

Access to Learning Award 2008 Fact Sheet

Overview

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Access to Learning Award recognizes and encourages innovative efforts of public libraries to connect people to information through free access to computers and the Internet. The award is given annually to a library, library agency, or similar organization outside the United States to promote the development of new models to increase access to information for people who need it most. A grant of US\$1 million is given to the recipient each year.

Award Eligibility and Selection

Public libraries and similar organizations outside the United States that provide free public access to information through the use of computers and the Internet are invited to apply for the award. The foundation particularly encourages applications from institutions in developing countries or those working with disadvantaged communities. Preference is given to organizations that reach out to socially excluded groups, such as poor and disabled patrons and those from minority communities.

An international advisory committee made up of librarians and information technology experts evaluates applications and selects a list of final candidates for consideration by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The foundation selects the award recipient following an independent financial and organizational review of the finalists.

Previous Award Recipients

2007: Northern Territory Library in Australia created the Libraries and Knowledge Centers program, which has transformed 13 libraries in remote, indigenous communities into vibrant community centers that offer free computers, Internet access, and training to help people build digital archives of their culture.

2006: Rural Education and Development (READ) Nepal works with local villages to build and equip self-supporting libraries—funded through income-generating community projects—that provide free access to computers and the Internet, Nepali books and other reading materials, community meeting spaces, and local news content.

2005: Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha in Bangladesh converts indigenous boats into mobile libraries that provide free computer and Internet stations and training to rural communities throughout a Northern Bangladesh watershed.

2004: Aarhus Public Libraries in Denmark has built a creative library system with a broad array of Internet and information technology services for use by a growing refugee and immigrant community.

2004: Evergreen Rural Library Service Center works with public high schools in remote regions of China to develop and computerize library collections, create computer labs for the community, and offer technology training.

2003: Smart Cape Access Project installed computers and Internet access in several public libraries in primarily disadvantaged areas of Cape Town, South Africa, to give residents free access for the first time.

2002: BiblioRed is a network of 19 public libraries in Bogotá, Colombia, that offers free access to computers and the Internet in some of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

2001: Proyecto Bibliotecas (Probigua) supports libraries and technology centers in rural communities in Guatemala offering computer training labs that teach new skills to underserved populations.

2001: Biblioteca del Congreso is one of the few libraries in Argentina that provides services to the public free of charge, including a mobile library and multimedia computer center that is open 24 hours a day.

2000: Helsinki City Library in Finland was among the first public libraries in the world to offer Internet access to the public, including poor residents and refugees. It established the Information Gas Station, a portable unit providing immediate information by phone, fax, and text messages.

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About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Patty Stonesifer and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

A special initiative of the foundation's Global Development Program, Global Libraries works to open a world of knowledge, information, and communication. The initiative helps public libraries and similar institutions in select countries to provide access to computers and the Internet and to train library users on how to take advantage of these tools. With our national and local partners, we aim to transform public libraries into vital centers that connect hundreds of thousands of people to information technology and to the economic and educational benefits of this access. For more information, please visit www.gatesfoundation.org/GlobalDevelopment/GlobalLibraries.