

# BILL & MELINDA GATES *foundation*

PO Box 23350  
Seattle, WA 98102, USA

V 206/709.3100

F 206/709.3180

[www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org)

January 2009

Dear Community Partners:

For the past eight years, we have taken a simple approach to grantmaking through our Pacific Northwest initiative's Community Grants program: we listen, learn, and respond to the local needs of communities in Washington state and in the greater Portland, Oregon area. Communities across the Pacific Northwest are increasingly feeling the impact of the ongoing global economic crisis and now, more than ever before, we need to sharpen our focus and address their most pressing needs.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation makes grants through a variety of initiatives, not solely the PNW Community Grants program. In Washington State – for example – the foundation will continue to focus on a core set of issues and strategies relating to education reform, early learning, libraries, and family homelessness. We remain committed to these strategies and the grantmaking associated with them both in the state of Washington and across the nation. In hard times, our existing activities are more important than ever.

To provide immediate relief to vulnerable children and families – as well as the nonprofits, tribes, and government agencies that serve them – our Community Grants program will be instituting several important changes for 2009. In order to have the largest impact on the lives of people with few resources and great needs, the majority of our 2009 investments will support three core objectives:

- **Increasing access to existing public benefits and supports.** Many low-income families are already eligible for a variety of government assistance, such as food stamps and the earned income tax credit. We will support the efforts of community-based organizations and government agencies to reach out to eligible families and increase utilization rates. We believe this preventative approach will help the largest number of at-risk families in the near term.
- **Supporting evidence-based and promising approaches to preventing and reducing violence in our communities.** Violence can take many different forms and is driven by many factors, some of which may be exacerbated by the economic hard times that create greater stress on families and communities. In addition, financial stress leaves fewer options for individuals seeking to flee violence. Children and families experiencing violence are likely to suffer long-term consequences that affect their ability to learn, to relate in healthy ways to other people, to hold a job, and to participate fully in community life in healthy and productive ways.
- **Strengthening communities and building strong families.** The foundation of a healthy, successful life – regardless of income – is an extended social network comprised of family, friends, and community. These support mechanisms are lifelines that are particularly important during hard times. To better understand our role as part of a collective effort, we will work with partners focused on the continued strengthening of communities throughout the Pacific Northwest.

As a first example of this new focus, our partners tell us that the first signs of family economic stress were seen at food banks around the region. In response to the need, the foundation focused on and devoted substantial new resources to fight hunger. In November 2008, the foundation awarded \$1.4 million in grants to strengthen the food distribution system across Washington and in the greater Portland area. We anticipate this is the full amount of funding the foundation will make into the region's food distribution system through 2009.

Community Partners  
January 2009  
Page Two

In addition to the three priority areas outlined above, we will also temporarily hold on initiating any new capital grants in 2009. Although capital grants have historically comprised more than half of our Community Grants awards, we believe during these turbulent economic times there are more immediate ways that our resources can impact vulnerable people in the Pacific Northwest.

Community Grants' new approach builds upon our long-held commitment to Pacific Northwest communities. Our hope is that despite our limited resources and narrower focus, we will develop greater insight into the role the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation can play in stabilizing and strengthening key nonprofit, public, and tribal partners.

We will continue to review relevant, unsolicited Letters of Inquiry as described on our Web site. We rely upon the innovative ideas and approaches of our grantees and community partners to keep us informed about our region's most pressing problems. Applicants with the greatest probability of partnering with us will propose activities closely aligned with our 2009 priorities outlined above.

We are also interested in hearing about solutions that actively leverage public resources and policy to impact the greatest number of people. To provide additional guidance for current and prospective grantees, the foundation will post additional information in the coming days regarding our focus areas on our Web site – located at [www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org).

At the Gates Foundation, we recognize that everyone is feeling the impact of the global financial downturn, and we know how important it is that we continue the good work already underway here in the Pacific Northwest and worldwide. We continue to be inspired by the work of grantees here in the Pacific Northwest and throughout the world that are dedicated to giving people the opportunities they need to live healthy, successful lives. We are optimistic that – even with the near-term challenges we face today – working together with our partners and grantees, we can provide at-risk families and communities with the support they need to thrive.

Regards,



David Bley  
Director, Pacific Northwest  
U.S. Programs