

Bridging the Digital Divide: Equal access to essential electronic resources for all students and faculty in NM higher education institutions.

There is a large and growing information access divide in higher education between urban and rural, large and small, community college, comprehensive, and research institutions. The Cost of Libraries subcommittee of the Formula Enhancement Task Force seeks support and funding in the amount of \$200,000 to pilot a state-wide licensing model intended to explore ways to flatten this divide. By expanding access to a core set of electronic journals and books to *all* students, faculty, and staff enrolled in any publicly funded institution of higher education in New Mexico we will take a significant step towards providing equal access to high quality resources, regardless of institution size, location, or library budget.

Authoritative academic electronic resources such as journals, books, and databases, needed for quality coursework and research, are not free to everyone with access to the world- wide web. Unlike hard copy library materials purchased at an advertised price available from a single physical location to anyone onsite or through interlibrary loan, electronic library resources require negotiated licenses. These are complex contracts negotiated by individual libraries and consortia, restricted to a specified, authenticated user community. Licensing costs are generally set based on the FTE size of the institution. The higher the FTE, the lower the cost is per person. No one outside the defined community of users is allowed access, which creates an inequitable situation when one student has the benefit of a resource that another does not. Even students co-enrolled from two institutions into the same course are not guaranteed access to the same information if each institution has not purchased the license.

This proposal seeks to leverage both the collective bargaining power and the existing licenses of the largest NM academic libraries in order to include all users throughout the state, and take an important step to flatten this divide. Based on the initial experiences of the libraries participating as the NM Consortium of Academic Libraries (NMCAL) in negotiating licenses, the cost of including the remaining smaller institutions into existing licenses is far less than if they negotiated alone.

Project Highlights:

- The funds would be appropriated for NM HED, not for individual institutions.
- A small but essential, authoritative set of core resources already licensed by a majority of libraries will be identified by content experts within NMCAL.
- The goal of the proposal is to expand access to *new* users. Libraries that have licenses to resources would not directly benefit financially from this proposal but would be expected to lend their leveraging power for the benefit to all New Mexico libraries.
- Creating state-wide equitable access to these core electronic resources is expected to increase licensing costs by only 20-30% of existing licensing investments. The additional costs would be funded by the state and managed by the HED offices in cooperation with a NMCAL library. *A library with a current license would receive only enough funds to cover the cost of the additional FTEs.*

Examples:

Nineteen New Mexico academic libraries are interested in holding the license for *Article First*, a core electronic resource. Fourteen of these libraries currently hold licenses for *Article First* at a total combined cost of \$100,000. The remaining five libraries have a combined FTE of 2,000 students but do not have funding available to obtain licenses independently. The existing license is renegotiated with the vendor at an additional cost of \$10,000 to include the five libraries. The total new cost for the license would be raised to \$110,000. This results in closing the electronic access divide in the state.

Lexis-Nexis Academic is held by six institutions including NMSU, NMT and UNM. These six libraries pay over \$100,000 a year. The license negotiation attempted would be to extend access to all the smaller universities and community colleges for not more than an additional 20% to 30%.

NMCAL negotiated with EBSCO to provide nine core databases in areas that range from career information to computer science. Most of the academic libraries were able to add this package, paying a total of \$116,000. Five institutions could not join in this deal due to financial restraints. The legislative appropriation for HED would extend access to those five for approximately \$20,000.

Budget, Methodology and Outcomes

- Total funding request: **\$200,000** for pilot project.
- All project funds will be used to directly pay the incremental costs of adding additional FTE of institutions to existing licenses for electronic resources.
- NMCAL members will contribute their time and expertise to this pilot project. This will involve substantive discussions between all NMCAL librarians to determine core electronic resources for this diverse state.
- Library directors will use this formal, HED supported project to share license negotiating strategies and identify other collaborative opportunities that might benefit libraries state-wide.
- The Cost of Libraries subcommittee, along with the NMCAL Resource Sharing committee, will coordinate proposal activities, create the pilot methodology, evaluate the project, and complete all required reports.
- The primary success measures will be:
 - Provide access to an agreed upon core set of electronic resources for every user in a publicly funded higher education in the state.
 - Negotiating new licenses that hold the cost to provide this additional support to state institutions to not more than 20-30% of the current investment.
- The model explored through the pilot will be refined and expanded to include more resources, and result in additional collaborations among NM academic libraries.