

# Congress approves \$100,000 for pilot digital project

Digital Promise non-profit will develop electronic education programmes

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The US Congress has approved \$100,000 funding for Digital Promise, a non profit group, which wants to create a \$20 billion trust for the development of non-commercial electronic education programmes, such as internet-based teacher training, public safety initiatives related to homeland security, and the digitilisation of library, museum, and university archives and collections.

The Digital Opportunity Investment Trust Act now before Congress calls for funding this new trust with proceeds from the sale of federal licenses to the publicly owned frequencies that transmit radio, television, telephone, and other digital signals.

The \$100,000 allocated by Congress will enable Digital Promise to develop a prototype of the sort of project the proposed trust would support.

“We’re going to create a piece of technology unlike anything you’ve had,” says project director Anne Murphy. For the prototype, the plan is to use elements from the video game industry and military communications to develop an interactive internet site to train first responders in an emergency. Digital Promise will present a demonstration to Congress in May 2005.

Two former heads of the Public Broadcasting Service, Lawrence K Grossman who led NBC News and Newton N Minow who chaired the Federal Communications Commission, first proposed Digital Promise in 2000. The Century Fund, Carnegie Endowment and other foundations helped them assemble a steering committee that includes filmmaker George Lucas, MIT president Charles M Vest and former Whitney Museum director Maxwell Anderson, among others. They brought the idea to Congress in 2002 and received \$750,000 to further develop the proposal. The bill to implement the plan was introduced in the Senate last autumn, and may be taken up by the Senate Commerce Committee this coming session.



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