

Talking Points for Platform 2010: Public Libraries

Platform point...

Minnesota's Libraries support:

- *An allocation of \$10 million for **Public Library Accessibility and Improvement Grants**.*

(Note: The Senate and House bills currently have \$2 million allocated for the 2010 grant cycle—for which we are very grateful! We are not advocating that number be increased this year, but in the future.)

Talking points...

- **The Minnesota Public Library Accessibility and Improvement Grant program needs additional dollars to be effective. MLA supports increasing the amount to \$10,000,000 as proposed by the Minnesota Department of Education.**
 - Combined with matching local funds, Public Library Accessibility and Improvement Grants have provided for the removal of architectural barriers and **improved accessibility**. Yet, there are still more public library buildings with similar issues. Increased funds would leverage additional local dollars to solve these problems.
 - General library **re-modeling and construction** projects may also be partially funded through this allocation. The amount of dollars available is inadequate to meet current needs. There are dozens of projects currently under consideration. The total cost of these projects is estimated to be approximately \$105,000,000.
 - Since a library card from most Minnesota public libraries may be used at almost every public library in the state, it is essential that the state grant program **provide expertise** to assist with these building projects.
 - Changes in **technology and demographics** have had a huge impact on the need for additional space in current library facilities:
 1. The need for public access **computers** is almost limitless. Libraries must severely limit access to this needed technology because of long waiting lists. Broadband home access in rural Minnesota is still the exception and not the rule. Many libraries are considering how best to provide space necessary to meet the needs of customers who access the Internet exclusively at public libraries
 2. **Programming** needs have also had an impact on space at public libraries. Programs such as those that focus on early literacy for children or English language classes for new Americans have placed a premium on spaces for the type of library programming. Many libraries are struggling to balance the need for this type of space with additional space for library materials.
 3. The aging of Minnesota's population is bringing more and more **seniors** into public libraries to use the Internet and other library services.
 4. **Teen** services are being expanded in libraries in an effort to provide information and cultural connections. Teen spaces are being planned for in new and renovated libraries to better serve this group.

- A Library housed in an inadequate physical facility is often underutilized because the public may perceive it as not being able to meet their needs. An attractive, welcoming public library with adequate technology **benefits local communities** in the many ways:
 1. Support **economic development**: public Libraries make for livable communities that attract business. Many corporations looking for communities to relocate to, measure the public library as one of the “quality of life” amenities that they require.
 2. Supports **newcomers** to the community: for example, retirees looking to settle in smaller towns or large cities see good public libraries as an essential service.
 3. Provides information services that **small businesses** rely upon for their research and development staff.
 4. Provides a gateway to all libraries in the state as well as to subscription **online learning resources**.

- **Libraries are at the forefront of addressing many of the needs that have been identified by Legislators as critical, for example:**
 - **School readiness and early literacy**: libraries play a key role in providing meaningful early childhood programs that encourage children to learn to love to read.
 - **School support**: without libraries, many children will be unable to carry out assignments or do fundamental schoolwork.
 - **Healthy communities**: libraries provide a wealth of resources for people seeking information to improve their health.
 - **Livable communities**: libraries give a community a sense of stability and well-being.

- **State support for public library facilities provides a mechanism for monitoring and review of projects to ensure the highest quality facility. Most communities build a new or renovated public library facility only once every 2-3 generations. It is essential that the state grant program provide its evaluation and expertise to assist with these projects. This process potentially decreases the number of individual bonding requests for local library projects. Competing projects are prioritized and receive funding based on criteria in the existing law. This criteria includes:**
 - **Tax capacity** and ability to raise the needed funds;
 - **Collaboration** with other community agencies;
 - **Level of need** based on the age and condition of the existing building and,
 - **Size of population** that will benefit.

- **With budget limitations and competing demands for local funding for many types of capital projects, it is extremely difficult for communities to reallocate existing resources for new or renovated public facilities. State leadership and support are required to enable these important projects to move forward.**