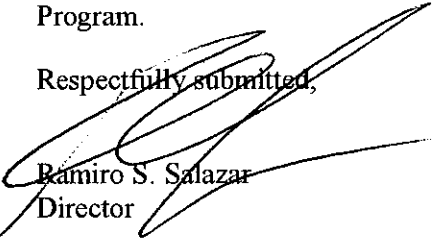
Public libraries play an important role in communities across the country. A library card is free and gives the user access to an almost unlimited universe of free resources and services. Public libraries offers books, access to computers, movies, music, live online homework help, magazines, online resources, children's story times, programs for adults, and more. Funding from the BTOP would enhance the library's ability to provide access to public computers and broadband Internet for the citizens who depend on those resources.

As the NTIA continues to develop the application guidelines and reporting process, please take the following into consideration the definitions to important terms such as "underserved" and "unserved". Traditionally these terms refer to descriptors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and income; however, in light of ARRA's specific reference to public libraries as public computing centers, I am advocating that the descriptor for "underserved" should be expanded to include a public library component. For example, residents in rural communities without a public library within 10 miles or residents in urban communities without a public library within 4 miles should be considered "underserved".

Public libraries have traditionally been the great educational equalizer – the "people's university" – available at no cost to anyone regardless of age, income, gender, religion, or ethnic or racial origin. Since the concept was invented, people from all walks of life have turned to their public libraries for free access to information that would otherwise be unavailable to them. Additionally, the library's free resources and services have become more valuable than ever as the economy weakens. Consumers who cannot afford to purchase books, rent movies, or pay for services such as tutoring for their children, turn to the library for those resources. Jobseekers can develop their résumés and search for jobs on the public computers offered at the library. Recent media reports highlight stories of families struggling with the economic downturn and how they are capitalizing on the free resources and services provided by the Library.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit public comment regarding the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program.

Respectfully submitted,


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