

Library White Paper: Charging Non-Residents for Library Services

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Non-residents, especially during the summer tourist season, can place a heavy burden on staff and services of the public library. This is particularly true of the use of public computers to access the Internet for Email. Recently some public libraries began charging out-of-state visitors a fee to use these computers. In those cases where a library receives E-rate discounts, this practice could jeopardize its eligibility in that program.

Della Matthis has provided the following information:

- Charging patrons, whether local or out-of-state, for accessing the Internet may have E-Rate consequences. This may be true regardless of whether your library has specifically applied for funding in the Internet category of E-Rate requests. If ANY of the costs incurred in connecting your patrons to the Internet are defrayed by E-Rate funding, then the certifications signed on the Form 471 comes into effect.
- Block 6, Item 29 : I certify that the services the applicant purchases at discounts provided by 47 U.S.C. Sec. 254 will be used solely for educational purposes and WILL NOT BE SOLD, RESOLD, OR TRANSFERRED IN CONSIDERATION FOR MONEY or any other thing of value.[emphasis added]
- In the event that an audit found that your Item 29 certification was not valid, your organization could be asked to refund the committed moneys and/or not permitted to apply for some number of subsequent years.

Whether or not a public library is a participant in the E-Rate program, the State Library strongly recommends that no fee be charged for the specific use of computers for Internet access. If a library needs to recover costs or better manage services, we recommend that it require a non-resident to register as a patron and to pay a non-resident fee. This would then give the user equal access to all services of the library. There is no prohibition, either state or federal, for charging a non-resident fee to a person who is not in the library's taxing or service district. This is true, not only for out-of-state persons, but also for Alaskans who are not in the library's district.

Charging non-resident fees for library service is common practice in other states, less so in Alaska. The fee charged is usually based on the annual per capita support of the library. For most Alaskan libraries this would be in the range of \$30 to \$50.