



## **LEARN and Facebook Partner to Provide High-Speed Internet To Texas Libraries**

***The partnership will provide three local libraries with improved connectivity and Wi-Fi equipment as they work to bridge the digital divide within their communities***

**Lubbock, TX (July 19, 2021)** – Three Texas libraries are now able to offer their communities high speed Internet access that is up to 100 times faster than what is currently available. Muleshoe Public Library, Cochran County Library in Morton and Friona Public Library all in far west Texas will connect at 1 gigabit (1G) Internet speeds thanks to a partnership between Lonestar Education and Research Network (LEARN, a statewide research and education consortium serving Texas) and Facebook.

Today’s announcement highlights LEARN’s work to connect the libraries to existing Facebook fiber, which will provide broadband that runs 10 to 100 times faster than current speeds. The three libraries will also receive new commercial grade Wi-Fi equipment supplied by Facebook to support robust Internet access to library patrons.

“The innovative partnership between LEARN and Facebook will provide world-class digital access to the residents of these communities,” said State Librarian Mark Smith, Director of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, which has contracted with LEARN to provide broadband assistance to libraries.

The great equalizer in today’s economy and educational environment is access to a quality digital infrastructure. Libraries are essential anchor points in communities serving people of all ages for all ranges of needs. We have learned, especially during the pandemic, that access to broadband is a critical component to economic, social and educational well-being.

“On behalf of LEARN’s Board of Directors, I am pleased to support the efforts to enhance the connectivity in rural west Texas communities, which aligns with LEARN’s mission and vision. By seeking out and participating in these collaborative opportunities, LEARN continues to be a visionary leader as the statewide research and education network for Texas,” said Mark Stone, The Texas A&M University System Chief Information Officer and member of the LEARN Executive Committee and LEARN Board of Directors.

“LEARN is excited about the partnership and the project with Facebook to improve digital equity by enabling faster Internet and Wi-Fi equipment at rural libraries in Texas,” said Akbar Kara, LEARN President and CEO. “Facebook’s efforts to utilize their assets to help the local communities is an innovative model for collaboration and shows how educational, government, and private sector partners can work together to provide scalable and sustainable solutions.”

Utilizing a high-capacity fiber route that was built by Facebook in 2018 to connect the Los Lunas, NM, and Fort Worth, TX, data centers, the partnership with LEARN will initially connect libraries in Muleshoe, Morton and Friona. LEARN hopes to connect even more libraries and other community anchor institutions in the near future in these rural and neighboring communities.

“As we continue to focus our infrastructure builds on areas of the country that lack the requisite capacity, Facebook is looking forward to working with LEARN to repeat the success in Texas,” said Boh DuPree, Director, Network Investments at Facebook. “This partnership will allow the libraries to provide faster internet connections to their community members that need it most.”

Driven by Facebook’s development of a cost-effective network breakout solution, 1G and 10G on-ramp can be provided across the fiber route, allowing LEARN to provide significantly higher speeds to each library.

“We recognize that internet connection is vital in today’s world, we look forward to providing our community members access to reliable and fast high-speed connectivity in our library,” said Dana Heflin, from Cochran County Love Memorial Library.

LEARN was awarded a National Science Foundation (NSF Award # 1925553) Grant in October 2019 to accelerate research and education at small Texas colleges (McLennan Community College, Midland College, South Plains College, South Texas College, and Trinity University). In December 2020, the grant was expanded to include a Hispanic-Serving Institution, St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, as it continues to expand its support for research and education projects, especially underserved areas of Texas.

Facebook broke ground on the data center in Fort Worth in July 2015; it opened in 2017. In December 2020, the company announced an expansion of nearly 170,000 square feet. The Texas site is Facebook’s fourth data center in the US, and features many of the designs used in its first custom-built facility in Oregon.