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The California State Library assembled nearly 200 public library leaders, community supporters, broadband providers, and local and state leaders for California's Opportunity Online Broadband Summit, on December 14 -15, 2009, in Sacramento to discuss how to improve and sustain quality Internet access in California public libraries.

The California Opportunity Online Broadband Summit highlighted the importance of community partnerships and the opportunities that technology can provide. Summit participants brainstormed and discussed possible solutions and action steps to upgrade and sustain broadband connectivity in California public libraries to meet patron demand.

Currently, 31 California public library systems lack Internet connections fast enough to meet the basic needs of patrons. Many more report speeds that are inadequate to meet the true demand of their community.

The California summit was sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as part of its pilot Opportunity Online broadband grant program. California, along with six other states, was invited to participate. The grant program supports public libraries as they seek to improve their broadband connectivity and calls for a broadband sustainability strategy, to be developed by the California State Library, to ensure that public libraries continue to improve and maintain adequate connectivity for patrons. The summit included a comprehensive analysis of California's current broadband climate and the future of technology access in California public libraries. Graham Richard, former mayor of Fort Wayne, Indiana and partner of public libraries, highlighted the importance of public and private partnerships on the local and state level to prioritize funding for improved connectivity in public libraries. State and library leaders from across California addressed the status of connectivity in the state. Speakers included: Linda Crowe, executive director of the Pacific Library Partnership; California Public Utilities Commissioner Rachelle Chong; Sunne McPeak, president and chief executive officer of the California Emerging Technology Fund; Teri Takai, chief information officer for the state; and California's secretary of education Glen Thomas. Technology futurist Tim O'Reilly reflected on the future of technology in libraries. ♦

Stacey Aldrich, California's newly named state librarian, led the summit and represented the California State Library. ♦

"California's public libraries are blazing a trail for those Californians who lack adequate access to high-speed Internet," Aldrich said. "Today's public libraries continue to provide traditional services, but a growing number of patrons depend on library Internet access to apply for jobs, further their education, run businesses, or stay connected with families and friends. This summit and grant program will help California public libraries meet these increasing personal and community needs better by improving library connection speeds."

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