

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation: Libraries

While computer use has exploded across the country, there remains a troubling gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not; a gap known as the "**Digital Divide**." Access to information is an age-old problem that has taken on a new urgency with the emergence of the Internet as a fundamental tool for learning. It is critically important that technology is available to everyone, regardless of race, gender, income or age.

Libraries, with their heritage of providing free information, are playing an important role in bridging the Digital Divide. However, many library systems lack the financial resources to provide widespread public access to technology. The combination of these factors led Bill and Melinda Gates to begin their philanthropic efforts with public libraries, to reflect their commitment to address the Digital Divide in a global, systematic way.

The U.S. Library Program makes grants to public libraries for the purpose of purchasing computers and hardware to bring Internet access to their patrons. As part of the grant, libraries also receive free training and technical assistance, and other support, as well as donated software from Microsoft Corporation.

The five-year goal of the Library Program is to provide grants to the more than 11,000 libraries in the United States and Canada serving low-income communities; provide training to librarians; and to ensure information access for future generations.

In addition, Bill and Melinda's commitment to libraries was the motivation behind a November 1998 gift from the William H. Gates Foundation of \$20 million to the Seattle Library Foundation. The "Libraries for All" capital campaign was aimed at expanding and improving neighborhood libraries, as well as expanding and supporting book collections. This gift also reflects Bill and Melinda's support for communities in the Pacific Northwest.

Source: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Libraries/>

