

## Access to Learning Award Fact Sheet

### Overview

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Access to Learning Award (ATLA) 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 that increase access to information for people who need it most. A grant of \$1 million (U.S.) is given to each year's recipient.

### Award Eligibility and Selection

Public libraries and similar institutions 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 actively reach out to underserved groups, such as patrons who are poor, disabled, or from minority communities.

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

Applications for the 2011 ATLA are now being accepted. Forms and details can be downloaded at [www.gatesfoundation.org/ATLA](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/ATLA) or requested via email at [ATLA@gatesfoundation.org](mailto:ATLA@gatesfoundation.org). Completed applications must be submitted by September 31, 2010.

### Award Recipients

**2010: Veria Central Public Library** in Greece has provided innovative technology and training programs for the benefit of its community, including being the first library in the country to offer users free access to computers and the Internet and the first to equip mobile libraries with books and laptop computers.

**2009: The EPM Foundation** in Colombia created the Network of Public Libraries (NPL) to provide broad community access to information and educational resources through a network of 34 libraries located in some of Medellin's most marginalized communities.

**2008: The Vasconcelos Program** in Mexico's Veracruz state employed a fleet of all-terrain vehicles—each equipped with computers, satellite Internet connections and a team of experienced trainers—to support people in rural, indigenous communities in Mexico's poorest areas.

**2007: Northern Territory Library** in Australia created the Libraries and Knowledge Centers program, which 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** joined 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 converted 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 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** connected 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: The 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** established a network of 19 public libraries in Bogotá, Colombia, to offer free access to computers and the Internet in some of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

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

**2001: Biblioteca del Congreso** was one of the few libraries in Argentina that provides services to the public free of charge, including a mobile library and a 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, 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](http://www.gatesfoundation.org) or join the conversation on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

An initiative of the foundation's Global Development Program, Global Libraries works to open the world of knowledge, information, and opportunity for communities around the world. The initiative forms partnerships with select countries to help public libraries provide access to

computers and the Internet, and to train library users on how to take advantage of these tools. Microsoft is a partner of Global Libraries and donates software to partners who request it. The initiative is working to transform public libraries into vital centers that connect millions of people to information technology, and the economic and educational benefits that access enables. For more information on Global Libraries' work, please visit [www.gatesfoundation.org/libraries](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/libraries).