

FCC PARTNERS WITH INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES TO ADDRESS DIGITAL DIVIDE DURING COVID-19

Agencies to Work Together to Keep Libraries and Their Communities Connected

WASHINGTON, May 21, 2020—The Federal Communications Commission today announced that it is partnering with the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to promote the use of \$50 million in funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to help address the digital divide during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The agencies will team up to raise awareness of these funds among libraries and Tribal organizations, which can use them to increase broadband access in their communities.

The CARES Act allocated \$50 million in funding to IMLS, the primary source of federal funding for the nation’s museums and libraries, to enable these institutions, as well as organizations serving Tribal communities, to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus pandemic. This includes work to expand digital network access, purchase Internet accessible devices, and provide technical support services to their communities.

More than half of this funding was distributed through State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs) in all states and territories based on population. States and territories may use these [funds](#) to expand broadband access and prioritize their efforts to high-need communities using data on poverty rates, unemployment rates, and broadband availability. IMLS has provided additional details regarding this funding availability directly to SLAAs.

Additionally, \$15 million of this funding will be awarded through grants to libraries and museums, as well as Tribes and organizations serving and representing Native Hawaiians. The goal of these [grant programs](#) is to support these entities and organizations in responding to the coronavirus pandemic in ways that meet the immediate and future COVID-19 needs of the communities they serve. Grant proposals may include short- or medium-term solutions to address gaps in digital infrastructure. For example, libraries may partner with community organizations to develop community Wi-Fi hotspot and laptop lending programs in underserved areas. Applications are due June 12, 2020 with award announcements anticipated in August 2020.

“Now more than ever, it is critical that all Americans have access to broadband to participate in online learning, get medical care via telehealth, search for jobs, and stay in touch with family and friends,” said FCC Chairman Ajit Pai. “And many Americans rely on their local library for this connectivity. So I’m pleased that Congress has provided funding to libraries and other entities to help them respond to the needs of their patrons during the coronavirus pandemic by bringing digital tools such as Wi-Fi and tablets into their communities. We look forward to working with IMLS to ensure that our nation’s libraries and Tribal organizations know about this opportunity and how it can help bridge the digital divide, especially in rural and low-income communities.”

“We are called to respond to the urgent needs of our communities,” said IMLS Director Crosby Kemper. “IMLS is focusing on bolstering the digital capacity of libraries and museums, helping them address the digital divide with the resources and direction provided by Congress and the White House through the CARES Act. We are pleased to do this jointly with the FCC, which,

under the leadership of Chairman Pai, has also taken a key role in addressing the pandemic and technological challenges in low-income, rural, urban, Tribal, and underserved communities. This money and this partnership will make a difference in the lives of people across the nation.”

As part of the FCC’s collaboration with IMLS, the FCC will publicize these CARES Act resources, help conduct outreach to libraries as well as organizations serving Tribal communities regarding the CARES Act funding and other IMLS resources available to them, and provide information on broadband service providers that may be able to help. The agencies will also share information on the availability of broadband and on the connectivity needs of libraries, including in rural areas, and work together to ensure that libraries across the country are aware that community use of Wi-Fi networks supported by the FCC’s E-Rate program is [permitted](#) during library closures due to COVID-19.

For updates on the FCC’s wide array of actions to keep consumers connected during the coronavirus pandemic, visit www.fcc.gov/coronavirus. For information on Chairman Pai’s Keep Americans Connected Initiative, visit www.fcc.gov/keepamericansconnected.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services continues to update www.imls.gov/coronavirus-covid-19-updates with information for libraries, museums, states, and local leaders.

For more information about COVID-19, please visit the following websites: coronavirus.gov, cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html, and usa.gov/coronavirus.

*This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).*