

SeniorNet comments

RE: Docket number 090309298-9299-01

Broadband Technology Opportunities Program

I. Introduction to SeniorNet

SeniorNet, a 20 year-old 501(c)3 organization, is comprised of a nationwide network of “brick and mortar” learning centers, strategic partnerships with senior centers, related organizations and businesses, and extensive outreach through our web presence and e-communication systems. It has a unique expertise in making information clear, understandable, and easily accessible to senior citizens. It also has a built-in structure for demonstration projects in our learning centers throughout the United States.

SeniorNet is an acknowledged leader in issues related to people aged 60+ and how they use technology. It has a large team of instructors skilled in teaching computer skills to senior citizens, a network of 130 learning centers throughout the country, a robust website, and an e-community of more than 20,000 people.

We have the knowledge and understanding of the senior citizen and Boomer communities and the capability to develop national-scope resources. As an added opportunity, many members of SeniorNet’s community also are underserved. SeniorNet has made an extensive effort to reach out to underserved communities and spends a significant amount of time supporting our learning centers in these communities.

II. SeniorNet’s recommendations for BTOP

A. Use broad definitions for eligibility. Encourage innovation and creativity by using broad definitions to further the goal of bringing broadband technology to as many Americans as possible. Do not be constrained by traditional business models that are defined by geography or political division. Instead, encourage strategic and forward-thinking institutions that have the ability to cross geographic, socioeconomic and ethnic divisions. This is the perfect time to “think out of the box.”

B. Include senior citizens as part of the community targeted for sustainable adoption of broadband service and in the definition of “public computer center.”

1. Add senior centers (including AoA funded centers, private centers in retirement communities, assisted living, etc.) to the cadre of libraries and community colleges. Again, we encourage a broad definition of “public computer center.”

2. Encourage intergenerational programming/learning. We strongly endorse the administration’s goal of education and training for children, and we also encourage education and training for senior citizens. The two are not mutually exclusive. Rather, there are many opportunities for the two generations to learn with and from each other with technology being the bridge.

3. Encourage programs that use the sustainable adoption of broadband as a tool to mitigate related challenges such as healthcare. As an example, seniors need to be able to use Medicare.gov online, obtain healthcare

information, and maintain electronic personal health records, etc., therefore, they need to have Internet access and know how to use it. Part of creating sustainability in the adoption of broadband is showing people why they need to use it, and how to do so. We need to make the technology relevant, useful, and easy to access.

C. Include senior citizens as part of the community targeted for job creation and training. Equipment, education, and training are necessary for the adoption of technology, and seniors are no different than the rest of the population in needing the skills to compete in today's workforce.

D. Include equipment as an eligible expense. Providing broadband access to communities that cannot afford computers and other technology falls a step short of the end goal creating sustainable adoption.

III. Conclusion

SeniorNet's goal is to bring education and technology to senior citizens wherever they are. We urge BTOP to be as flexible as possible in encouraging innovation and upgrading capacity in the broadband arena.