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GLOBAL LIBRARIES IN ROMANIA PLANNING GRANT

EDUCATION | INDEPENDENT MEDIA | CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has selected the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) to plan for a program to provide public access computers with Internet access in Romania's public libraries.

At the conclusion of the planning grant, IREX will present the Foundation with a nationwide program implementation plan that includes a set of recommendations for increasing public Internet access throughout Romania, along with alternatives and obstacles.



GLOBAL LIBRARIES

Computers and the Internet connect people to crucial information that can improve health, education, and employment opportunities. Incredibly, the vast majority of the world's population—more than 87 percent, or 5.5 billion people—lack access to these powerful, modern tools.

To address this disparity, the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Libraries** initiative forms partnerships with select developing countries to provide free public access to information technology. Global Libraries is helping to transform public libraries into vital tools that can advance the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

ABOUT IREX

IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing leadership and innovative programs to improve the quality of education, strengthen independent media, and foster pluralistic civil society development.

Founded in 1968, IREX works in more than 50 countries with a staff of over 500 professionals worldwide.

IREX's history with public access computing goes back more than 15 years and has provided services to more than 3 million registered users. IREX currently administers several community technology programs, including the **Internet Access and Training Program (IATP)** in 10 Eurasian countries, the **Global Connections and Exchange** program in Central Asia.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Between fall 2007 and fall 2008, IREX and its partners will implement the following activities as part of the planning process for a national public Internet access program. The information gathered will inform the design of an effective project for improving access to the Internet in Romania through libraries, especially for the most underserved groups.

- Establish **public access computer networks in libraries in five counties**. In cooperation with the central county library in each region, **each network will consist of up to three sites, for a total of 13 sites** located in the county capital and in town and rural libraries. Each library will be paired with an NGO that will help facilitate community engagement.
- Explore a variety of **computer training options** targeted at librarians, government officials, public users and marginalized groups. IREX will work with selected national training organizations to evaluate the training curricula and approaches best suited to Romanian needs.
- Conduct an **assessment** to determine the status and capacity of Romania's public libraries and informational needs of communities. IREX will partner with survey firms and the Association of Librarians and Public Libraries to collect information on citizens' use of the Internet, on existing library facilities and on librarians' training requirements.
- Collaborate with the National Library Commission in establishing a **National Steering Committee** consisting of stakeholders from government, the library system and the private sector to discuss the challenges of providing public access to the Internet through libraries, and formulate national policy directed at supporting this access over the long-term.
- Conduct a **series of regional conferences** to promote the exchange of information between participants and experts on community Internet access, discuss plans and reflect on lessons learned.
- Coordinate with the **ANRCTI Universal Service** telecentre project and **Ministry of Communication Knowledge Economy** project to share experience and best practices with project participants, informing program design to best make use of existing knowledge and resources.