

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Tincan

Project Title: Spokane Broadband Technology Alliance: Sustainable Adoption

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

The City of Spokane has lagged behind Washington State as a whole in terms of access to resources and prosperity. The city's per capita income is \$18,451, in comparison to the state's \$28,290. Of Spokane's residents, 15.5% live below the federal poverty level compared to 11.8% in the state as a whole. The situation in Spokane's 5 identified low-income neighborhoods is more severe. For the East Central, West Central, downtown, Northeast, and Peaceful Valley neighborhoods, percentage of individuals below the federal poverty level are 27.7, 23.6, 24.6, 24.1 and 32.6 respectively. In these neighborhoods, one third of the households have no working vehicle, one-fourth of individuals over 25 have not completed high school, and 10% have less than a ninth grade education. Computer and Internet use is also low. The 2009 Pew broadband report notes home broadband usage at 63%; the lowest income users stood at only 35%. This is confirmed by surveys of the 600 at-risk teens/year who participate in Tincan's programs. More than 80% say their only Internet access is limited to school. Yet broadband service is widely available in these neighborhoods. The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission reports that 5-8 broadband providers are available. According to a recent Pew report, when people do not subscribe to broadband where it is readily available, the primary reasons are that they perceive broadband to be too difficult to use, not relevant to their lives, and in the context of these factors, too expensive.

Our overall strategy to increase sustainable broadband adoption among vulnerable populations is to meet these concerns directly. Because the Internet is increasingly a forum for self-expression, civic participation and social interaction we offer training that goes beyond Internet searching to activities such as video publishing, social media, and even video game development. These activities engage new audiences and show them that broadband can contribute substantively to their lives. Small businesses, critical to the economic vitality of these low-income neighborhoods, will have the opportunity to learn how to sell on the Internet and use social media to promote their business. Community organizations will have the opportunity to learn how to better inform citizens of their goals and resources. A series of easy to use portals plus intensive training taught at a level that our constituents can comprehend is combined with ongoing support at diverse community locations to make using broadband appear doable. Finally, information about the availability of refurbished and low cost computers, low cost broadband solutions and a discounted broadband subscription program addresses the issue of affordability.

This project addresses the BTOP goals of 1) providing improved access to broadband service to consumers residing in underserved areas of the country 2) providing broadband access, education, awareness, training, equipment, and support to community anchor institutions or organizations and agencies serving vulnerable populations and 3) stimulating the demand for broadband. To achieve these goals we have formed an alliance of community partners to create a city-wide project, the Spokane Broadband Technology Alliance, that links collaborating organizations to create an innovative web of access and training designed to serve all of the low income neighborhoods of Spokane. We estimate that there are 8175 potential broadband subscriber households in these neighborhoods, plus additional numbers in surrounding areas of the city. By the end of this project, we will not only see increased usage of public access computers, but a growing number of people by project's end, who have their own broadband connection and an ongoing system of training and support that will continue to bring in new users in future years. Our related PCC proposal focuses more intensively on the technology we will provide, and supports this Sustainable Broadband proposal by providing sites for training.

The SBTA project stands on a strong foundation of existing partnerships. We did not come together solely for this proposal – we have been working together for over 15 years. Given that strong base, we could start many project activities immediately, offering some training using our laptop lab. Tincan has a long track record of effective management of projects of similar size, scope, and focus. We have had three TOP grants as well as U.S. Department of Education and National Science Foundation technology grants. We know how to manage them to not only ensure that the programs are implemented, but also ensure that they will grow. The community centers that joined this project began in 1994 as Tincan's first public access sites, now grown to robust public computer centers. Our second TOP grant focused on business development and led to not only an ongoing program to help small businesses get online, but to our very successful drop out prevention program based on an innovative e-commerce curriculum. The final TOP grant was to start a "virtual teen center" with activities to engage at-risk youth. This project has grown to serving over 600 teens a year, leveraging millions of dollars in public and private funds. We know how to create a strong framework for implementation and how to promote sustainability.

We estimate that we will train 12150 people over the three years of the project, and that about 1550 will become new broadband subscribers.

Using the OMB rubric of 1 job year created/\$92,000 of federal expenditure, the minimum number of jobs created will be 11. We anticipate that number to be higher because of small business training. We estimate jobs saved to be 150 due to increased skills of workers. The overall cost of the project is \$1,1,709,942, including \$980,591 in requested BTOP funds and \$728,351 (43%) match, for a cost of \$140/trainee over the course of the project.