Gates Foundation Challenges State Library Agencies to Apply for Federal Broadband Stimulus Dollars

It is virtually impossible to succeed without access to the Internet today. For millions of people, their public library is the place to get connected to the online information and services they need. The economic downturn has only intensified this demand. More than ever, people are getting online at the library to look for jobs, access unemployment services, learn new workforce skills, and find information that can help them through tough times.

Still, up to one-third of all libraries do not offer Internet connections that are fast enough to meet true community need, leaving too many people with nowhere to turn when they need high-quality Internet access.

$4.5 billion in federal stimulus funds provided through the NTIA Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) can help libraries reverse this deficit.

BTOP is an unprecedented opportunity for public libraries to access federal dollars to improve Internet connections for their patrons. Libraries are eligible—and encouraged—to apply for BTOP funding to support the deployment and adoption of broadband to their communities. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), which administers the funds, supports community anchor institutions, such as public libraries, as beneficiaries of this program.

> **To help public libraries access federal broadband stimulus funds, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is offering a one-time-only grant program to help libraries fully leverage the NTIA Broadband Technology Opportunities Program.**

The Challenge:

Forty-three state library agencies[i] and a select group of additional library support organizations have been invited by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to respond to a call for Letters of Interest describing their plans to apply for BTOP funds on behalf of public libraries in any of the remaining NTIA funding rounds.[ii] These proposals will help the foundation identify a compelling pool of qualified organizations eligible to receive support to:

➢ Develop NTIA BTOP proposals with assistance from professional consultants who will provide project management, technical expertise, and application writing support;
➢ Fulfill some or all of the 20 percent funding match NTIA requires BTOP applicants to demonstrate; and
➢ Provide E-rate technical assistance to help public libraries secure more federal funding to sustain ongoing broadband connection costs.
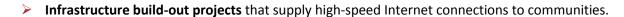
Letters of Interest from invited RFI respondents are due to the foundation no later than 5 p.m. PDT on September 28, 2009.

BILL & MELINDA GATES *foundation*

About BTOP Funding for Public Libraries

Three specific funding categories within BTOP can support public libraries:

➢ The **Public Computer Center** category will fund projects that expand public access "computer centers" in institutions such as public libraries and colleges.

➢ The **Sustainable Broadband Adoption** category will fund innovative projects that promote broadband education, awareness, training access, and support, particularly among vulnerable populations.

➢ **Infrastructure build-out projects** that supply high-speed Internet connections to communities.

➢ To learn more about the Broadband Technologies Opportunity Program, visit: **www.broadbandusa.gov**

➢ The **American Library Association's Office of Information Technology Policy** also provides background on BTOP funding opportunities and guidance for libraries that want to apply for the funds.

➢ To find out more about the Gates Foundation's U.S. Libraries program in general, please visit **www.gatesfoundation.org.**

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i The seven states that participated in the foundation's 2009 Pilot Opportunity Online broadband grant program are not eligible for new funding through this program.
ii NTIA favors BTOP applications from entities that are able to maximize the reach and impact of proposed broadband projects. Therefore, the foundation has chosen to invite proposals from select state- and national-level library organizations that can apply for BTOP funding on behalf of multiple library systems.