

Opportunity Online Hardware Grants



Public libraries serve as cornerstones of our communities where, regardless of age, economic status, or level of education, people can gain access to a world of opportunities.

Today, technology plays an important role in library services. Computers and the Internet are essential tools for accessing information and learning, and for the 40 million Americans without the Internet at home, libraries are the place to get connected. Public libraries give people equal access to the benefits of technology through free computer workstations, Internet connections, special programs, and training. Without online access at their public library, many people would miss out on chances to find jobs, further their education, learn English, research important health information, access e-government resources, and more.

Keeping Your Community Connected

Nearly every U.S. public library now offers free computer and Internet access, but many are having trouble keeping up with this new part of their mission. Libraries are struggling to maintain technology as computers and Internet connections get faster, more powerful, and more complicated. And they're struggling to meet community demand as more and more people want to use computers and the Internet.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Opportunity Online program is designed to help these libraries add or replace computer workstations so they can better serve their communities. The two-year grants will pay for new computers, training, and associated technical support, and will help libraries learn how to sustain computer upgrades over time.

Benefits to Participating Libraries and Communities

A community in which everyone has access to computers and the Internet is better in countless ways. Its members have more

opportunities to learn, improve their lives, and to join together in efforts to make the places they live better. Public libraries give people this access, but communities must work together to ensure the opportunity remains for all people.

Opportunity Online hardware grants offer more than just funding to upgrade technology services. The program will give local libraries the skills they need to build partnerships, connect with their community, and secure the funding necessary to sustain high-quality technology services for generations to come.

Libraries will be required to participate in a unique professional development opportunity which will teach them how to raise awareness about their library's services and increase support. Their new skills will help them generate required local matching funds for the grant. As participating libraries reach out and encourage local leaders to ensure that every member in their community has access to opportunities online, they will create a network of support for libraries that exists far beyond the life of the grant and ensures long-term benefits for local residents.

Grant Eligibility

The Opportunity Online hardware grants will support libraries serving people in need and those which are struggling to keep pace with changes in technology. Eligible libraries serve communities where 10 percent of the total population or more than 3,000 people in a library service area live in poverty. Libraries must also show that their computer and Internet services are vulnerable to becoming obsolete.

To receive grant funding, libraries must match a portion of the amount given by the foundation through local community or government funds.

States eligible for Opportunity Online hardware grants are:

In 2007: Colorado, Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Wyoming.

In 2008: Alaska, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Washington.

In 2009: Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

Grant Funds and Delivery

Grant funds will be spent by participating libraries on a specific number of public computer workstations. The foundation will determine the amount of funding each library receives based on the number of existing up-to-date public computers available and the number of low-income individuals served by a library.

The grants will be managed by and distributed to participating libraries through a third party intermediary in each state. In many cases, the state library will take this role. Funds will be distributed to participating libraries in two phases over a period of approximately two years. Before receiving grant funds for each phase, eligible libraries must first raise local funding to match a specific portion of the grant funds they will receive (25 percent for phase one and 50 percent for phase two).

For More Information

Everyone can do something to help public libraries continue to give all people access to knowledge and technology. To find out more about how you can help your library, talk to your local librarian, or contact your state library organization.

More information about the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's U.S. Libraries initiative is available at: www.gatesfoundation.org.