

ST-9
Oklahoma Report
Mountain Plains Library Association
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Bill Young from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries gives updates on the financial picture for the state library:

More bad budget news continued for the Oklahoma Department of Libraries (ODL) in 2011. The state legislature cut the ODL budget by 7.5%. During the past three years, the state library's appropriation has been reduced a total of 19%. It could have been worse: many other state agencies in Oklahoma have seen cumulative budget cuts of 25% or more.

Even before the recession, ODL had been struggling to fully fund daily operations. In the pre-Great Recession good times, most new state dollars for Oklahoma libraries were pass through funds for public libraries and literacy councils. Previous cuts to operational funds, going back as far as two decades ago, have never been fully replaced by the legislature, and inflation has had its own impact. During the past decade, employment at the agency has dropped from 81 to 50 staff members. The agency's state archives and state records management program has been hit particularly hard, with staffing reduced from 12 to 5 employees. Fortunately, the agency has been able to handle the reduction of employees through attrition. Layoffs and furloughs have not been needed.

On the good news side, ODL dodged a bullet when it was removed from a bill that sought to consolidate all agencies responsible for services to state government and state employees. Advocacy efforts by the Oklahoma Library Association were able to convince legislators that ODL did not fit the criteria for consolidation, since it serves libraries and citizens across the state, not just state employees.

In other good news, the Oklahoma Legislature increased the level of state e-rate reimbursements to libraries, schools and medical facilities. These institutions can now receive reimbursements for up to a T1 line. Previously, they could only receive reimbursements for 56k connections.

The state e-rate legislation could also benefit ODL's OkConnect initiative, which is providing Internet speed increases and videoconferencing capabilities to 44 rural libraries in the state.

OkConnect is funded with federal stimulus funds and matching support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The State of Oklahoma also received stimulus dollars to lay an additional 1,000 miles of fiber optic cable, which will bring more high speed connections to libraries, schools and other qualifying institutions.

The Oklahoma Library Association has honored Representative Lee Denney of Cushing and State Senator Jim Halligan of Stillwater with the Bill Lowry Library Champion Award for their sponsorship of a bill that would increase Internet speeds in the state's schools, libraries and hospitals. The Award was presented on April 12 during the Library Legislative Day Activities at the State Capitol.

The 2011 Information Matrix camp, sponsored jointly by the Oklahoma Library Association and Rose State College is under way. 27 teen campers from across the state are enjoying a week of learning about different kinds of libraries and librarianship.

In August, the Oklahoma Library Association is presenting a two day information technology conference focusing on libraries, bringing together the industry's leading thinkers and designers.

