



### **New York Opportunity Online Summit Recap**

On June 3, 2009 through June 4, 2009, more than 250 library directors, local partners, and state leaders gathered for the New York Opportunity Online Broadband Summit in Bolton Landing, New York. The summit featured the theme of “The Magic of Broadband” with a corporate motivational magic motivator to reinforce the meeting’s important agenda: connectivity. Various speakers articulated the need and potential of broadband connectivity and engaged in discussions about stimulus funding. Speakers included:

- Jill Nishi, Deputy Director of U.S. Libraries Initiative for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s U.S. Libraries program (USL);
- Dr. Melodie Mayberry-Stewart, New York State Chief Information Officer and Director of the Office for Technology
- Edward Hemminger, Ontario County’s Chief Information Officer
- Harry Roesch, Senior Telecommunications Advisor to the Appalachian Regional Commission

On day one of the summit three library stakeholders gave examples of why increased broadband speeds are important for libraries:

- Lisabeth Kelly, a 10th grader at Tech Valley High School in Troy, discussed the importance of libraries in giving high speed access to students who do not have computers or broadband access at home to participate – particularly for students from schools such as Tech Valley High School where the educational emphasis on 21st Century skills includes technology literacy.
- Kathy Naftaly, Assistant Director, Crandall Public Library, discussed how Crandall Public Library is using the Internet to disseminate medical information for patrons.
- Jim Cosgrove, Director, Marlboro Public Library (a Broadband Grant eligible library) highlighted their innovative marketing on YouTube to help build their library community using broadband.

Day one interactions were also highlighted by the speed networking activity which entailed answering five critical questions:

- i. Is it a commonly-held community perspective that broadband service is directly connected to a community’s economic viability?
- ii. How can a library director/library board member/library supporter successfully promote the library’s position as the hub for broadband access?
- iii. What are the constraints/opportunities regarding adequate broadband within your community?
- iv. What are some possible partnerships for developing solutions to broadband issues? What factors affect the potential success of these partnerships?
- v. What is necessary for an appropriate level of broadband services to be financially sustained?

The Keynote speaker for Day One of the summit was Dr. Melodie Mayberry-Stewart, New York State Chief Information Officer and Director of the Office for Technology. She described the New

York State Broadband Strategy, the 2009 ARRA Broadband Stimulus Programs, and the critical role of libraries in New York's Universal Broadband Initiative. She stated that libraries were a critical component in achieving New York's universal broadband goals because they can function as community distribution networks and serve as the focal point for community development.

Day Two of the summit began with a federal speaker, Harry Roesch, Senior Telecommunications Advisor to the Appalachian Regional Commission and a member of the White House - National Economic Council's (NEC) Federal Broadband Taskforce in regard to the Stimulus Bill. He outlined the Stimulus Bill and gave examples that highlighted the changing faces of library services. He also issued a call to action for libraries to think outside the box in order to achieve long-term sustainability for libraries.

Day Two activities also included facilitated table talk discussions among the participants. Participants seated by region were asked to address five issues:

### **I. Expanded Services Opportunities**

What types of services requiring broadband capability can and should libraries be able to offer? What impact is associated with e-government services? What are the major factors affecting the services a library actually offers? How do you foresee this demand being an expanded type of service, quantity of demand or both? Will staff levels and hours be affected by increased broadband availability?

### **II. Connectivity**

Given that connectivity must be at a speed adequate for today's use and able to be expanded to meet future needs, which of the available broadband options seem most feasible? Do these options exist or must they be developed? How can these needs be effectively communicated to Internet service providers? Do the development of community partnerships and the aggregation of demand seem to be useful options for increasing connectivity? How do you envision this working? What role will library systems have in the increase of connectivity? What role should the state library assume?

### **III. Funding**

Are the costs associated with increased broadband manageable for libraries? What level of responsibility should individual libraries assume for broadband costs? If community assistance is necessary, how can the value of the library's contribution to community growth be clearly presented? In addition to Gates Foundation money, what sources of funding are available at the local and regional level? How dependable are these sources short term and long term? Realistically what type of financial assistance is needed for libraries to manage and sustain their broadband costs?

### **IV. Political**

Who needs to be convinced of the importance of developing and funding high speed broadband and who should be responsible for this effort – on a local level, on a regional level, on a statewide level? How can these efforts be effectively coordinated? Since political support is an ingredient of stable funding, what is necessary for this support to be maintained as political leadership changes? What should be the relationship of government and Internet service providers?

## **V. Support**

What expertise will libraries require (technical, policy, financial, advocacy etc.) so they can accomplish and oversee the implementation and maintenance of broadband services? From whom and how can they acquire this support? What types of assistance will libraries require to stay informed about new opportunities and changes in broadband? Will there have to be institutional/management structures created on the regional or state level? Who will provide technical support for installation, connectivity, hardware and software issues?

The summit's final speaker was Edward Hemminger, Ontario County's Chief Information Officer whose discussion was entitled *Supporting Technology-Led Economic Development - Promoting a Globally Competitive Community*. He talked about how they had created a non-profit, Finger Lakes Regional Telecom Development Corporation, whose mission will ensure that telecommunications infrastructure in Ontario County that supports technology-led economic development and the technical worker thus supporting Ontario County's goal of being a World Class Community County. He offered suggestions about how other communities can become a success like Ontario County with ideas such as finding a champion, working on regional projects and taking responsibility for the local community.

At the summit's conclusion, the New York State Librarian charged the group to get involved in the task of developing a sustainability strategy to raise connectivity for all New York libraries. Overall, the summit gathered people and organizations for one common cause: improved connectivity to New York's public libraries. Every participant left knowing that improved connectivity is imperative for our public libraries and that they can help make it happen.