

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Cook County Government

Project Title: Get Connected

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

a. Statement of the Problem and Project Need

Cook County has a wide socio-economic disparity within our neighborhoods. The existing Digital Divide and supporting Digital Inclusion philosophies support our desire to create a ubiquitous and scalable platform that can enable our communities to implement and deploy Community Technology initiatives leveraging the capacity that can be supplied via the County Technology Infrastructure. This capacity supplemented by donated and recycled personal computers, as well as additional computers and equipment with this project, will enable our disadvantaged residents' and children access to education and skill building opportunities as well as affordable access to the internet. This access will allow continued expansion of government services through the Cook County Web Portal initiative and continue to fulfill the county's goal of erasing the chasm between the digital have's and have not's.

A major objective of this program is to enhance broadband services for the education of underserved children in Suburban Cook County. The County will also partner with existing Council of Governments' (COG's) such as the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association to increase community focus of the BTOP grant. An additional objective is to provide adult computer training for job enrichment skills and provide convenient access to on line job services. Given the current economic environment, the demand for job search and job enrichment training is increasing rapidly. As such, the County is collaborating with the President's Office of Employment Training (P.O.E.T.) and with the Cook County Workforce Investment Board (CCWIB) who supports the economic health of the communities and resident's of suburban Cook County by providing a skilled workforce through training, skill attainment and job placement, which, as a result will improve the quality of the region's workforce.

b. Overall Approach – the Solution

One of the more innovative concepts of the County's Plan, entitled "Get Connected," is to establish a series of 10 additional neighborhood based Public Computer Centers (PCC) in conjunction with P.O.E.T.,

community organizations and churches. P.O.E.T. will continue to provide the training and job enrichment services at the PCCs. P.O.E.T offers a wide array of programs and has an extensive Partner Network as attached in Supplemental Information 1. The County will further expand this technology education based curriculum via our partnership with Faith Based Community outreach programs centered around the existing council of community churches and the “Increase the Peace” organizational campaign headed by Reverend Tyrone Crider who leads the organization within Cook County.

P.O.E.T. requires highly qualified technical instructors with innovative curriculum in compliance with the Workforce Investment Act grant requirements.

c. General Description of Proposed Funded Service Areas

According to the Census data, there are approximately 190,000 low and very low households in Suburban Cook County. With no access to after school programs, the literacy rate of these children continues to decline. The County will partner with P.O.E.T. and the other organizations noted above to provide computerized literacy training programs through the use of 600 computers at 15 PCCs. The project goal is to enhance the education and provide training of at least 3,000 children and adults per year over the next two – three years or a total population of 9,000.

As the unemployment rates remain high, the demand for adult training and the opportunity to provide job enrichment skills is also increasing. The County will also be collaborating with various community and non-profit organizations to conduct additional computer and technical training classes at the community facilities.

d. County Qualifications

P.O.E.T. has extensive training and job service credentials and will play an integral role in the PCC Project. P.O.E.T. Programs include occupational skills training, skills upgrade and re-training, on-the-job training, customized training and incumbent worker training. Additional Trainers will be added to provide additional technical and desk top training classes.

e. Estimated Job Creation

Each one of the new PCCs will require a Project Coordinator, Lead Instructor and Intern creating 30 new jobs, during the initial roll out. As the Project expands additional positions will be required.

A major project goal is to leverage this training so that as many residents who participate as possible are successful in seeking employment or better positioned for advancement and children receive the required training to remain competitive in school and advance their education.

f. Overall PCC Cost

The projected cost for "Get Connected" is \$ 10 Million. Major cost components include computer hardware and software, network installation costs and PCC training personnel.