

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: City of Boston

Project Title: City of Boston Public Computing Centers (BPCC)

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

a. Statement of Problem With Regard to Improving Broadband Service Adoption Rates: High functioning public computing centers (PCCs) are an essential element of Boston's overall plan to effectively address digital inclusion for the City's most vulnerable families. (See Boston's other 2 BTOPS grants for other digital inclusion components.) For the most vulnerable residents and all of Boston's population, the demand for public computing and training has far exceeded the City's ability to meet the need. 3 citywide PCCs operate 66 centers serving a City of 600,000. Most are in need of equipment upgrades and expanded training. Boston's project will enable more computers, better software and substantially upgraded training and programming. An expanded base of residents will become comfortable with and then adopt and utilize broadband to improve their lives.

b. Overall Approach/How Grant Will Increase Broadband Adoption: The City's 3 partners who operate the 66 centers are established community anchor organizations which provide multiple services to constituents including public computing. PCCs are embedded in multi-service organizations providing ideal institutional setting for reaching a large audience of potential broadband adopters. These partners are: The Boston Public Library (BPL) and its 25 neighborhood branches; Boston Centers for Youth and Families (BCYF), Boston's largest youth and human service agency serving over 90,000 residents annually in 46 facilities including 29 PCCs; and the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) operating 62 public housing sites, serving 11,500 households, with 11 computer labs. With more and better computers and training, broadband education will become a more robust program offering. The needs and the grant-enabled solutions to increase broadband adoption: In 2008, BPL had twice as many applicants as available seats in the computer basics program, offered at only one of the 25 branch libraries due to funding constraints. Classes are fully enrolled up to 5 months in advance. With grant funding, waiting lists will be eliminated or much smaller. Training will occur weekly at all 25 branches and daily at the Library Headquarters. BCYF currently has 29 computer labs in its 46 facilities. More than half have outdated equipment and BCYF's 10 trainers themselves need additional training. With grant funding, 16 labs will have new hardware and software and much improved training ability. BHA currently has 11 computer lab sites with only 41 functioning computers, operating in 11 sites serving 6,273 households. 4 labs lack functioning equipment. The other 7 are operating but with very old hardware and software and most have less than 10 computers. With BTOPs funding, all 11 centers will be open with 10 computers each, almost triple the current number. While this is still a small number of computers to service all these

households, it is a huge improvement and is a sustainable level of growth for BHA. Boston's proposal has united these 3 city organizations in joint planning to maximize use of all computing centers by publishing each others' programs and hours of operation to reach the largest possible number of residents. This coordination will result in 66 expanded computing centers operating at many hours of the days, nights and weekends, with many more public computing/program hours.

c. Areas served/population/demographics/estimated number of potential users in newly upgraded centers: Boston's 66 PCCs serve the entire city, with the substantial majority in the lowest income, majority minority neighborhoods, which is the proposed funded service area (PFSA) for Boston's Infrastructure grant. A very small % of the 117,506 households in the PFSA have adopted broadband at home making PCCs their only broadband access. Household incomes in this area are very low. The median household income in the PFSA is only \$34,626. This area includes residents in 11,000 units of public housing where the median income is \$9,606. All households in the PFSA are at or below Boston's median of \$46,362 which is already lower than MA and US medians of \$61,785 and \$50,007. In a high cost city such as Boston, these very low medians are indicative of true household financial distress and vulnerability where internet access and understanding can have significant positive impact to improve the life circumstances of the most vulnerable residents. For further evidence of the financial distress of residents in the PFSA see Q8 b in Infrastructure Grant. Sharon Gillett, who will soon become the Chief of the FCC's Wireline Bureau, told the Boston Globe in 2007 that Boston's Broadband Task Force on which she served found that 80% of Boston public school children had no broadband in their homes because: "It's not an access issue, it's an affordability issue." If Boston's Infrastructure grant is successful, the proposed network will solve the affordability issue, Boston's PCC grant will provide a location for residents to get basic training. This will extend into homes as residents take advantage of the home computers and innovative adoption training that through Boston's Sustainable Broadband Adoption grant. With all three grants funded, Boston will have the necessary components to close the digital divide. The current # of public computing center users is 11,045. This is expected to increase to 15,555 , a 40% increase, in the newly funded centers during the 2 year grant period with the clear growth potential as residents become familiar with this expanded and refurbished resource and the associated training and programming. (See answer to Q 17 for detail.)

d.e.f. Qualifications of Applicants/Jobs to be saved or Created/Overall Cost of Project: Please see answer to (a) above, Qs 24 and 27 for qualifications . Total project cost is \$2,180,105m, offset by the City cash match of \$436,021 in BTOP grant request for \$1,744,084.