LEARN Empowers Rural Libraries with High-Speed Internet

Lubbock, Texas (May 10, 2021) – With the COVID-19 pandemic increasing demand for reliable Internet access outside of school and work, the need to improve Internet capabilities of community anchor institutions, such as libraries, is more important than ever.

Last fall, LEARN began working with our Board Member Mark Smith, Director and State Librarian at Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), to identify Texas libraries to connect to the LEARN network. LEARN was specifically looking for libraries in cities with a population of 10,000 or less in order to make a bigger impact in the community. After identifying an initial set of three west Texas libraries to connect, LEARN and TSLAC looked to expand the project into other rural regions of the state, eventually adding seven additional libraries in east and central Texas to the project.

Starting with the west Texas libraries, LEARN began work to provide up to one Gigabit (1G) Internet to these ten libraries. "The LEARN community is excited to share its capacity and capabilities to improve digital equity by enabling faster Internet and Wi-Fi equipment at rural libraries in Texas," says Akbar Kara, LEARN President and CEO.

With a high-speed connection to LEARN capable of up to 1G upload and 1G download speeds, these libraries will receive 10 to 100 times faster Internet service than their current speeds. "These locations are not in urban environments, so the need and impact are significant, especially to the young patrons engaged in learning" says Kara.

"This project is exciting for LEARN and, more importantly, will bring transformative change to the participating libraries," says Dr. Michael Hites, Chief Information Officer at Southern Methodist University and Chair of the LEARN Board of Directors. "Being able to deliver LEARN connectivity to communities that may not be familiar with who we are and what we do enables us to fulfill our mission of empowering all nonprofits in Texas."

Through this partnership, LEARN hopes to introduce itself to the greater library community and extend its footprint to other community anchor institutions in rural Texas. All ten libraries will be connected to LEARN by August 2021.

About: LEARN (The Lonestar Education And Research Network) is a consortium of 40 organizations throughout Texas that includes public and private institutions of higher education, community colleges, libraries, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Texas State Library and Archive Commission (TSLAC), and Texas Education Telecommunications Network (TETN) and K-12 public schools. The consortium, organized by higher education leaders as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, connects its members and over 300 affiliated organizations through high performance optical and IP network services to support their research, education, healthcare, and public service missions. LEARN is also a leading member of the national community of advanced research networks, providing Texas connectivity to national and international research and education networks, enabling cutting-edge research that is increasingly dependent upon sharing large volumes of data.