

News Release
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Iowa library users to benefit from Gates Foundation grant

The State Library of Iowa has been awarded a \$749,000 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's U.S. Library Program to sustain and expand public access computing in Iowa's public libraries.

The "Staying Connected" grant will augment a \$3.7 million foundation grant to Iowa in 2003 to provide nearly 1,000 computers with Internet access in 382 Iowa public libraries.

The new grant will allow the State Library to provide technical and consulting support to librarians in maintaining the computers, and to train librarians in helping the public increase their computer searching skills. Teaching Iowans how to find and critically evaluate information is a unique skill that librarians bring to today's information-overloaded society. Public libraries are a key part of lifelong learning opportunities for Iowans and grant funds will assist Iowa librarians in their role of helping their communities become information literate.

The State Library will also use grant funds to aid public librarians in developing library web sites for public use. Library web sites connect Iowans with library information and services round the clock, and direct Iowans to accurate and helpful sources of information.

According to State Librarian Mary Wegner, "Technology is changing the way that Iowans live, learn, work and govern. Computers and the Internet bring the whole world of information to all Iowa libraries, regardless of size. By developing web sites, public libraries will be able to deliver services and communicate with customers in new ways."

Eighty percent of Iowa's public libraries now have high-speed Internet access, thanks in part to the foundation's investment. This "Staying Connected" grant will assist the remaining 20 percent of libraries in obtaining high speed connections. Iowa libraries bridge the digital divide by making computers and Internet access available, without charge, to all Iowans.

The grant will also allow eligible public libraries to replace public access computers through matching grants.

"Iowans use library computers to find employment, research health issues, complete school assignments, and stay in touch with distant friends. Adding computers to libraries has led to increased customer visits and has enhanced libraries' standing in their communities," said Wegner. "We are delighted that the Gates Foundation has given us this opportunity to expand public access computing in Iowa."

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