

## **Broadband USA Applications Database**

**Applicant Name:** Passaic Public Library

**Project Title:** Passaic Public Library's Technology Reboot Initiative

**Project Type:** Public Computer Center

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### **Executive Summary**

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The Passaic Public Library's (PPL) Technology Reboot Initiative Grant Proposal will allow PPL to improve and enhance broadband access for the 69,000 residents of the City of Passaic, NJ, and its surrounding communities. As a community anchor institution, PPL is the primary source of broadband access for the nearly 700 patrons who come through its doors daily. Many are economically disadvantaged and culturally marginalized. Our community suffers from a high unemployment rate and low household income. Over 65% of our population speaks English as a second language, with over 60% of Hispanic origin.

The enhanced broadband access made possible by BTOP funds will greatly enhance PPL's efforts towards its patrons' basic computer skills, career development and training, learning English, job searching, healthcare, and educational needs. As these needs are met, the local economy will be stimulated and lives will be improved, a winning combination for our larger American society.

PPL has served its community by actively helping new immigrants integrate into American society, not survive beside it as a marginalized sub-population. We have aided the unemployed find jobs, and those seeking to have their careers explore new opportunities, so as to stimulate and improve the individual's, and community's, economy. We serve our senior citizens to ensure they are not forgotten. Nearly 70% of the residents in our community do not have computers, therefore, we provide public access computers free of charge.

As proud as we are of our service, we recognize that our technology and public programs were implemented in a haphazardly organic, piecemeal fashion, which has led to great frustration. We do not have enough public access computers to satisfy the high demand. Our network infrastructure cannot adequately handle our existing computer traffic, resulting in patrons frequently being kicked off their computing session and losing anything they were working on. With limited classroom sizes, computers, and funds, many members of our community have been forced to wait on waiting lists for months before attending our classes.

PPL was hampered in its attempts to address the patron dissatisfaction because of lack of funding, stable, long-term leadership, and technological expertise. Two of these problems have been addressed. The Board of Trustees has been reconstituted, with renewed vigor, stronger ties to the community and a commitment to the pulse of the residents. In PPL's new Director, Mario M. González, we have an experienced library administrator with over 30 years of experience implementing large-scale programs and administrating large library systems. In his short tenure here, Mr. González has forged stronger relationships with community partners. He has made strategic hires and empowered PPL staff to be comfortable with the installation and utilization of computer technology.

In order to regain our community's confidence, and attract further funds from private donors, PPL needs to retool its technology and implement a wide-ranging, bottom-up strategic vision that will meet and exceed our community's expectations. We are ready to address the root causes of patron dissatisfaction with our technology, and the obstacles preventing us from scaling up our program reach. The only piece missing is the funding.

The results of our reboot will be dramatic. BTOP represents the ability to make necessary sweeping changes in one, concerted push, with a unified vision and planned organizational commitment. Our multi-pronged approach includes:

- 1) Stabilization of technology infrastructure. PPL's main branch building requires both electrical and computer network rewiring, including new hardware (routers, switches, and hubs). PPL's phone system is inadequate. We will also upgrade our wi-fi service.
- 2) Public Access computing expansion. PPL currently provides 31 computers for public access. We are looking to double that number. We will purchase furniture for our computers, as current furniture is inadequate and non-ergonomic. We will also provide color laser printers and scanners for the general public, to better support school projects, career correspondence, resumes, cover letters and business presentations.
- 3) Peripherals for Special Needs. To better reach populations with special needs, PPL will provide: screen readers and headphones for the visually impaired; TTY (Telephone Typewriter); magnifying reading device; ESOL software; resume-writing software; dedicated workstations with software and keyboards in Spanish, Gujarati, and Russian alphabets.
- 4) Retrofitting/Refurbishing of PPL's Technology Training Center (TTC). PPL has had classroom space with 8 workstations available for instructional purposes. To increase class sizes, PPL wishes to add at least 7 computers, and rename the space the TTC. The TTC needs to be refurbished and retrofitted.

5) Expansion of Existing Public Program Offerings. We will greatly expand them by increasing class size, recruiting certified instructors, and providing free textbooks and workbooks.

6) Enhanced information on topics relevant to our public. The most important topics identified by our community include: healthcare, career development, citizenship, housing, parenting, and education. PPL will guide the public towards the highest-quality information on these topics by:

Providing access to at least 10 premium databases with the most up-to-date and reliable information;

Creating pathfinders on these topics. Pathfinders are collections of web resources;

Upgrading/redesigning PPL's website to accommodate Web 2.0 technologies, and house new databases and pathfinders.

Total project cost is \$416,520. PPL is requesting \$320,500 from BTOP, providing \$96,020 from our operating budget, contributions, and other sources.