

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: ePath Communicationsof Florida, LLC

Project Title: Pathways Computer Center Project (PCCP)

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

According to a "May 2008 Economic Benchmark Study", by LAT Consulting, The South Central Florida Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern is comprised of six counties, three cities, and one community. The counties are Desoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, and Okeechobee. The cities are located in Palm Beach County and are Belle Glades, Pahokee and South Bay. The community of Immokalee is located in Collier County. In 1999, the region was designated by Governor Bush as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) because of its long-term economic distress, low per capita income, disproportionate labor force distribution, a persistent poverty level, low wages and poor educational attainment. The region has a population of 273,335, which represents potential users that reside in 95,832 households. The service area has 10,866 business units.

On average, only half of the individuals age 25 and older have an education beyond high school diploma. This educational attainment level trails the state by 30%. The graduation rates for the region are lower than the Florida average, which calls attention to the critical need for intervention to demonstrate the value of postsecondary education.

Tampa was selected due to its poverty level for an urban market. Its poverty level is 30.4% above the state average and 17.4% of the residents are at or below the poverty level. In addition, according to a May 2009 article in the Tampa Tribune, Tampa's unemployment rate is higher than the state average for large markets. Current unemployment is 10.6%. Approximately 140,000 residents in the greater Tampa Bay area are unemployed.

ePath's PCCP mission is to provide free access to public computer centers with broadband access for the purpose of postsecondary education, awareness, and training. ePath Communications of Florida, LLC, a public-private partnership with the USF and New Horizons Computer Learning Centers of Gulf Coast Florida (New Horizons) formed to implement the PCCP, will set up the PCC to consist of 8 public computer center locations. The PCCP includes 7 public computer centers that will be located in the following rural towns: Arcadia, Sebring, Wauchula, Immokalee, Belle Glades, Clewiston, and Okeechobee. The eighth center will be located in Tampa, Florida in a facility that will also house

equipment for delivering via broadband educational and training content for the targeted populations served by all 8 public computer center locations. ePath has acquired that building for use for these purposes. However, the cost of that building acquisition is not part of the project budget.

The PCCP uses broadband technologies to train residents, unemployed and displaced workers, and individuals with no computer knowledge to bridge the digital divide. College credit courses and certified career training will be available on fee-based scheduled to retrain displaced and unemployed workers and to provide more options for residents and businesses to improve their lifestyle, education, healthcare, productivity, and employment opportunities. The project will create approximately 30 direct jobs as staff additions to ePath assigned to the PCC project. In addition, providing skilled training and higher educational opportunities will improve the communities' labor force qualifications, which will have an indirect effect on creating additional jobs as local employees access their employment needs as well as attracting new companies to locate in the region.

The PCCP, which is also planned to include Cisco Systems, Inc., the Florida Workforce Investment Agency (WIA), the Florida State Department of Education, and municipal and county libraries, is designed to foster the creation of a digital community in the areas served by the 8 centers. The PCCP will be sustained through a combination of public and private sources, which ePath expects will include the WIA for employment-related training and commercial businesses for job-specific training and on-demand seminars.

The 8 centers will serve as virtual classrooms and to provide information and training curricula through seminars, webinars, and other events.

Other residents in the areas served by the 8 centers will have access to broadband digital technologies to engage in online degree and non-degree programs offered through the PCCP's partnership with the USF. Employment-related training at the sites would be available during normal business hours through a partnership with New Horizons, a Florida-based company that has developed numerous training modules that are used in conjunction with Florida's WIA training support programs. All degree and non-degree programs and any training modality offered by USF and New Horizons will be based on each individual institution's fee schedule.

A critical building block of the PCCP is a state-of-the art Cisco interactive video communication system, which offers a number of other educational enhancements, particularly with respect to higher education. This system, which will be located in the Tampa center, will allow access to broadband

services as well as fee-based training and educational courses and programs offered by USF, New Horizons and other training and educational programs to be extended to the 8 public computer center locations using interactive video communications.