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March 29, 1996

Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on Universal Service (NPRM). The passage and signing of the 1996 Telecommunications Act has massive implications for all of us.

People in an information society cannot live, learn, and work without information. Information, and access to it, increasingly affects the quality of each American's life as well as the economic vitality of our country. Information increasingly is available through, and sometimes only through, telecommunications.

I believe that high-speed electronic access to information in all its formats --- text, sound, and graphic --- is a basic service and that the rules of "universal service" should apply to advanced telecommunications.

PILOT PROJECT

For the last two years, the California State Library has used \$2.5 million in federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) "seed" money to fieldtest a project that would provide people with direct Internet access through public libraries. Some 180 sites in our 800 major public library facilities received a single Internet workstation, training, and free connect time to experiment with public access to Internet and to develop community-based plans for what should be made available at each site.

The community plans became operational in January, 1995. The subsequent year proved that people could and would use the Internet at their public libraries, and that the greatest usage has related to:

- finding and obtaining jobs, including retraining
- small business information
- government information (local, State, Federal)

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Those uses were the same statewide, from rural areas to urban centers. (Further detail on the InFoPeople program, "Internet for People: Connecting People through California's Libraries," is enclosed in the appended report.) The pilot project will expand to 154 more public library sites this year.

FINDINGS

In addition to demonstrating that people can and will access Internet through local public libraries, we discovered that libraries in rural areas faced significantly greater difficulty in providing the service due to lines/equipment inadequate to transmit graphic images, a lack of local service providers, and the higher costs associated with the long distance tolls they were forced to invoke.

RECOMMENDATIONS

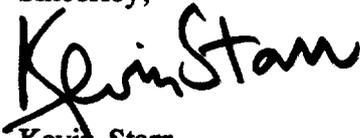
I recommend that all rural areas be equipped with the capacity to access all information formats (i.e., multimedia) electronically, and that they be enabled to do so at costs equivalent to those of urban areas (i.e., the cost of local telephone call).

I further recommend that public libraries be viewed as a vehicle of providing "universal service," in light of their widespread public accessibility and the implausibility of equipping each home for advanced telecommunications access. The public libraries could be supported in this role through free or minimal telecommunications costs (as lifelong learning centers, all uses by them should be considered for "educational purposes"); subsidies for increased hours could also be considered. Public libraries are educational institutions supported with taxpayer dollars, and their provision of direct public access to the Internet is in the public interest. I would also note that some related costs such as file transfers, if involving a cost to the library, should be permitted to be passed along to the individual user and not be considered "selling" or "reselling" in the context of paragraph 86.

* * * *

Thank you for considering these recommendations. I'd be pleased to provide additional information that would be useful to you in the exploration of these suggestions.

Sincerely,



Kevin Starr
State Librarian of California

cc: Barbara Will
International Transcription Service

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California State Library
March 1996

INFOPEOPLE

(Internet for People...Connecting through California Libraries)

SUMMARY

InFoPeople, a statewide initiative of the California State Library that seeks to provide direct public access to the Internet through public libraries, began in 1994. Some 180 public libraries received Internet workstations, free connect time, and intensive training for local "teams" of library staff members and community partners. Over a nine-month period, these teams worked to identify the Internet resources and services most relevant to people in the local area. In January, 1995 each library began offering the direct public access program as outlined in its local community-based plans. And by that time, the two-person team had expanded into a cadre of trained volunteers and staff members who could provide assistance to the public.

InFoPeople was an enormous success. People use the library's Internet workstations in ever-increasing numbers, since the library is a non-threatening environment and since they could obtain the training necessary to make use of the technology. Community volunteers conduct training events and, in many locations, staff the InFoPeople workstation area in order to assist others; businesses have "adopted" some local programs and donated connect time, employee assistance, and workstations; local governments have expanded upon the program by having the library take the lead in developing city-wide home pages.

Throughout California, the major uses of the InFoPeople workstations are for job-seeking (and, more importantly, job-finding) and for locating government information from all levels of government. Small businesses, in particular, utilize government information and other Internet resources on a vast variety of topics. Lively discussions occur on public policy issues, and some local governments use InFoPeople as a vehicle for tapping community opinion.

