

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Spelman College

Project Title: West End Broadband Public Computer and Mobile Extension Center

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Technology continues to have a profound effect upon our nation's pursuit of sustained economic growth. While access to technology for these purposes has improved in recent years, significant numbers of Americans remain seriously underserved.

The West End community in Atlanta, Georgia is a "vulnerable" population that has experienced the economic "rollercoaster" common to many major inner city communities in America. Approximately 50% have either some high school or no high school education. Studies have shown that high school non-completion increases criminal activity and adds to the costs of operating prisons and supporting welfare programs. Additionally, it leads to lower lifetime earnings, which lowers tax revenues and reduces economic growth.

Convenient access to technology capable of identifying either potential employment opportunities or training resources is limited to a single public library in this community. Access is further weakened by a limited number of computers in this facility, a one hour access time per visit, and limited evening and weekend access hours. Programs to assist the community in the use of this technology, job skill regarding training options are not available.

The establishment of a Public Computer Center (PCC) in the West End community would provide access to broadband technology for its residents, thereby addressing the goals of the BTOP by:

Providing training that would assist West End residents with the requisite technology skills for local employment, or the pursuit of higher education

Providing training for small businesses in the West End to enhance their technical efficiencies, productivity, and awareness of the business use of technology, thereby stimulating profitability and ultimately, job growth.

Additionally, a mobile extension of this computing center will bring access to other underserved communities in the metro Atlanta area and rural counties. The Mobile Extension Center Platform is a fifteen passenger van that will be converted into a Mobile unit with a Tachyon Networks Satellite positioned on the roof of the vehicle. This system will be built to provide Mobile Internet Service. The van will be equipped with wireless technology as well as twenty PC computers. The concept behind the wireless technology van is to have an outside class-room as well as wireless access in an enclosed building that does not provide Internet Service.

As a resident and member of the West End community, Spelman College is in a unique position to address many of the urgent issues facing this community. Community outreach and empowerment is one of Spelman's key goals in its five-year Strategic Plan "Strengthening the Core: The Spelman College Plan for 2015:

"...create and implement a community engagement and development program model for students, faculty, staff, and alumnae and neighborhood residents through collaborative

partnerships. The program model will focus on a broad range of community interests, including education, health, economic development, and environmental sustainability."

Utilizing its key assets (the department of Media and Information Technology, distinguished faculty, and a historic legacy of developing and mentoring people of color) Spelman would be uniquely capable of affecting change in this community by establishing and managing a technology center and associated outreach that would:

Provide the technology to nurture, and remediate the skills of underserved residents via education and training essential to acquiring employment

Providing the technology to nurture, reinforce, and remediate the skills of underserved residents needing to obtain a GED and enhance their chances of attend college

Offer training in computer fundamentals, email, efficient use of the Internet

Provide beginning, intermediate and advance classes in word processing, desktop publishing, digital/video camera instruction, web page design and the basics of social-networking sites

Access training for “soft” skills, i.e. resume preparation, interviewing skills, etc

Our outreach partnership program for the Mobile Extension Center will be the START (Services to Achieve, Reach and Teach Youth) program. The program will provide the youth summer camps and after-school programs that will be offered in the West End PCC.

The Media and Information Technology Division (MITD) will handle the implementation of the West End Public Computer and Mobile Extension Center. The program design, ongoing management and technical support will be handled by MITD. This division is staffed by highly qualified and motivated individuals that are currently responsible for maintaining and supporting Spelman College’s information technology infrastructure.

The usage of a Mobile Extension Center will provide our potential students the opportunity to experience Spelman College from a distance. They will be assisted with completing the application for entry into the College; completing financial aid paperwork; assistance with housing, scheduling of classes; experience of contact with potential professors and administrative staff.

Initially, the proposed project will create seven (7) new jobs in the West End community. Over time, additional individuals will be identified and trained to develop the skills necessary to perform peer training, to manage the center, and to provide basic technical support to West End area small businesses. Operational costs will be minimized and sustained after project completion (three years) by the ongoing use of Spelman students to supplement staffing, by offering fee-based summer youth computer camps (income adjusted), and by providing low cost technical support to local West End small businesses.

The overall cost to accomplish the above initiative would be matched according to the requirements of the NTIA Grant guidelines and would include in-kind donations of staffing, technical services, hardware, an