

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: City of Arlington - Library

Project Title: Public Computer Center - Project Connect: Building Capacity

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Project Connect: Building Capacity will serve Arlington, Texas, a city of 356,764 spread over 98.7 square miles located within the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area. It is the largest city in the country without public transportation. Lack of public transportation, coupled with social and/or cultural barriers that also serve to isolate residents, results in substantial areas of the city where broadband services are underutilized. Low service usage may be attributed to economic factors, as well as to insufficient technical or literacy skills, or to lack of understanding of the services offered and their value. As a result, a substantial percentage of residents do not have access to information and resources required to obtain and maintain meaningful employment, participate fully in activities designed to further their educational goals, obtain information to improve or maintain their health, or to fully participate as a citizen of their municipality, state and country.

Arlington is home to several particularly vulnerable population groups, including a growing Hispanic population and substantial African American and Asian minority groups. According to a recent United Way of Tarrant County report, 30% of Arlington residents do not speak English at home (compared to 10% nationally) and 15.1% say that they speak English less than very well. In the area of the city primarily served by this project approximately 55% have only a high school education or less. This data suggests that navigating the barriers of language and literacy is imperative in order to educate residents about use of broadband services.

At present, public computing options are insufficient to meet demand in Arlington. The seven public library locations throughout the city are currently the only source of free public computer access in the city. On a weekly basis, 6,717 public computer sessions are logged in library computer centers. The library measures computer "occupancy rates" and data collected demonstrates that when a user walks into any of our library locations, at least 78% of the time, they will have to wait in order to access a computer. Sometimes the wait can be well over an hour and as a result, it is likely that some users go unserved. Overall public computing capacity will be increased by 73.1% as a result of this project and an additional 3,217 sessions on a weekly basis can be accommodated as a result of the improvement.

Project Connect: Building Capacity will increase broadband accessibility in four ways: 1) Adding a new computer lab at the City's Hugh Smith Recreation Center located in an area of high need in East Arlington; 2) Adding desktop computers to the Central Library, East Arlington Branch Family Learning Lab and the Lake Arlington Branch; 3) Adding laptops to locations where additional space is not available for additional desktop installations; 4) Expanding network infrastructure to add internet access to 53 Children's Learning Center workstations in all seven library locations and to allow for increased public wireless service at the Central Library and two branch libraries. Library Information Technology staff, collectively with over 75 years of experience, will manage the project and deploy the systems, in concert with City of Arlington Information Technology department staff. Both organizations work together to maintain the reliability, security and usability of the network for library users.

Project Connect: Building Capacity, will team with the Sustainable Broadband Adoption initiative named Project Connect: Building Awareness. The latter project will provide a mobile computer lab and a smaller mobile outreach van to push broadband access out into the community by visiting apartment complexes, assisted living centers, schools and special events throughout the city. These efforts will assist in building awareness and comfort with broadband services. As the demand for services continues to increase, the stationary public computing centers will be used more and more heavily and the increase in capacity will assist in accommodating that demand. Both Project Connect initiatives will utilize the CyberCoach volunteer program. Within the first two years of the grant period, this program will teach skills related to technology and training to approximately 144 youth (ages 14-21) and seniors (age 55+) that will assist them in securing future employment. Project Connect will also offer services, through a partnership with the Greater Arlington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to over 281 businesses owned by women and minorities in Arlington.

The Arlington Public Library has a strong history of implementing both technology projects, as well as projects that involve and engage the community. The library is the largest in the area to have completely implemented RFID technology for inventory and self-service purposes. In addition, the Arlington Reads literacy initiative has grown to serve over 100 learners and to utilize 2,853 hours of volunteer support between October 1, 2008 and July 31, 2009. In order to accomplish this, the Library acknowledges strong partnerships with the Americorps/VISTA service program, area school districts, health care providers and non-profit organizations. These partnerships will be utilized fully in the implementation of Project Connect.

The overall cost of this capacity building project is \$215,000, or \$0.64 per use (computer session) added during just the first two years of the grant period. The largest percentage of the funding for the project is directed toward computer and network hardware and software to achieve the most cost-effective increase in capacity. Existing staff will manage and implement the project; where needed contractual services are sought in order to facilitate the timely development of training curriculum.