

Federal Stimulus Grant to Fund 600 New Library Computers, Mobile Computer Centers

A Major Broadband Technology Grant to be Sought in March

OSHEAN (pronounced Ocean) and its partner Ocean State Libraries (OSL) have been awarded a federal stimulus grant to assist Rhode Islanders with library based, computer access.

The \$1.6 million in funds will provide 600+ computers/printers and 10 mobile computer centers for public libraries at over 70 locations throughout the state - covering virtually every public library in Rhode Island.

"Stimulus funding is coming to Rhode Island at an extremely critical time for public libraries," said David Macksam, Director of the Cranston Public Library and OSL Vice President. "We are facing increasing demands to provide high speed internet access to citizens who are turning to their public libraries to search for job opportunities, prepare resumes and complete online job applications. Our current and future abilities to respond are threatened by continuing reductions in funding from cash strapped municipalities. Stimulus funding could make a real difference."

The grant, awarded as part of the Federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) will expand the libraries' capacity to offer public-use of personal computers, enable expanded employment training and workshops, and provide streaming video equipment that will allow libraries to offer classes in one location while sharing content at another library location.

The mobile computer centers can travel throughout the OSL library locations. Each center is equipped with a classroom of computers and internet connections.

"This \$1.6 million Recovery award to OSHEAN and Ocean State Libraries is well deserved," said Governor Donald L. Carcieri. "Access to computers in public libraries is critical to citizens to gain access to employment information and help improve computer skills. Broadband grants are extremely competitive, and this award highlights the tremendous efforts by OSHEAN and OSL, and their commitment to increasing access to computers and the Internet for citizens throughout all communities in Rhode Island."

It is estimated over 36,000 library patrons will utilize the new and upgraded computers each week.

"Receiving the BTOP stimulus grant represents an unprecedented opportunity for the citizens of Rhode Island," said Joan E. Gillespie, OSL Executive Director. "We are also very grateful to the state Office of Library and Information Services for their help and to the Champlin Foundations for providing matching funds for this grant and for their ongoing support of RI libraries. They have truly built the backbone of library technology in Rhode Island."

The library grant is the first of two grants included in OSHEAN's requests for federal stimulus funds under the BTOP program. OSHEAN will be submitting a broadband infrastructure grant worth nearly \$30 million in March.

“We are pleased to receive the initial library grant and thank our congressional delegation for its help, in particular Senator Reed and Congressman Langevin.” said Joseph Pangborn, OSHEAN Board Chair. “We look forward to continuing to pursue other important stimulus grants that will allow us to proceed with our initiatives to expand our network and to bring broadband capacity to OSHEAN members and the public they serve.”

The BTOP grants that will be submitted in March would:

- Provide direct broadband service to Rhode Island’s most important anchor institutions including universities, hospitals, colleges and community health centers.
- Provide affordable broadband accessibility to underserved areas in western Rhode Island.
- Create over 70 new high wage, high skilled direct jobs and hundreds of indirect jobs.

“If we receive the larger stimulus grant it will give us enormous momentum as we work to serve all Rhode Islanders.” said George Loftus, OSHEAN, President/CEO.

About OSHEAN:

OSHEAN Inc., (pronounced ocean) is a consortium of non-profit organizations that was formed to foster the development of a communications infrastructure for Rhode Island's research, educational, health care, and public service community. OSHEAN is committed to developing network expertise among its member organizations and to creating an environment that encourages collaboration through shared resources, information and expertise.

About OSL:

Ocean State Libraries, Inc. is a consortium of all the public libraries in Rhode Island. Through a shared telecommunications network, shared integrated library system, group purchasing and a shared catalog, OSL members are able to share their collections so that any library user in Rhode Island gets access to materials owned at any other OSL library, and the materials are shipped for pick up at any library location the patron specifies. OSL is a wonderful example of less becoming more through collaboration and cooperation.