



IDAHO COMMISSION FOR LIBRARIES

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NEWS RELEASE

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Idaho Commission for Libraries is Awarded \$1.9 Million to Upgrade Public Computing Centers in 55 Public Libraries

BOISE, ID — The Idaho Commission for Libraries announced today that the U.S. Department of Commerce has awarded the Commission a \$1,907,531 grant to fund its public computing center project. The “Online@YourLibrary” project is designed to expand broadband capacity in Idaho’s least connected libraries; upgrade public computing resources in those libraries; and expand online resources statewide. The Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s (NTIA) Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, provides grants to expand broadband access and adoption in communities across the U.S. which will increase jobs, spur investments in technology and infrastructure, and provide long-term economic benefits.

This BTOP grant project will increase connectivity in 55 (40%) of Idaho’s public library buildings, from an average of 1 Mbps to an average of 6.2 Mbps and increase the number of public computing workstations by 43%, from 391 to 561. With this increased capacity and partnerships with other state agencies the project will provide services in education, workforce development, and e-government to over 375,000 Idahoans who meet the BTOP definition of vulnerable populations.

“This project targets the highest need and least served of all of Idaho’s rural communities. Through this project, more Idaho citizens will be able to get online at their public library to look for a job, find workforce resources, and access government information. Expanded broadband access at our libraries will help deliver needed services to the people of Idaho.” said Governor C. L. “Butch” Otter. “This is an unprecedented opportunity for public libraries in Idaho to increase their capacity to deliver critical resources to their patrons,” said State Librarian Ann Joslin. “With this BTOP funding, we will equip libraries with the tools they need to provide computing capacity and services to vulnerable populations in rural communities—especially informal learning resources for children, job skills and adult basic education for unemployed and low income populations, and access to government services.”

In addition to the \$1.9 million grant from the federal government, the Idaho Commission for Libraries,

in partnership with other Idaho agencies and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, will provide \$942,816 in matching funds. The matching funds will be a combination of in-kind and cash contributions including a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The total project budget is \$2,850,347.

"Federal investments in connecting libraries to high-quality Internet service are critical to realizing the universal broadband access our country needs," said Jill Nishi, deputy director of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's U.S. Libraries program. "When libraries provide broadband to communities, they can deliver valuable online opportunities that help people find jobs, further their education, and access important government information. We hope that this BTOP award and the project it supports will help other public and private funders to understand the importance of investing in public technology access at Idaho's public libraries."

"Since 2008, the unemployment rate in Idaho increased over 150%," said Joslin. "The unemployed need General Educational Development Diplomas (GEDs), computer skills, and new training to reenter the workforce. Idaho's economic recovery and growth hinge on improving access to services from the Idaho Department of Labor, Adult Basic Education (ABE), and colleges, as well as other online resources. And new entrepreneurs need access to online business license services available through the state portal. Over 69% of public libraries in Idaho report that they are the only local free public Internet access point in their communities and therefore they play a critical role in the delivery of these resources. With 141 locations in Idaho, public libraries as public computing centers can address these needs."

The grant allows the Idaho Commission for Libraries to partner with the Idaho Department of Labor, Adult Basic Education, Idaho Public Television, the Idaho Regional Optical Network and 55 of Idaho's public libraries currently classified by BTOP as underserved due to low bandwidth. It will expand Internet access and computing capacity; provide broadband education, awareness, training, access, equipment, and support to the libraries; expand the reach of community colleges, workforce development centers, ABE centers, and school tutoring; and expand LiLI online resources for K-12 students and job seekers. An outreach and public awareness campaign will stimulate local demand for broadband, using basic computer training and access to education and e-government services as a gateway.

"The staff of the Idaho Commission for Libraries is committed to assisting libraries to build their capacity to better serve Idaho citizens." said Joslin. "This BTOP project is a crucial step in expanding the scope and reach of services to the areas most in need."

A graphic overview of "What it looks like in practice" can be found at <http://libraries.idaho.gov/files/What%20it%20looks%20like.pdf>.

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About the Idaho Commission for Libraries

The Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICFL) assists libraries to build the capacity to better serve their clientele. To learn more about ICFL, visit <http://libraries.idaho.gov/>.

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, Washington the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett. Learn more at www.gatesfoundation.org or join the conversation at [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).