

# Net Neutrality

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Librarians must lead in the fight for net neutrality. Just as they were an important force in the growth of public libraries for all citizens, librarians must do everything they can to ensure that citizens regardless of where they live have access to the Internet. Currently there is a push to roll back the rules that allow equal access to the Internet. Some large bandwidth users such as Netflix who supported net neutrality in the past, are now pulling away from the concept. Large users of the Internet, just like the railroads of the nineteenth century, seem to feel that they have the clout to set the rules to favor themselves and not the average user. There is already a significant disparity between large research centers with gigabit access and rural locations that only have dial up access. The real challenge is how to convert the existing legacy copper systems into more modern data pipelines, while allowing at the same time the development of new technologies to further expand the gigabit universe. Current Internet providers come largely from the outgrowth of early copper telephone systems with Sprint being one of the prime examples. Internet providers are saying that the net neutrality rules are just too expensive and burdensome for their high speed environment. They feel that it's just not "fair" to be forced to provide equal access to "free or low cost" sites such as public libraries. Originally the net neutrality concept was an outgrowth of the idea of publicly regulated utilities providing standardized service to all customers with rates set by a "public utilities commission." Some groups want to change this public utility concept of net neutrality by

modernizing the rules similar to what was done with airline and telephone company deregulation. Librarians need to get together to lobby for the inclusion of all libraries as equal access points for the general population. Librarians have long championed equality of access to print materials from publicly supported budgets. Doing the same for net access will carry the concept of low cost or free public access into the digital world of the twenty-first century. Let's all do our part to keep both print and electronic information flowing to our citizens.

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