

U.S. Libraries Initiative 2007 Opportunity Online Hardware Grants



A primary goal of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's U.S. Libraries initiative is to help public libraries permanently sustain free access to computers and the Internet for people who need it most. We believe helping libraries support high-quality technology services is one of the best ways to ensure that all people—regardless of their economic status, level of education, or where they live—have equal access to opportunity, information, and learning.

Grant Overview

Today, nearly every public library offers free computer and Internet access, but 40 percent are not able to successfully maintain quality technology services for their patrons. Our new Opportunity Online hardware grants are designed to bridge this gap by helping public libraries upgrade hardware and learn how to sustain these upgrades over time. We will focus on libraries that serve communities in need and are struggling to keep pace with changes in technology. The program will also seek to motivate local governments to commit long-term local funding to computer services in public libraries.

The two-year Opportunity Online hardware grants will pay for public computer workstations, and associated training and tech support. The program will require dedicated local funding through a monitored and enforced escalating matching requirement. We anticipate that this will be the foundation's last round of hardware grants to support libraries with vulnerable technology services.

Grant Eligibility

States eligible for Opportunity Online hardware grants are¹:

2007: CO, DE, IA, KS, MD, NV, NY, PA, UT, and WY

2008 and 2009: AK, CT, HI, IL, IN, MA, ME, MN, MO, NC, ND, NE, NH, NJ, OH, OR, RI, SD, VA, VT, WA, and WI

The U.S. Libraries initiative will determine eligibility for each participating library. Libraries from eligible states must meet two criteria to become fully eligible for funding.

- 1. Economic need:** Eligible libraries will serve communities where 10 percent of the total population or more than 3,000 people in each library service area live in poverty. Library service areas are defined as a 10-mile radius from a branch for rural areas, a 3-mile radius from a branch in suburban areas, and a 1-mile radius from a branch in urban areas.
- 2. Hardware need:** Eligible libraries must demonstrate that their computer and Internet services are vulnerable to becoming obsolete. Libraries will run a TechAtlas² computer inventory report to assess their hardware vulnerability.

¹ States that received hardware upgrade grants in 2005 and 2006 through the foundation's Public Access Computer Hardware Upgrade Grants (PACHUG) will not be eligible for the Opportunity Online hardware grants.

² TechAtlas is a computer inventory program that libraries will use, free of charge, to provide an automated analysis of their computer systems to the foundation. The program is operated by WebJunction, which will also provide training and e-mail support to libraries throughout the grant program.

Grantmaking Intermediaries

The foundation will partner with intermediaries, including state library agencies and regional library organizations, which will administer grant funds in each state. Our hope is this will expedite the Opportunity Online hardware grants and minimize impact on individual participating libraries.

Intermediaries will be responsible for grant administration and implementation. They will:

- Develop proposal, budget, and other general documentation to be submitted to the foundation
- Assist participating libraries with TechAtlas inventories throughout the grantmaking process
- Communicate with eligible libraries about grant program requirements, opportunities, and available funding
- Facilitate the individual library application process
- Disseminate tools and templates developed by the foundation to assist libraries in the grant-matching process and additional support as needed
- Verify grant matches from libraries
- Disburse grant funds to libraries that have complied with requirements and/or assist with purchasing of computers
- Report to the foundation on the status of each participating library on an annual basis through the life of the grant

Library Grantee Requirements

Eligible libraries must fulfill the following requirements to receive full funding:

- They must demonstrate a commitment to provide matching dollars over the term of the two-year grant (25 percent in phase one; 50 percent in phase two). The length of each phase will be determined by the intermediary, but will total approximately two calendar years. Matching funds must come from local or state funding sources, not federal LSTA funds; private funds are acceptable (e.g., friends groups, local community foundations). The match will be monitored and enforced through written documentation and verification.

- Libraries must run three TechAtlas computer inventory reports, once during the initial baseline data collection period to determine their eligibility, and twice to follow up after each hardware installation.
- They must participate in the annual ALA-FSU Internet and Public Funding Survey.

Grantees will also be encouraged to attend a unique advocacy training symposium sponsored by the foundation. The symposium is designed to help libraries build skills and confidence in their work to gain increased support and local funding.

The Grant Funds

The amount of each grant to individual library systems will be based on a predetermined “level of service” formula that specifies a certain number of computer workstations per persons living in poverty as defined by the U.S. Libraries initiative. The funds will be provided for the purchase of a specific number of computers and will also include additional funding for printers, peripherals, tech support, and training. Libraries may use funds for laptops if the targeted number of public workstations is achieved. Computer selection, purchasing, and installation will be at the discretion of each library system.

Grants will be distributed to participating libraries via the intermediary, contingent upon match verification in each phase of the grant. Acceptable verification documentation will include: a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) from the appropriate official overseeing the library budget; a council or library board resolution committing funds; or a letter of commitment from a nongovernmental resource such as a community foundation, corporate partner, friends group, or foundation.

For More Information

To find out more about your library’s eligibility, please contact your state library or regional intermediary.

For general information about the U.S. Libraries initiative, please visit our Web site at www.gatesfoundation.org.