Massachusetts Libraries
BOARD OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS

Automated Library Networks

Fund: 7000-9506

Massachusetts has nine automated library networks 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 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 network 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

Lack of funding has caused networks to increase membership fees for libraries, eliminate digital and online resources available for patrons, and cut back on network staff. In general, cuts are passed on to member libraries who then have the burden of figuring out how to cover increased fees. In addition, networks have been unable to improve their broadband connections to meet the public's demand. Current broadband connections have kept some libraries from meeting FCC standards.

What Networks Would Do with Increased Funding

- Lower membership costs to libraries, allowing member libraries to invest the money in other ways.
- Increase digital collections offered to patrons including eBooks, audio books, and streaming audio and music.
- Adding internet bandwidth that meets current needs and demand.
- Invest in technology that provides patrons with better access to materials.
- Offer training to library staff