

[Markle  
Foundation  
Home Page](#)

[DIGOPP  
Working Group](#)

[Online  
Resources](#)

[Events](#)

[About  
Markle's  
Global Digital  
Opportunity  
Project](#)

[Comments or  
Questions](#)

[Archive](#)

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[Programs](#)

[About](#)

[Grants and Project  
Information](#)

[News and Reference](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Contact Us](#)

search ▶

## Press Releases

July 22, 2000

*opportuNity initiative*

### SEIZING THE DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY

#### A GLOBAL STRATEGY TO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

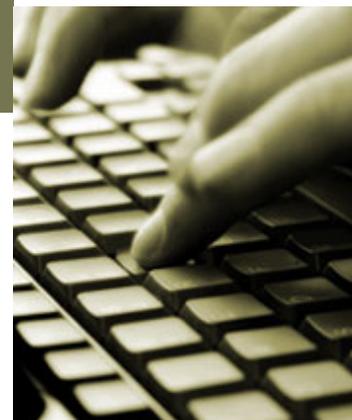
The challenge of bridging the global digital divide should not be underestimated. With the accelerating pace of innovation in information and communications technologies (ICT) a clear danger exists that developing nations will not have the opportunity to participate fully in the network revolution. Indeed, despite the significant number of initiatives currently underway, the digital divide is widening, not closing. One of the principal reasons for this is that the role that ICT can best play in supporting broader economic and social development has not been fully addressed.

Initiatives to close the digital divide will only become self-sustaining when they tie in with this wider development agenda, and so generate real popular market demand, increases in wealth and quality of life, and as a consequence become a high political priority for developing nations. In order to succeed, the G-8 Digital Opportunities Task Force (DOT) will need to gain and demonstrate a firm understanding of how ICT can be used to address these issues. It will need to use that understanding to mobilise the international community around practical approaches and realistic targets for closing the digital divide.

The *opportuNity initiative*, launched at the G-8 Summit in Okinawa, Japan today, sets out to lay the foundation for such an approach and should be seen as a critical supporting mechanism for the creation and the success of the G-8 DOT whose mandate is to promote the goal of achieving digital access and education for all before this decade is out.

A Global Strategy to Bridge the Digital Divide It is proposed that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works together with Andersen Consulting and in cooperation with the Markle Foundation and all categories of development partners and others to build a global strategy for bridging the digital divide within ten years, and will seek to mobilise the global community to execute that strategy. This work will include detailed research through a broad consultation process on links between ICT and broader development issues, using that knowledge to set an overall 10 year strategy, proposal of the strategy to the G-8 Digital Opportunities Task Force (DOT), and mobilising the global community to execute the strategy. The programme of work involves 3 main components:

- Setting an overall strategy, including an overall strategic approach, broad timetable, set of targets and implementation plan for bridging the global digital divide within ten years. The plan will identify how communities can use ICT to assist in achieving broader development goals and through those initiatives build the digital content and ICT infrastructure that will bridge the global digital divide. It will recommend appropriate roles and contributions from private and public organisations, NGOs, and broader civil society, and will include recommendations for ongoing implementation.
- Initiation and scaling up of a series of exemplar initiatives for bridging the digital divide. These will ensure that the project



[President's Letter](#)

[Speeches and Essays](#)

[Press Clippings](#)

[Press Releases](#)

[Research and Reports](#)

[Resources and Links](#)

accelerates activity on the ground and will test the overall strategic concepts. The *opportunitY initiative* will identify, develop and gain commitment to at least six major, immediate and concrete initiatives across the world. It will also endorse pre-existing initiatives where they fit with the overall strategy developed.

- A stakeholder campaign to win hearts and minds in support of the real developmental benefits of ICT investment. Experience around the world has proven that popular demand is an absolute necessity for the success of ICT investments, and that such demand can spark dramatic and self-sustaining growth. The first step towards this is to win the battle of ideas amongst governments, business and the international development community. The campaign will also be implicit in the open, enthusiastic and consensus building approach that will characterise the *opportunitY initiative*.

Under the leadership of the UNDP together with Andersen Consulting and in cooperation with the Markle Foundation the project team will work with public, private, academic, international and not for profit organizations on a global basis. In particular it will seek to draw on the expertise of the World Bank, ITU and other multilateral and international agencies, the DOT, and with organizations such as the GBDe, the GIIC, and the World Economic Forum (WEF). In order to build consensus and mobilize support, the *opportunitY initiative* will be launched in September 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York, with an interim presentation made at the WEF annual meeting in Davos in January 2001.

Preparing and launching the overall strategic plan and mobilizing exemplar initiatives will be accomplished over the course of the next year, with an update back to the DOT in time for the 2001 G-8 meeting. Where possible exemplar initiatives will be framed and mobilised early so that their first results can be used to inform the strategy by the year's end.

In order to formulate the strategy, the project will have to examine issues such as:

- the extent to which use of ICT in local enterprise, health, and education, may be able to contribute to broader development objectives, as well as the business and technical viability of using ICT to support these objectives in a variety of different environments.
- how to make appropriate and co-ordinated use of applications developed to support these objectives to reinforce economic growth, stimulate self sustaining growth in ICT infrastructure and gain support for the establishment of a positive regulatory environment.
- the appropriate mix of telecommunications competition, Internet and e-policy, e-government, human capacity initiatives, and the enabling entrepreneurial environment that will attract investment but also reap the full economic, social and cultural benefits of the network revolution.
- the expansion of basic connectivity to people everywhere with a coordinated and cooperative approach, including new public-private partnerships, toward the diffusion of low cost devices and applications customized to developing nation needs, and with the goal of scalable and catalytic solutions for an early and significant increase in local, backbone and international connectivity.
- Realistic targets for making progress, and how to initiate and scale major global initiatives which would help to enable excluded communities to seize the digital opportunity.

The UNDP together with Andersen Consulting and in cooperation with the Markle Foundation will provide appropriate staffing and support from within their global organizations, and by agreement will

co-opt project team members from other organizations. Andersen Consulting will provide a full time ten-strong project team, with other senior involvement up to and including the firm's CEO and International Chairman. The combined UNDP, Andersen Consulting, Markle Foundation and other partner contributions are expected to total an initial commitment of at least \$5 million.

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