

Texas State Library and Archives Commission to Participate in Program to Improve Library Internet Connections



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Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will help the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and public libraries across the state improve and sustain high-speed Internet connectivity

Austin, Texas - The Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) has been invited by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to participate in the Opportunity Online broadband grant program designed to improve and sustain free, quality Internet connectivity in the state's public libraries.

Today, millions of Americans use computers and the Internet at public libraries to find jobs, earn long-distance learning degrees, start and grow small businesses, learn English, get e-government information and more. Seventy percent of people who use computers and the Internet at libraries say it is their primary source of access to these technology tools. Unfortunately, 217 Texas public libraries do not currently offer high-speed Internet connections that meet the needs of their communities. Moreover, almost every Texas public library would like to improve their connectivity speeds.

In today's digital world, connectivity speed is important. It is the difference between taking an interactive, online educational course with streaming video or audio and reading a basic Web site for instructive content. Or downloading lengthy government applications in seconds versus struggling with freezing or intermittent connections to access a basic government Web site.

The Opportunity Online broadband grant program is designed to support improved and sustained connectivity so every Texas public library can meet the needs of their communities, specifically high-bandwidth applications like online education, e-government services, and economic development applications. In order to better prepare for the participation in the grant program, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission has convened a sustainability advisory group including state leaders for both public and private sectors to determine how best to improve high-speed Internet sustainability for the state public libraries.

"Connectivity continues to be important to Texans and state government," said Peggy D. Rudd, Texas State Library and Archives Commission director and state librarian. "The Texas State Library and Archives Commission looks forward to adding to that momentum by working with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to improve connectivity in our public libraries. The connectivity needs of our communities continue to grow, and it is essential that Texas' public libraries keep up with the needs of the people they serve."

The Opportunity Online broadband grant program comes at an opportune time as local organizations explore federal broadband stimulus funding and the Texas Department of Agriculture is developing a detailed broadband inventory map to understand where broadband technology is currently available to better position Texas for competitive funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) to build out technology to unserved areas.

“Public libraries have played an important role in closing the digital divide. Unfortunately the speed of connectivity in libraries is often too slow to ensure that people can use computers effectively,” said Jill Nishi, deputy director of U.S. Libraries at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “If libraries are to remain engines of opportunity, local governments, communities, and library supporters must all work together to ensure that public libraries provide free, sustainable, high-speed Internet access.”

The grant program will allow the Texas State Library and Archives Commission to host a summit for library leaders, community partners, and statewide stakeholders to examine the current state of connectivity in Texas libraries and raise awareness about the need for increased connectivity in libraries. The summit will create a foundation for a state broadband sustainability strategy for all public libraries to ensure that all communities can support adequate Internet connections at their public library.

The Texas State Library and Archives Commission will host two summits this fall in San Antonio (October 7-8 and November 18-19). Connected Nation, a national non-profit technology advocacy organization, will produce the summits with the Texas State Library and Archives Commission. The American Library Association’s Office for Information Technology Policy will support TSLAC’s development of a broadband sustainability strategy. For more information about the Texas Opportunity Online Summit, please contact txsummit@opportunityonline.org or 1-866-882-3081.

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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.

Texas State Library and Archives Commission

The mission of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission is to preserve the record of government for public scrutiny, to secure and make accessible historically significant records and other valuable resources, to meet the reading needs of Texans with disabilities, to build and sustain statewide partnerships to improve library programs and services, and to enhance the capacity for achievement of individuals and institutions with whom we work. Since 1909, TSLAC has carried out a commitment to make information work for all Texans by providing archival and genealogical services, federal and state government documents, electronic research databases, and library services. TSLAC is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. For more information, go to www.tsl.state.tx.us or email pio@tsl.state.tx.us.

Connected Nation

Connected Nation is a national nonprofit 501(c)3 organization that expands access to and use of broadband Internet and the related technologies that are enabled when individuals and communities have the opportunity and desire to connect. Connected Nation effectively raises the awareness of the value of broadband and related technologies by developing coalitions of influencers and enablers for improving technology availability and use. Connected Nation works with consumers, community leaders, states, technology providers, and foundations, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to develop and implement technology expansion programs with core competencies centered around a mission to improve digital inclusion for people and places previously underserved or overlooked. Connected Nation is also working with technology leaders to implement Every Citizen OnlineSM, a public-private partnership program to enable computer ownership and broadband use in low-income and unconnected homes. For more information about Connected Nation, visit www.connectednation.org.