

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Springfield-Greene County Library District

Project Title: Edge Community Technology Center Expansion

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

1.) The Edge Community Technology Center at the Midtown Carnegie Library, initially funded by the Department of Vocational and Adult Education and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, opened in April, 2002. The service plan provided a wide range of learning opportunities for those living in the most economically depressed area in the city, giving them “the edge” in the age of technology. The goals were to provide easy access to technology, and training leading to an understanding of the magnitude of electronic resources available and the development of skills necessary to use a variety of applications. Some believed that the numbers using the Edge would diminish over time as the general population became computer literate. That has not happened; the demand continues to grow.

The evidence demonstrating the need for the Edge Community Technology Center Expansion includes:

a.) Enrollment trends at the Center - the lab will accommodate 12 in instructor led sessions; training has been provided for more than 21,000 individuals and there has recently been a noticeable increase in attendance. Last year 405 sessions were offered with a total attendance of 2,887. In the first six months of this year 2,169 have attended 227 sessions, and the monthly attendance records have been surpassed with June being the highest at 398.

b.) The impact of the economic downturn and increased unemployment rate - unemployment numbers continue to grow and the Missouri Career Center is operating at capacity. Their staff refers customers to the Library because they know that they will receive free, high quality training delivered by caring and friendly staff.

c.) Small businesses needing support - there are 3,056 small businesses within the Midtown area; 2,330 have fewer than ten employees; 1,815 have fewer than five employees. 1,168 have an annual sales volume of less than \$500,000; 710 of those have no available PC or only one PC. Of those 1,168 businesses, 382 spend less than \$500 per year on technology. Many are probably unaware of the Library and community resources available to them (Reference USA, a service of referenceGROUP, Business and Consumer Research)

d.) Information gained through cooperative projects – the Library works with a number of agencies serving various target audiences; one example is the ATLS Coalition that provides tax preparation assistance. The agencies involved serve different populations, and regulations restrict extending service to groups outside those parameters (VITA and Tax Counseling for the Elderly). The Edge will accommodate only one agency serving one demographic. During the season, those seeking tax preparation assistance line up on the sidewalk waiting for the doors to open.

2.) This project will address the needs in a variety of ways. It will provide two additional lab areas; a small one at 566 sq. ft., and another at 885 sq. ft. with 24 additional public computers. Two staff will be added for a total of 64 more staff hours per week. Hours open will be increased from 25 to 52 per week. It will then be possible to schedule three hands-on instructor led programs or a combination of instructor-led classes with simultaneous individual tutorial sessions. Or, during tax season the Southwest Missouri Office on Aging can offer Tax Counseling for the Elderly in one wing and the Missouri State University School of Accountancy students can provide VITA in the other.

3.) The Edge Community Technology Center is available to all residents of Greene County. The primary service area of the Midtown Carnegie Library is defined within a two mile radius. According to Business Decision, a database produced by ESRI, the 2007 population was 47,026 with 18,793 households. Of those, 11,101 were renter occupied households, and 7,692 were owner occupied. 27.6% of the households had incomes under \$15,000; 20.6% had incomes between \$15,000 and \$24,999; or, a total of 48.2% lived on incomes under \$24,999. 33.4% were between the ages of 20 and 34; 23.2% were 35 to 54. 86% are white; 6.2% were black; and 3.8% were Hispanic. The total attendance for public training sessions last year was 2,887; according to the current trend, the number will grow this year. Staff estimates that the total attendance will double after the expansion, reaching 5,700.

4.) The Springfield-Greene County Library District has designed and implemented many successful grant projects. Many of them are supported with Library Services and Technology Act funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and administered by the Missouri State Library. The most recent major project is the development of a digital imaging collection of 2,500 pages of Civil War materials called Community and Conflict: the Impact of the Civil War in the Ozarks at <http://www.ozarkscivilwar.org/>. During the planning phase, staff wrote The Planning and Development Manual for Digitization Projects, which is being used by the Missouri State Library as a model for the development of similar cooperative digital projects.

Of Course, the Edge is the most relevant example for this proposal. It has been sustained for five years beyond the initial grant period and has served thousands of people during that time. Its success is the reason this extension is needed to meet the increasing demand. Support staff are accustomed to doing whatever it takes to implement major projects successfully. The Library also has a strong track record of involvement with agencies from all sectors of the community to plan and implement successful initiatives. The key partners in this project are indicative of the wide net cast to reach out to target audiences by working cooperatively to meet common goals.

5.) 1.5 jobs will be created; 17 will be saved.

6.) Overall Cost \$280,000 for two year