

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: City of Arlington - Library

Project Title: Sustainable Broadband Adoption - Project Connect: Building Awareness

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

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, as well as a large (and growing) population of senior citizens. Recent data from United Way of Tarrant County (UWTC) supports the notion that navigating the barriers of language and literacy are imperative in order to educate residents about use of broadband services. Public computing centers in the 7 public library locations in the city offer options for residents without an in-home broadband connection; however utilizing these systems assumes first, an ability to get to the center during hours of operation; second, a certain level of technical ability, and third, knowledge of the benefits that broadband offers. As suggested above, a substantial number in our population, especially of Hispanic users, low-income users and seniors may not possess those skills and abilities.

Project Connect proposes a multi-faceted approach to solving this problem. First, Project Connect: Building Awareness will provide a mobile computer lab and a smaller mobile outreach van that will offer training/education and serve as a demonstration site for broadband access in the community by visiting apartment complexes, assisted living centers, schools and special events. Project Connect will also offer services, through a partnership with the Greater HispArlington Chamber of Commerce to over 281 businesses owned by women and minorities in Arlington through use of the mobile lab services at worksite locations. These efforts will assist in building awareness and comfort with broadband services.

Second, Project Connect will implement the CyberCoach volunteer program which will teach skills related to technology and training to youth (ages 14-21) and seniors (age 55+) to not only assist in implementing and sustaining Project Connect, but provide trainees with valuable workforce skills. And finally, a public awareness campaign will be launched to make residents aware of the benefits of broadband connection. Both the mobile lab services and the CyberCoach program will contribute to this public awareness campaign.

Project Connect: Building Awareness, will team with the Public Computing Center Broadband Adoption initiative named Project Connect: Building Capacity. 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. Project Connect: Building Capacity will add a new computer lab in a recreation center in an area of high need in East Arlington, as well as increasing the capacity of the current computer labs by 73.1%.

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 nonprofit organizations. These partnerships will be utilized fully in the implementation of Project Connect.

The project contains innovative elements that set it apart from traditional broadband outreach campaigns. First, the standard approach to increasing public computer access might be to create small computer labs in various locations throughout the city and expect residents to visit these centers to obtain access if they are unable or unwilling to connect from their homes. This conventional approach often cannot produce the desired result because of the cost for equipping and staffing a stationary computer lab within walking distance of every resident in a city of 350,000+. In addition, many residents who remain unconnected do so because they lack the technical skills or knowledge of the benefits to make effective use of these centers. The mobile approach offers innovative solutions to both issues.

The overall cost of this public awareness and outreach campaign is \$631,200, including \$79,200 in in-kind training instructor hours. The largest percentage of the funding for the project is directed toward the mobile computer services (which also function as part of the marketing campaign) and the computer and network hardware and software. Existing staff will manage and implement the project, as well as

providing in-kind training instructor hours. A 200% increase in staffing from the Library's literacy program VISTA/AmeriCorps project also assists with staffing this project. Where needed, contractual services are sought in order to facilitate the timely development of training curriculum.