Massachusetts Libraries
BOARD OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS

Automated Library Networks

Fund: 7000-9506

Massachusetts has nine automated library networks around the state that are collaboratively run by their member libraries to provide services to patrons. They work behind the scenes to provide Massachusetts residents with access to current technology such as Wi-Fi, digital resources, and broadband internet access. Networks provide the infrastructure for online catalogues that allow patrons to find materials at all member libraries quickly and easily. They are a vital part of the state's interlibrary loan system. Working collaboratively makes these services affordable and accessible to local libraries.

Why Networks are Important

Libraries pay a membership fee to be in a Network, however these fees are small compared to the cost saving that is achieved by being a Network member. Residents who live in communities where their libraries are not part of a network rely on their own library's collection, and miss out on the 53.5 million items that are available through Networks catalogues, as well as access to databases, eBooks, and streaming audio and video.

Networks also provide broadband internet connections to libraries that give residents access to high speed internet free of charge. In Central and Western Massachusetts, as well as parts of Cape Cod, these high speed internet connections are sometimes the only ones available in town.

How a Lack of Funding has Affected Networks

- Networks have been forced to increase their membership fees.

- In order to meet the rising costs, libraries have had to reduce services by purchasing fewer items, reducing the number of programs, or in some cases, even reducing the number of hours that the library can be open.

- Networks have been unable to improve their broadband connections to meet the public's demand.

- Current broadband connections have kept libraries from meeting FCC standards.

What Networks would do with Increased Funding

- Add internet bandwidth that meets current needs and demand.

- Invest in technology that provides patrons with better access to materials.

- Meet the recommended standards of the e-Rate Modernization Order from the FCC.

- Increase digital collections offered to patrons including eBooks, audio books, and streaming audio and music.