

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Coshocton Public Library

Project Title: Ohio Community Technology Centers Program: Coshocton Public Library

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Coshocton Public Library is situated in the city of Coshocton, which is the county seat of Coshocton County, Ohio. The area is part of the economically depressed Appalachian Region, primarily rural, with unemployment rates as high as 14.8%. The Library and its single branch are the only public libraries in the county serving a population of 36,000. In recent years, Ohio's economy has been spiraling downward, and Coshocton County is among the most impacted areas in the state. The Coshocton Public Library has not gone without budget cuts, either. Currently, the Library is operating on 31% less income, having experienced a 20% cut in FY2009 and a further cut of 11% in FY2010. Facing such high unemployment rates and the closure of several major manufacturing plants, Coshocton's citizens are turning to the Library more than ever for access to WIFI, Internet connectivity, and even computer classes to make themselves more marketable as employees. Yet, while 55% of Ohio residents have home broadband service, only 32 % of Coshocton County residents can access high speed Internet in their homes, and the number of residents in the County without home computers is even greater. This proposed scalable project can begin to effectively address the broadband and computer access problems that area residents are facing. This grant is crucial to the library's ability to effectively address the broadband and computer accessibility problems of Coshocton County.

Coshocton Public Library's proposal is deployable in three phases. Each phase will address a different problem area. Phase one will increase wireless capabilities within the Library and the branch library. Wireless usage has grown considerably as the County's residents have become aware of the high speed WIFI that is available at no cost. The proposal will expand WIFI capability throughout all three floors of the Library and the branch. Phase 2 of the project will allow the Library to circulate eight wireless computers in-house for patrons 18 years and older. This will ease the waiting patrons experience when trying to get on a library computer. Currently, the wait can be an hour or more during peak usage. Phase three of the proposal will introduce computer technology and broadband to patrons with little or no computer experience. Twelve laptops will be used in a computer lab setting with an instructor leading classes on Windows Office applications such as Word and Excel, as well as Gmail and the basics of Internet use.

Of the 36,000 residents in Coshocton County, 21,000 are card holders at the Library. That figure includes all children who receive library cards from the Bookmobile when they are in first grade. Of these school children, over half in the City of Coshocton receive free lunches due to low income. Coshocton Public Library is within walking distance of all city schools and the Library has become a destination for many of these children who come for no other reason than to access the Internet for social networking, email and school work. During the times that school-age patrons are in the Library, the wait for a computer can be lengthy, often causing potential users to become frustrated and leave. Serving the 21,000 residents who live beyond city limits has become more crucial as high-speed Internet service is not available in the majority of homes that have computers. Beyond the high-speed issue is the fact that 43% of people do not understand broadband, while 68% do not even own a computer.

Coshocton Public Library has taken huge strides in Internet and WIFI capabilities since hiring a Technology Coordinator (Tech). Professionally trained, the Tech has been responsible for expanding the number of computers available in good working order, meeting the demands of the public, establishing the Library as a place to go for Internet. For that reason, the Library finds it cannot keep up with public demand. In the first seven months of 2008, 2,016 log-ins resulted in 1,484 hours of Internet use. That increased to 2,555 log-ins in the first seven months of 2009. The branch library shows a similar increase in usage. Likewise, WIFI usage jumped from 596 log-ins in the first seven months of 2008 to 1,449 during the first seven months of 2009. The increases can be directly attributed to the ability of the Library's Technology Coordinator to maintain the Library's equipment in excellent working order.

At this point, with the economy of Coshocton County and the State of Ohio suffering huge unemployment figures and budget cuts to services throughout the State, Coshocton Public Library's goal is to assist Coshocton County's economic recovery. It is now critical that there be a place for people to come for assistance in seeking employment opportunities via Internet. There has been a noticeable increase in people coming to the Library to file for Unemployment or financial assistance with utilities. It isn't uncommon to hear someone requesting assistance to complete an online job application, the only means of applying for the particular job. Making all things equal for Coshocton County citizens by providing Internet service to each and everyone, regardless of economic factors, is one of the best ways the Library has to meet their mission of free and equal access for everyone.

The cost of this proposal is \$38,514, with \$30,838.53 coming from the BTOP grant and matching funds of \$7,709.63 coming from the Library.