

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Morgan County Learning Center

Project Title: Morgan County Education and Broadband Access Program

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Research conducted by ConnectOhio shows that while 71% of the residents of Morgan County, Ohio have a computer, only 57% have internet access, and only 25% have broadband, compared to the state average of 55%. Of residents who have a computer, 48% said they don't need broadband or don't understand the benefit of the service.

As a part of rural Appalachia, Morgan County is one of those small communities being left behind the digital divide. Without the access and use of broadband service, the economy in this area will continue to deteriorate and the unemployment rate will continue to rise. The use of broadband connections will begin to put this rural area on equal footing with the more urban areas, allowing access to the same resources currently available in the more populated areas.

Expanding broadband access in rural areas can help build infrastructure for Internet access and lead to better jobs and stronger economies. Ohio Governor Ted Strickland and Congressman Zack Space, OH-18, both agree that the future of Ohio's economy depends on the ability to compete in the modern, high-tech economy.

With Broadband service being deployed in more areas of the county, there are more people than ever who can realize the benefits of a high speed internet connection. Since this hasn't been an option for many people, many people never bothered to experiment with the Internet or learn enough about their own computer to use the service. For many of our residents who grew up before the proliferation of computers, those little boxes seem scary, and people are convinced they could never learn to use one on their own. The Basic Computer Classes the Morgan County Learning Center will offer to residents will allow them to become familiar with the computer, giving them confidence to run them and a reason to utilize the opportunities of the Internet with a broadband connection, thereby increasing the broadband adoption rate.

The Morgan County Learning Center proposes to address this need by offering basic computer classes in a comfortable, educational environment with friendly and personable instructors. Five classes would be offered in a series, though one could take any number or sequence of classes as their schedule permits.

The Morgan County Learning Center will work in conjunction with Washington State Community College's Workforce Development to initially offer the following five courses: Purchasing a PC, Introduction to Computers, Introduction to the Internet, Introduction to Email, and Internet and Security. These classes will each be offered at least three times per year.

These courses will give Morgan County residents the instruction and the confidence to become computer users. This will lead to the adoption of broadband service as well as to the improved economic development of this rural, Appalachian region.

The Learning Center already serves many adult students through Adult Basic and Literacy classes and college courses offered by the Morgan County Higher Education Consortium. In addition to providing a facility for instruction, the Learning Center also serves as admissions counselor for students interested in enrolling in post-secondary education. The Center connects career goals to educational programs, provides assistance filling out the FAFSA, and helps students to apply and even register for their college classes.

The Learning Center would like to be self-sustaining in its operation. With funding decreasing for higher education in Ohio and in the country, it is in the best interest of the Learning Center to begin to position itself as a standalone entity.

The Morgan County Basic Computer program will target the residents of Morgan County. The County has an overall population of 14,898, with 74.7% of the population, or 11,129 residents, age 18 years old and older. Residents of other counties may enroll in classes, but marketing efforts will be focused on Morgan County. If the same students take all 5 courses, we could reach 42 students per year for this instruction. It is anticipated, however that students will not necessarily take the entire series of classes, enrolling in only what they need. There could therefore be the potential of serving a maximum of 200 students per year. While this represents the number of students for this series of classes, the increased operating hours of the center will provide more access to the equipment and broadband connection available to the public at the Center. This could potentially impact nearly 500 students.

The Morgan County Learning Center, with the support of Washington State Community College, has successfully held computer application classes targeted to employees of local businesses. Courses with enough enrollment to be held included Microsoft Word Basic and Intermediate, Microsoft Excel Basic and Intermediate, Microsoft Access Basic and Intermediate, Quickbooks and Introduction to Computers. Because we have had experience in running a similar program, the time to implement our courses will be much shorter than other facilities just getting started. We will make a swift impact on our community.

This proposal will create one part-time job directly, but there will also be other opportunities created. Because the Basic Computer classes will run through Washington State Community College Workforce Development, local instructors will be hired to teach these courses. With the expected growth as a result of this funding, it is likely that there will be a full-time employee employed by the Morgan County Learning Center in 5 years.

The cost of the overall project totals \$130,936.15. Most of this cost comes from equipment and software requested in order to ensure a functioning computer lab for the public. Only \$36,154 of the budget would be recurring costs that will easily be sustained beyond the funding cycle.