

Florida Broadband Projects

DISCUSSION DRAFT ONLY

**Charles R. McClure, Ph. D. cmcclore@lis.fsu.edu and Charles C. Hinnant, Ph. D.
March 10, 2009**

Public Library E-Government and Disaster Preparedness and Response

Abstract

This \$12-17 million project seeks to increase the capacity of Florida public libraries to provide access to electronic government (e-government) services and to heighten the ability of public libraries to participate in emergency management (EM) activities. In many communities, public libraries are key local institutions that provide many residents with access to online services. Furthermore, they often play important roles in helping residents in preparing and responding to emergencies and disasters. Through a significant investment in broadband connectivity, information technology (IT) infrastructure and training, and training in EM activities and information, this project will increase the institutional capacity of public libraries to play these key roles in their communities. This project will also achieve several key stimulus priorities associated with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA); these are:

- Create 1,200-1,750 jobs;
- Modernize the state's technology infrastructure;
- Increase broadband access to under-served segments of the population;
- Improve residents' access to and use of e-government services; and
- Mitigate the impact of disasters such as hurricanes on Florida residents.

Data from the national Public Library Funding and Technology Access Survey (2008), funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and conducted by the Information Institute, show that there is a significant need for improved broadband for Florida's public libraries since 42% of some 500 public libraries have connection speeds of 1.5 mbs or less. In addition, 62% reported that they were the only source for free Internet access in their community and that only 28% reported that they had adequate connection speed to meet current and future needs.¹

This project would serve dual purposes of 1) increasing the capacity of Florida public libraries to provide access to local, state, and federal electronic government (e-government) services and 2) heighten their ability to more fully participate in the emergency management (EM) activities such as disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery activities. The goal of the project is to improve residents' access to, and use of, E-government services and improve the local community's ability to prepare for, survive, and recover quickly from different

¹ Denise Davis, John Carlo Bertot, and Charles R. McClure (2008). *Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2007-2008*. Chicago: American Library Association, p. 84.

types of disasters. Previous work at the Information Institute has documented the many roles that public libraries in Florida contribute to the provision of E-government services.²

Those public libraries in the state of Florida that wish to participate in the project would immediately be funded to purchase additional broadband capacity and emergency back-up communications equipment (generator, satellite communications, laptops, etc.); and they would hire 2-4 full time staff (depending on size of library and level of participation) over the two year project. With some 500 public libraries in the state the project could result in the hiring of 1,200 to 1,750 individuals. Additionally, there are already a group of 7-10 public libraries in the state involved in developing a range of E-Government services. This “core group” of public libraries would receive additional staff and resources to continue and expand these services such that they can be leveraged statewide by other public libraries and included in the web portal.

Libraries and other community organizations participating in the two-year project would receive training from individuals hired by the state library to assist library staff in better identifying and using E-government services as well as disaster and emergency management within their local communities. In addition, the state library would oversee the development of a statewide web portal that would identify, organize, and make available to public libraries (and others) basic information and resources broadly related to E-government services and resources.

The project is especially important as it will assist communities with under and non-served populations to better access a range of electronic services and resources that they might otherwise not be able to use. Other benefits include:

- Improve access to government information and services to many underserved populations;
- Increase public awareness of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery information and activities;
- Enhance the broadband capacity and services provided by public libraries and other community organizations;
- Leverage and collaborate E-government and emergency management resources among local, state, and federal agencies with public libraries;
- Create technology-oriented and high-skilled jobs in many rural and economic disadvantaged communities; and
- Reduce economic, community, and human risks associated with emergencies and disasters.

These and other benefits will significantly improve the success with which Florida state and local governments can coordinate E-government and EM resources and services with public libraries for the benefit of state residents.

© Charles R. McClure, Information Use Management and Policy Institute, College of Information, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306.

² John Carlo Bertot and Charles R. McClure (2008). Florida Public Libraries and E-Government: Services, Issues, and Recommendations. Tallahassee: Florida State University, Information Use Management and Policy Institute. Available at: http://www.ii.fsu.edu/news_detail.cfm?newsID=59