

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Montana State Library Concludes Grant That Increased Technology Access and Training Across State

(HELENA)---The Montana State Library is pleased to announce that it successfully concluded a three-year grant that provided significantly improved access to technology and technology training throughout Montana. The Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) grant was a nearly \$2.7 million project that provided more computers, training programs, and resources; funded minor construction; and increased broadband capacity at participating Montana public libraries.

Forty-two of Montana's public libraries participated in the program; these libraries serve 86% of Montana's population. Funding for the project came from a variety of partners including the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Missoula Public Library, the Montana State Library, and several smaller Montana libraries.

"We not only achieved all of our original goals and objectives for the BTOP project; we surpassed – in some cases by tremendous margins – what we originally set out to do," said Jennie Stapp, Montana State Librarian.

A handful of BTOP's achievements are highlighted below:

- Montana BTOP libraries received 478 new computers.
- Library operating hours increased by 5 percent.
- Wait times for public computers dropped to an average of less than one minute.
- BTOP libraries offered 51,280 hours of technology training to 130,345 patrons and 2,373 library staff members.

"It is incumbent on all of us who understand the importance of technology to everyone's lives and who care deeply about eliminating the digital divide in America to do what we can to make a difference," said Stapp. "With the BTOP funding, we got it right: local public libraries were strengthened as were the communities they serve."

The BTOP grant also provided funding to create innovative library services for some of Montana's most rural citizens. The Missoula Public Library launched the new Web on Wheels (or W.O.W. Bus) that delivers high quality computers with internet capabilities and extensive technology training to communities that do not have public computer centers. The Bus makes stops in rural communities, retirement centers, community centers, rural schools, local missions, and underserved communities throughout Missoula County.

"More Montanans are ready for jobs because of this investment in technology," said Governor Steve Bullock. "With increased access to computers, training programs and resources, the grant

reached folks across the state—including our most rural residents. The Broadband Technology Opportunity Program is a huge asset to our Montana libraries.”

The public access computers and wireless access in libraries throughout Montana are used millions of times per year, indicating the high need for Montanans who do not have internet access in their homes. Montana’s low population density creates situations that can make broadband service uneconomical or prohibitively expensive to many consumers. For those Montanans who do not have home internet access, 67% rely totally on their local libraries to provide the internet access they need and on which they depend.

The staff of the Montana State Library is absolutely committed to improving the lives of Montana citizens,” said Stapp. “Thanks to this grant, we have made an important step in building a bridge to eliminate the digital and educational divide that we know exists in Montana and that keeps many of our citizens vulnerable and disenfranchised. Montana libraries are now better equipped to ensure online information access equality for all Montanans.”

For more information about the BTOP grant, contact Sara Groves, Marketing and Communications Coordinator, at (406) 444-5357 or via e-mail at: sgroves@mt.gov.

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About the Montana State Library

Through its statewide programs, the Montana State Library empowers Montanans; enhances learning in families and communities; builds 21st Century skills; and provides opportunities for civic participation. For more information about the Montana State Library, visit <http://msl.mt.gov>.