

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: South Carolina State Library

Project Title: Smart State SC Project

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Executive Summary: South Carolina is a small state facing large problems in the areas of workforce development, health, and education. 40% of South Carolina is classified as rural. In many of these rural areas, free access to the internet and online databases is only available at the local public library. Access from home in many cases is not available or is not affordable.

The backbone of South Carolina's small town economies, textiles and tobacco, is long gone leaving many South Carolinians in need of new skills. South Carolina's overall unemployment rate is the fourth highest in the country at 12.1%. Eighteen of forty-six counties have unemployment rates of 15% or greater.

SC ranks 48th in the 2008 edition of America's Health Rankings. The State is 5th in the nation for overweight and obesity. Higher premature death rates among the African American and rural populations reflect significant health disparities. Every county in the State includes federally-designated Medically Underserved Areas (MUAs) and 30 of the 48 counties are so designated in entirety. Equally alarming, only 14 of 48 counties have some area that is not designated as a Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA).

Student performance in South Carolina is lower than average. The State's 4th and 8th graders stand four percentage points below the national average for the proficient level on NAEP reading exam. South Carolina also posts low marks in academic achievement of low-income and minority students, with only 13% of low-income 8th graders scoring at or above the proficient level on the NAEP reading exam, compared with the national average of 15%. Finally, and most disturbingly, only 66% of South Carolinians graduate from high school within 4 years.

The focus of "Smart State SC" is twofold. First, using the public libraries as anchor institutions in five of South Carolina's poorest rural counties, "Smart State SC" will provide training for unemployed and underemployed residents to prepare them for the increasingly online work environment. Recognizing

that less than 40% of retail firms now accept paper applications, the project seeks to improve skills in basic computer use, job searching, email use, and applying for jobs online. Essentially, "Smart State SC" provides the basic tools necessary to survive in the information age. Maximizing the power of broadband access and using online resources provided by the South Carolina State Library, vocational testing, career development, and skills assessment will be offered to help citizens return to work or choose work/educational directions. Other offerings include financial and health literacy training. Citizens in the five target counties will find and use health information via the "Hands on Health" website developed by the library of the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) to specifically meet the health information needs of South Carolinians. Without hands-on programs like these, the benefits of broadband access are purely theoretical. After establishing the training centers in public libraries, the program can be replicated in public computing centers in local churches, senior centers, etc.

Secondly, "Smart State SC" brings the expertise of academic institutions together in support of adult job seekers. South Carolina's traditional education pipeline is not meeting the needs of the State's economy in job creation and worker preparation. A new, improved adult education plan, which has the strong support of business and political leaders as well as the education community, can overcome the barriers (especially lack of self-confidence), that keep adults from seeking more education. A new "Knowledge Network" will tie literacy, adult education, workforce training, and college preparation into a coherent whole, offering students an integrated transcript that provides a virtual "You Are Here" map of not only where they've been but where they could go. "Smart State SC" will utilize the proficiencies of the South Carolina State University to begin the construction of these new integrated tools.

The lead applicant for "Smart State SC" is the South Carolina State Library with more than 40 years experience with statewide programs, grant administration and project management. The Medical University of South Carolina's Library won a National Commission on Libraries and Information "Blue Ribbon Award" for health awareness and education for the "Hands on Health" website. MUSC's organizational ethic mandates community outreach. South Carolina State University is a Historically Black College and University institution of the first rank. Located in Orangeburg, South Carolina, SCSU is intimately familiar with the target populations and possesses the academic resources to plan the first steps of the Knowledge Network. Finally, the public libraries in the target counties are all prepared to participate, with broadband speed connections in place, and are directed by professional MLS credentialed librarians.

The total population of the target counties (Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Hampton, and Orangeburg) is 164,315. Average median family income in the area is less than \$32,000, nearly 35% less than the national average. The population is predominantly African American; 20% of the 25-34 age group does not have a high school diploma.

Once developed, the project can be replicated in the remaining 41 South Carolina counties. The “Smart State SC” project budget of \$713,354 is a solid investment in South Carolina’s future. Although there will be a minimal number of jobs initially created (5), the real payoff is preparing a very rural, underserved population for employment in the knowledge economy which is South Carolina’s future.