

# Library of Virginia Hosts Summit to Kickoff Statewide Effort to Improve Internet Access in State's Public Libraries



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*Leaders from across the state come together to discuss new strategies to improve and sustain high-speed Internet access for communities through public libraries*

**Hot Springs, VA:** Today, more than 100 library leaders, community partners, broadband providers and local and state leaders gathered for the Virginia Opportunity Online Broadband Summit to take the first steps to improving connectivity in the Virginia public libraries. Assembled by the Library of Virginia, the summit participants examined the benefits of high-speed Internet connectivity in Virginia public libraries and communities and explored new solutions to improve and sustain connectivity.

Virginia has long been committed to improved technology and leads the country in telework and broadband expansion efforts. The commonwealth is fertile ground to improve connectivity to Virginia's library systems that are not able to provide adequate Internet access for patrons. This commitment to technology is why the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation selected Virginia as a pilot state for the Opportunity Online broadband grant program.

Karen Jackson, Deputy Secretary of Technology noted "Virginia's competitiveness in the global economy hinges on our citizens' ability to access and navigate the ever evolving technology landscape. Libraries play an integral role in ensuring that all citizens have equal access to the infrastructure and assistance necessary to experience the wide range of socio-economic opportunities enabled by broadband."

The summit included a comprehensive look at Virginia's current broadband initiative as established by Virginia Governor Tim Kaine to understand the broadband climate. Currently, seventeen Virginia public library systems lack Internet connections fast enough to meet the most basic needs of patrons, and many more report speeds that are inadequate to meet the true demand of their community. Ironically, these public libraries offer a technology lifeline to their communities.

"Virginia communities depend on the libraries for access to the Internet to apply for jobs, stay connected with family and friends and take advantage of government resources," said Sandra G. Treadway, Librarian of Virginia. "Virginia's public libraries must be a partner in Virginia's broadband initiative to connect all Virginians to the Internet."

The Library of Virginia hosted the Virginia Opportunity Online Broadband summit as part of its participation in the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's pilot Opportunity Online broadband grant

program which will help ensure that public libraries in seven states can achieve and sustain broadband Internet connections for patrons. Libraries across the state will benefit from state-wide planning efforts, supported by the program, to sustain broadband connections for patrons in all public libraries.

Building on dialogue and ideas generated at the summit, the Library of Virginia will work with an advisory group including library advocates, municipal representatives and state leaders to develop a plan to increase and sustain broadband connections in all Virginia public libraries.

“The summit highlighted the vital role libraries play in connecting communities to information and knowledge through technology.” said Jill Nishi, deputy director of U.S. Libraries at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “What is needed now, is long-term collaboration among government, business, community and library leaders to ensure that public libraries can continue to provide the high-speed Internet access their patrons need to improve their lives and thrive.”

Graham Richard, award-winning national broadband technology leader and speaker and former Mayor of Fort Wayne, Indiana, served as the keynote at the summit. He offered inspiration to how communities can support library connectivity. Jorman D. Granger, former Deputy Chief of Staff for Governor L. Douglas Wilder, also offered insight into the future of technology in the commonwealth. The Virginia Opportunity Online Broadband Summit included in-depth discussion about possible connectivity solutions and next steps. For more information about the Virginia Opportunity Online Summit, please contact [vasummit@opportunityonline.org](mailto:vasummit@opportunityonline.org) or 1-866-882-3081.

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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).

### **About the Library of Virginia**

The Library of Virginia ([www.lva.virginia.gov](http://www.lva.virginia.gov)), located in historic downtown Richmond, holds the world's most extensive collection of material about the Old Dominion and has been a steward of the commonwealth's documentary and printed heritage since 1823. The story of Virginia and Virginians has been told in many ways since 1607. At the Library of Virginia it is told through more than ---110 million manuscripts and more than 1.8 million books, serials, bound periodicals, microfilm reels, newspapers and state and federal documents, each an individual tile in the vast and colorful mosaic of Virginia’s experience. In addition the Library of Virginia offers professional consultation and support to more than 300 public libraries in Virginia, as well as to library staff in state agencies, schools, colleges, museums, corporations, and private organizations throughout Virginia.

### **About Connected Nation**

Connected Nation is a national non-profit 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 technology

deployment and adoption. Connected Nation works with community stakeholders, states and technology providers 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. For more information about Connected Nation, Inc., visit [www.connectednation.org](http://www.connectednation.org).