

American Library Association Broadband Policy Priorities 2026



Broadband is today's critical infrastructure that fuels personal and professional opportunities and drives innovation.

Access to robust, reliable, and affordable internet is essential to advance education, gain employment, start and grow a business, receive healthcare, achieve financial security, and foster self-sufficiency and thriving communities. It is the foundation that ensures a competitive edge in a highly competitive global marketplace for our smallest, most rural communities and our large urban centers. As information stewards, the American Library Association (ALA) calls for broadband policies that protect the investments made by the public and private sectors and position the U.S. to meet the challenges ahead.

The nation's 124,000 libraries are an equally critical infrastructure that should be leveraged to achieve local, state, and national broadband priorities. Libraries are trusted and established local stakeholders. **For every dollar invested in public libraries, the community realizes five dollars in value.**¹

To ensure libraries are equipped for this role, the following are ALA's priorities for broadband and digital opportunity:



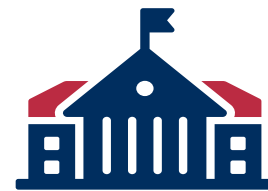
Safeguard the Universal Service Fund and the federal E-Rate program.

The Universal Service Fund (USF) provides financial support for the E-Rate program, which subsidizes fast, affordable broadband for public and tribal libraries. The USF is the largest permanent federal program that provides consistent financial support for affordable connectivity. The USF expands broadband access to rural and remote areas of the country, ensures access to quality healthcare for rural communities, and assists low-income people in the U.S. in securing voice and internet service. USF must be sufficient and sustainable to support E-Rate for many years to come.



Protect individual freedom and secure, open networks.

Digital information is only as good as the network over which it travels. Whether the end user is a small business, a Fortune 500 company, or individual, long-recognized network protections are essential for the free flow of commerce, equal access to noncommercial speech, and the exchange of ideas. As community anchor institutions, libraries rely on these principles to provide access in their communities. ALA supports net neutrality safeguards like prohibitions on blocking, throttling, or preferential treatment and transparent network management.



Leverage libraries to expand digital opportunity.

When libraries have fast, reliable internet, secure networks, appropriate technology, robust and relevant digital content, and staff prepared to provide digital skills training and support, their communities thrive. Library investments in these areas pay dividends. Libraries should be eligible to participate in programs that expand digital opportunities and skills alongside broadband deployment initiatives, such as those offered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).

¹ irs.org/data-tools/public-libraries/return-on-investment/recent-studies/

Sustain and advance the Federal Communications Commission's **E-Rate** program

ALA believes that access to fast and affordable broadband is as essential today as electricity and, as such, supports the vital Universal Service Fund programs. First and foremost, we advocate for the preservation of, and increased access to, the FCC's E-Rate program for libraries and schools. Since 1996, E-Rate has helped to change the public library's information technology landscape and provide internet access to almost every community in the nation.

Through the bipartisan efforts of four key senators, the 1996 Telecommunications Act established the E-Rate program, acknowledging the unique connectivity needs of libraries and schools necessary to carry out their respective educational missions. Since its inception, the E-Rate program has fueled the adoption of high-capacity broadband by libraries across the country. Now, E-Rate sustains connectivity in approximately half of U.S. public libraries and shapes the information technology landscape for millions of Americans.



30 Years of E-Rate: Affirm its core mission, accommodate emerging connectivity needs.

For nearly 30 years, ALA has worked to:

1. ensure the program stays current as the need for robust broadband networks increases;
2. boost library participation in the program; and
3. streamline the application and review process.

These goals are integral to our larger goal of leveraging libraries to meet the broadband and technology needs of communities across the country, especially libraries serving rural and tribal communities.

While ALA continues to monitor any court action to dismantle E-Rate, we turn our focus to USF reform efforts taking place in congress. The long-term viability of the USF depends on a stable and sustainable funding model. USF contributions should be fairly distributed so they impose the least burden and the most widespread support. ALA opposes using Congressional appropriations for the funding mechanism. E-Rate, a program on which millions of Americans depend, needs predictable funding that is guaranteed year to year.

In 2025, ALA pushed for common sense reforms through the FCC's Delete, Delete, Delete proceeding calling for the elimination of duplicative procedures and the reduction of government overreach. Our straightforward approach to streamlining the program strikes a balance between necessary regulatory oversight and administrative burden on applicants. Our approach also leverages built-in program flexibility that allows local libraries (and schools) to determine how and when to target their available E-Rate funding to effectively meet current and future connectivity needs. In 2026, we will continue to champion common sense reforms.

Eyes on the courts, feet in congress.

In 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of the USF, including E-Rate. In 2026, E-Rate is facing renewed challenges in court.

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The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For 150 years, ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library's role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all. ALA represents the nation's 124,000 libraries, which includes 17,000 public libraries.

ALAAmericanLibraryAssociation Megan Janicki, mjanicki@alawash.org | ala.org/advocacy/broadband