The University of California at Berkeley is providing computer space and technical support for the InFoPeople home page, gopher, two listservs and a mail reflector, and an FTP site. Home pages of InFoPeople participants are also accessible there. The California State Library continues to provide training support and project coordination to the 180 original participants.

The success of the program is such that the California State Library has awarded InFoPeople grants to an additional 154 public libraries. By the end of 1996, these public libraries will be providing direct public access to the Internet...and the people across the state will share in the benefits of the information superhighway in 334 locations statewide. Universal access is on its way to becoming a reality in the Golden State.

THE InFoPeople CONNECTION

Problem: How can the average California citizen gain access to the much-touted information superhighway? While the Internet is often praised for its ability to "level the playing field", that levelling influence is only felt by those who are "connected" - and millions of Californians lack the personal resources and/or computer skills to be connected. Lack of access to the information available via the Internet is a serious disadvantage in a world where much government as well as private information is available only in electronic form. The California State Library has developed a solution to this problem of Internet accessibility. The solution is the InFoPeople (Internet for People) Project, which has created almost two hundred points of direct public access to the Internet in public libraries throughout California.

SITES AS DIVERSE AS THE STATE ITSELF

The State Library began the project in 1994 by inviting all public libraries to apply for grant awards. (InFoPeople is supported by a Federal Library Services and Construction Act grant.) Almost two hundred library sites applied, and 180 awards were given. The sites selected cover the state from rural Del Norte County in the northwest to the Los Angeles basin to remote desert libraries. They are as diverse as the state itself, including sites that are large and small, urban and rural, rich and poor, highly computerized and totally without technology until the arrival of the InFoPeople workstation.

Each participant was asked to identify a "community partner" who would work closely with library staff in designing the Internet project to meet the specific needs of the local community. Participants were also asked to commit to several obligations: to provide public access to the Internet for five years or the life of the grant-provided equipment; to send a lead staff person and the community partner to training sessions sponsored by the State Library; to use these local "teams" to train other staff and community members; and to develop a written plan for public Internet access.

In return, the grant provided a workstation equipped with a high speed modem and communications software; free connect hours during the first year of the Project; training in both technical and policy matters; consulting assistance; custom manuals and a small collection of Internet books; and public relations materials.

GOPHERS DIG UP INFORMATION

When the Project was designed in early 1994, the **gopher menu approach** was the primary mechanism for bringing some order to the chaos of the Internet. Accordingly, an "InFoPeople gopher" was created as the starting point for patrons. The gopher was designed around the experiences of reference librarians in using the Internet to answer routine public library questions. It is accessible to anyone with a gopher client; the address is:

gopher nic.cerf.net 1073

The InFoPeople gopher, developed and fieldtested with the participating libraries, offers the following menu options:

- **LC Marvel**, the Library of Congress Information system, which provides access to a wide variety of information sources including federal legislation, Supreme Court decisions, federal job listings, and the Library of Congress catalog.
- **MELVYL**, the University of California System, which provides the book catalog and periodical holdings of the University of California campuses and the California State Library.
- **Online Library Catalogs**, a geographical arrangement of hundreds of online library catalogs available on the Internet.
- **CIA World Factbook**, which provides up-to-date geographic, demographic, political, economic, and other types of information about countries.
- **Weather Forecasts**, a file which gives daily and extended weather forecasts, frost and other agricultural warnings for the state of California.
- **CARL**, a group of databases including a magazine index, CARL UnCover, from which users can order (for a fee) complete magazine articles. CARL also provides access to the catalog of the Los Angeles Public Library.
- **California Legislative Information**, which provides access to the legislative calendar; committee information; the text, history, and status for recent Assembly and Senate bills; the California Codes; newly enacted California Statutes; and the California Constitution.
- **Gopher Jewels**, which is a subject listing of gopher sites throughout the world.

- **Fun and Games**, which includes an archive of movie reviews, music files, recipe files, games, and files of jokes and anecdotes arranged by subject.
- **UC Santa Cruz "Infoslug"**, which includes electronic books, journals, and newspapers; weather reports for the entire U.S.; an economic bulletin board; and subject searching capability for the entire Internet.

