

Funding

For FY1999-2000, the State appropriated \$3,000,000 for the Alabama Virtual Library in the budget of the Alabama Public Library Service (APLS). APLS was the unanimous choice of the representatives of all the educational sectors as the state agency to oversee the development and management of the AVL. The groups seeking funding for the AVL promised the legislators that:

The AVL will serve constituents of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (NAAL), Alabama Dept. of Postsecondary Education (public two-year colleges), Alabama Public Library Service (public libraries), Alabama State Department of Education (k-12 school systems). A board representing these state agencies and the Alabama Supercomputer Authority will be appointed to oversee the AVL. The Alabama Public Library Service is the state agency legally responsible to manage the AVL and will serve as the fiscal agent. The Alabama Supercomputer Authority will provide technical expertise.

Dr. Lamar Veatch, director of APLS, has invited the 5 educational agencies to make three appointments to an AVL board/steering committee/advisory committee. Of these appointments, one should represent the agency and at least one should represent its constituents. Agencies to be represented are:

- Alabama Commission on Higher Education
- Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education
- Alabama State Department of Education
- Alabama Public Library Service
- Alabama Supercomputer Authority

The appointed board will be the body that makes the decisions about the AVL including selection of the databases, how these will be accessed, etc. Funds for the AVL will not be available until October 1, 1999. Under state law, agencies cannot contract for services until the funds available. For the past year, a Steering Committee for the AVL (an informal group representing the state agencies described above along with representatives of the constituent groups) has been working to achieve funding and develop an AVL implementation plan. For the first official meeting of the AVL Board, this committee will recommend that the Board license several databases for Phase I of the AVL. Vendors will be asked to make these available immediately so that some AVL resources can be made available when school starts in August 1999. Point to stress: this will be a temporary implementation and will not represent the entire AVL databases that will be available.

The informal steering committee is reviewing proposals and will PROBABLY recommend that the board license:

- Online encyclopedia

- General periodicals index with full text of articles
- "Reference center" like SIRS Discoverer/Researcher and Electric Library
- Index to education journals that includes full text of articles
- Index to newspapers

The BOARD will decide if it will do this and will determine which databases to license. The informal steering committee can only recommend a course of action. If the Board concurs and licenses any or all of the above, volunteers from the library community will be asked to assist with immediate implementation, and especially, training. The primary goal will be to have the databases available from every network-ready public K-12 school when school opens for Fall99. Because there are fewer public libraries and 2- and 4- year college libraries to connect, it seems it will be easier to have the databases readily available from those sites. An equally important task within this goal will be to provide training to assure the databases will be used efficiently and effectively.

The informal steering committee will probably recommend that all of the databases selected by the Board be made available for all libraries -- at the choice of the library. The vendors offer various iterations of their databases -- selected and designed to be appropriate for different age groups. However, elementary schools might want to make the elementary age product available for students, but the college (adult) product available for teachers. Public libraries will probably want to make all databases available because they serve a broad range of patron age groups. The public libraries are the primary service points for areas where the schools/school media centers do not yet have Internet connectivity. Public libraries will be the primary service point for home-schooled students and those attending private schools. Every county in Alabama has a public library with Internet connectivity, so these students will have access to the databases.

The AVL will support access to databases from schools and libraries. In this initial phase, there are no plans for the AVL to support access from homes. HOWEVER, many vendors offer remote patron access, and if libraries/schools want to offer this service, they can negotiate this with the vendors whose database are selected for the AVL. (The burden of supporting remote patron access will rest with the library/school, not the AVL. Some vendors charge extra for remote access, the AVL will probably not pay these charges).

Access to the AVL will require a network browser and an Internet connection. While the Alabama Supercomputer Authority will provide technical support for the AVL, access to the databases can be via any Internet Service Provider. The informal steering committee hopes the Board or APLS will immediately establish a web page and a list serve to assure the education community is kept informed of AVL developments.