

What is the Alabama Virtual Library and Frequently Asked Questions

The Alabama virtual Library is a joint effort by State and local officials to add and consolidate structured, on-line library content for use by students and residents of Alabama. The Alabama Virtual Library Steering Committee is currently leading the effort to fund a variety of subscriptions for Alabama library users.

What is the Alabama Virtual Library?

The Alabama Virtual Library (AVL) is a proposal to provide all students, teachers, and citizens of the State with online access to essential library and information resources. Through the AVL, an equitable core of information sources will be available to every student and citizen in Alabama, raising the level of excellence in schools and communities across the State.

Why is the Alabama Virtual Library such a good idea?

Information is a vital part of education at any grade or educational level. Alabama students deserve accurate and current information for their education. Too many schools have been unable to fund adequate library resources – and students suffer when materials are out-of-date or information is simply unavailable when needed. The Alabama Virtual Library will put excellent information right on the desktops of school and library computers in a way that is easy and enjoyable to use.

Students, teachers, and citizens will be able to research topics using simple search strategies, including keyword searching, across thousands of magazine articles. With full text of many articles available online, students will spend their time productively reviewing the information content. Hundreds of thousands of articles and books will also be available through statewide lending programs using the resources owned by Alabama libraries.

The state can achieve substantial discounts by contracting for information databases on a statewide basis because the per student cost is less for the state as a whole than it is for small, individual contracts. The AVL is also the fastest, most realistic plan to achieve significant equity for students and teachers in public schools across the state.

Who will participate in the AVL?

The education communities served by the Alabama Virtual Library will be the constituents of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, the Alabama Department of Education, the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, and the Alabama Public Library Service. Therefore, K-12 school systems, two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and universities will have access for their students and teachers. Public libraries will be connected so students can use the AVL after school and on weekends and so the citizens of Alabama can use the resources for their lifelong learning needs.

What information resources will the Alabama Virtual Library provide?

The resources will vary according to the needs of the various education communities. Each education community will select a core of age-appropriate databases to support its overall curriculum. Examples of core resources are online encyclopedias, almanacs, biographical sources, and the full text of magazines and books.

How will the information resources of the AVL be made available?

The content of the Alabama Virtual Library will be delivered online over the Internet to existing computers in public schools, community colleges, four-year colleges, and public libraries across the state. Each computer will need a Web browser (software which is free to schools in many versions) and an Internet connection. Each school system, college and university, and public library will be able to choose its own Internet service provider. For many AVL participants, the Alabama Research and Education Network (AREN) provided by the Alabama Supercomputer Authority will be the Internet provider.

How much will it cost to join AVL?

The AVL will be funded by the state for the education community. *None of the education communities will pay to participate.* The Alabama Virtual Library will provide the information content; participants will use their own hardware, software, and telecommunications for Internet access to connect to the AVL.

What impact will AVL have on public schools?

>For the first time, *every* student in *every* school will have access to the same core of up-to-date, responsible information with which to complete homework and research assignments. Teachers in all schools—urban or rural, wealthy or poor—will be able to make assignments with confidence that the resources will be available. Since few public schools can now afford to provide resources equal to those in the AVL, this proposal will immediately expand the quality and quantity of information available for most students.

For example, the full text of about 1,000 magazines for instruction and research will be available to view, print, or download from the online library. The cost to provide print copies of these magazines for every school library, college and university library, and public library is prohibitive. By working together, the online equivalent of these resources can be provided on a desktop in every school and public library for a reasonable cost. To meet the needs of younger students, the AVL will also include resources for elementary and middle school students.

If my school does not have Internet access, how will I benefit?

For students and teachers in schools not yet connected to the Internet, access will be available through the local public library. Public libraries in every Alabama County have Internet access as a result of funding from the Gates Library Foundation. In addition, all of the state's two- and four-year college libraries allow public access to their libraries.

How will AVL help K-12 and community college faculty?

The AVL will provide teachers with accurate, up-to-date information to develop or revise their courses of study. It will place information on their desktop PCs for their own continuing education. And perhaps most importantly, the AVL will allow teachers in the poorest and most rural schools to make challenging assignments with the full assurance that appropriate, current information will be available in the school library.

How will the AVL be funded?

The education community is requesting \$3,000,000 from *new growth revenue* in the FY2000 Special Education Trust Fund. This amount is only 3.2% of expected growth for next year. Central funding from the state will assure that a common pool of money is available to negotiate the lowest possible prices for the databases needed by the communities participating in the AVL.

How will my local school or library funds be affected when the AVL is funded?

Funding for the AVL will not affect local school or library funding. No public library, school, or college will pay for access to the AVL. Existing funding formulas will not be affected either, as the proposal is to fund this project entirely with growth money in the Special Education Trust Fund.

What does the \$3 million budget request for AVL include?

The vast majority of the funds will be used to license electronic databases, such as online encyclopedias, almanacs, indexes to information contained in books and magazines, and the full text of online books and magazines. A small amount of the budget will be used to train librarians and teachers to use the information resources effectively. Some funds will be required to set up and manage the virtual library, including the purchase of a central server, gateway software, and some technical support.

What will be needed in subsequent years to fund AVL?

The \$3 million budget request represents the recurring annual cost to license the kinds of resources mentioned above. The cost to renew the license subscriptions in subsequent years will depend on the set of core resources identified by the participants in AVL, on the number of libraries and schools being served, and on our ability to negotiate good prices for the databases. Use of the databases will be carefully monitored to insure that the AVL licenses only what it needs.

Who is planning the AVL?

Representatives of the education community have been meeting as a steering committee to develop an organizational structure for the Alabama Virtual Library. The committee represents the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, the Alabama Department of Education, the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, the Alabama Education Association, the

Alabama Public Library Service, and the Alabama Supercomputer Authority, as well as school media specialists and librarians from two- and four-year colleges and public libraries.

Who will manage and oversee the AVL?

The Steering Committee is developing a permanent organizational structure to manage the Virtual Library. Guiding principles for design of the governance structure include:

- Representation from the various partners to ensure that all of the education communities are served in an equitable fashion;
- Structure to foster unified spirit of trust and cooperation among partners in service of common goals;
- Structure to allow different education communities within AVL to define and serve individual information needs of their constituents;
- Strong advisory authority to rest in a permanent steering committee made up of representatives from the education communities identified above with ultimate authority and responsibility to reside in the agency which manages the funds;
- Librarians from the different education communities to serve on the overall advisory boards.

Who will provide technical support for the AVL?

The Alabama Supercomputer Authority will provide much of the technological expertise and the infrastructure (AREN) which are critical to the project's success.

How will the databases be selected?

When funding is approved, librarians and teachers from throughout the state—K-12, post-secondary, higher education, and public libraries—will select the databases that best meet the information needs of their library users.

Do other states have programs similar to AVL?

Virtual libraries are emerging in all of the southeastern states and in many states across the nation. The first statewide effort was GALILIO in Georgia. LUIS (Louisiana), Magnolia (Mississippi), VIVA (Virginia), NC Live (North Carolina), and DISCUS (South Carolina) have since joined it. Information about consortia working together to share online resources can be viewed at www.library.yale.edu/consortia.