The InFoPeople gopher was conceived both as a training tool for the Project staff to use with the participants and as a mechanism that the libraries could use to structure public use of the Internet.

In May and June of 1994, 180 teams of library staff and community representatives were trained in nine two-day workshops. The workshops included four hours of hands-on instruction focusing on the InFoPeople gopher but also including basic e-mail and an introduction to file transfer protocol and newsgroups. Two workshops on "advanced" topics took place during the summer, and another series of two-day workshops (this one focused on policy issues) was held at the end of September. In January of 1995 Library Solutions Institute presented nine one-day "Teaching the Internet" sessions for Project participants.

Each participating library site was required to submit to the State Library a community plan for public access to the Internet. The plans reveal a wide variety of approaches reflecting local differences and needs, but there are some common trends.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS BRING MONEY, PUBLICITY, TRAINING AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

The Project has elicited widespread community involvement and support from diverse groups. One hundred (100) sites have some type of community advisory group, ranging in size from 4 to over 30 members. Over 50 different occupations and organizational types are represented in these groups. The community members not only give advice on community needs, but also provide concrete assistance in a variety of ways. Many have been trained to serve as docents providing individual or small group instruction and monitoring the Internet workstation. Some have raised money for the project, provided publicity, or developed written training materials. Perhaps the key role filled by community members has been to provide technical assistance in setting up, configuring, upgrading, and maintaining the Internet workstation.

TRYING BEFORE BUYING, GOVERNMENT INFORMATION ... AND JOBS!

Most InFoPeople libraries began to offer direct public access to the Internet at the beginning of January, 1995. A series of regional meeting was held in late March to discuss how public access was going. All regions reported that the number one public use of the Internet in the public library is to look for jobs - and there are documented cases of library patrons getting jobs from listings they have found on the Internet in the library. In fact, the San Ramon Branch of the Contra Costa County reported that a patron used the library's e-mail account submit his resume in response to a job listing, and subsequently got the job! Another popular use for the library Internet station is for personal exploration in anticipation of getting a connection at home. Libraries are being asked to advise on Internet service providers, hardware and software configurations, etc. Students at all levels are heavy Internet users, as are genealogists. Government information, from all levels of government, is one of the most frequent reasons that people (especially small businesses) use the InFoPeople stations. Local government officials are often users themselves; they increasingly see the opportunities for interactive exchanges on public policy issues that the project provides. In several cases, the public library now organizes and maintains the city's own home page of community information.

ANOTHER CONNECTION

The InFoPeople Project is part of the larger statewide multitype networking initiative, and a recent development demonstrates the linkage between academic and public libraries. The University of California at Berkeley Library is providing computer space and technical support for the InFoPeople home page, gopher, two listservs and a mail reflector, and an FTP site. The home page can be accessed at the following URL:

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu:8000/>

The home page includes alphabetical and regional listings of participating libraries, a clickable map, all the InFoPeople gopher information, links to various online tutorials, links to the major Web search tools, and a variety of online library-related resources such as the Internet Public Library at the University of Michigan. Links to the home pages of individual InFoPeople libraries are being added to the library listings.

The listservs became operational in the summer of 1995. One, called IP-TECH, is devoted to discussion of technical issues related to the provision of public access to the Internet in public libraries. The other, called IP-PUB, is devoted to discussion of public service issues in California public libraries.

LOOKING AHEAD

What is the future for InFoPeople? The California State Library sponsored a second grant program to allow the InFoPeople sites to expand their programs. Awards were made in February, 1996; and 154 more public libraries will become InFoPeople participants by the end of the year.

The project has generated widespread enthusiasm in local communities, and public use has increased so much since one year ago that most sites maintain reservation lists. The community involvement from the beginning has translated into locally-responsive service programs, and volunteers in most areas provide training and on-on-one instruction for other InFoPeople users. Local businesses have donated connect time and additional workstations to expand the program further. InFoPeople has opened doors and enabled connections that would otherwise have been inaccessible to the public, and the people are loudly appreciative of their entry into cyberspace.

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