

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: District of Columbia Government

Project Title: Underserved Neighborhood Based Public Computing Centers

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Based on the District's analysis of the broadband penetration data submitted by carriers to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on Form 477, the District has a citywide broadband adoption rate of 57.87 percent. This statistic masks the near-100 percent adoption rates in the more affluent parts of the District, as well as adoption rates below 40 percent in large lower income areas. For Internet access, these lower-income residents rely heavily on the strained resources available at publicly funded libraries, recreation centers or other community-based facilities.

Digital literacy and broadband adoption can improve educational attainment and provide a helping hand out of poverty. In the District, entrenched poverty and education attainment are substantial problems, though they are not always apparent in a region with above average educational attainment and income. For example, the District of Columbia suffers from one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the country. According to The State of Adult Literacy report published by the D.C. State Education Agency in March 2007, 37 percent of the District's total adult population reads at the lowest levels of functional literacy. Although adults at this level are represented in all city wards, functionally illiterate adults are most likely to live in Wards 5, 7, and 8, with percentages close to 50 percent east of the Anacostia River. In 2002, the State Education Agency estimated that more than 130,000 adult residents (22 percent of the population) lacked a high school diploma or a General Equivalency Diploma (Washington Literacy Council Annual Report, 2007).

The District's unemployment rate, driven in part by residents' poverty and poor educational attainment, is abnormally high in certain communities. In May 2009, citywide unemployment was 10.7 percent, but as with other indicators, there was a wide disparity in unemployment across communities. In May 2008, before the recent economic downturn, the citywide unemployment figure was 6.6 percent, but in Wards 7 and 8 it was 11.2 and 17.2, respectively, as compared with 1.7 percent in Ward 3, the city's most affluent ward

For a cost of \$1.6 million in federal funds and \$3.6 million in applicant contribution, the District will promote digital literacy and broadband adoption to address educational attainment and improve job skills to combat poverty. The District's Public Computing Centers (PCC) project will provide residents

public-access computers and computer training, as well as broadband Internet access, by improving the quality and capacity of existing computer programs at public libraries and recreation centers, as well as new programs at senior and community cultural centers. Though focused primarily within the areas of lowest income and lowest broadband adoption (the “proposed funded service area” designated in the District’s Infrastructure project application), these facilities will also be placed in other locations where seniors, recent immigrants, and other vulnerable populations come for help.

This project will provide either new or improved capabilities at over 400 workstations at nearly 70 locations that are predominantly in underserved regions with vulnerable populations, making a significant impact on digital literacy and broadband Internet access. This project in conjunction with the District’s Sustainable Broadband Adoption projects will provide extensive training (over 16 hours worth of available instruction in subjects ranging from Internet basics, HTML training, using e-mail, and finding health information to the full suite of Microsoft productivity software (Microsoft Office).

The District’s Public Computing Center project will be focused in locations that currently administer such programs or have a population which is currently underserved in terms of broadband access. These government institutions currently have the ability to quickly and efficiently provide the physical sites for broadband access, computer equipment and staff to provide training for residents. Outreach to the targeted residents is also a part of these agencies’ existing missions and measurement of the impact and effectiveness of programs is a function currently performed by these community anchor institutions (libraries, recreation and community centers).

The computing centers supported by this project will service or be available to nearly all of the District’s nearly 600,000 residents. Because the city’s most needy residents rely most heavily on public computing centers for their access to broadband services and computer equipment, the project focuses particularly in the most economically distressed wards, which are also those with the lowest broadband adoption rates (Wards 7 and 8). This project will provide service to almost 40,000 residents on weekdays, and over 10,000 on weekends. Job creation of an estimated 5,000-10,000 residents is expected and direct employment of over 100 contractors and District FTE is also expected as a result of the PCC application.