

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Vermont Department of Libraries

Project Title: eVermont: Public Computing Centers

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

“e-Vermont: Public Computing Centers” is a project of the Vermont Department of Libraries (VDOL) in partnership with Vermont State Colleges (VSC). The VSC include Castleton State College, Johnson State College, Lyndon State College, Vermont Technical College and 12 sites of the Community College of Vermont (CCV). Grant funds will be used to: (1) expand the public computing capacity in 4 of the state's busiest public libraries; (2) provide Mobile Laptop Labs for sharing among 61 small rural libraries in 4 targeted counties; (3) provide a wide range of training classes for the general public at locations throughout the state; and (5) train college student Tech Interns to provide one-on-one assistance to people using Public Computing Centers (PCC). These programs will help to address a serious shortage in public computing opportunities for Vermont citizens and provide badly needed computer training for the general public, with special emphasis on training for seniors, the unemployed and underemployed, English language learners, and low-income adults. Our goal is for Vermont citizens to learn new computer skills and have access to free computing centers with online services so that they can use their newly acquired skills to improve their lives: to find satisfying jobs, to become better educated, to participate in e-government, for immigrants to improve language skills and assimilate into a new culture, to establish new avenues of communication and social networking, and to become full members of the computer literate population. In addition, every public computing workstation in every Vermont public library will be equipped with ZoomText software (adaptive technology) making it possible for disabled and visually impaired citizens to use these public computers.

BTOP funds will be used to purchase computer hardware, software, and peripherals for deployment in 4 “key” public libraries that serve large segments of the Vermont population: Burlington (service pop. 38,531), Brattleboro (service pop. 11,590), Rutland (service pop. 23,079, with the state’s highest unemployment rate), and Lyndon (service pop. 10,276.) Also, 4 Mobile Computer Labs (each with 8 laptop computers) will be purchased for use at 61 small public libraries in 4 rural counties. The Mobile Labs will be housed and maintained at one central library in each county: Bristol (Addison Co. /11 libraries / pop. 30,950); St. Albans (Franklin Co. / 12 libraries / pop. 46,642); Greensboro (Orleans Co. / 14 libraries / pop. 25,745); and Hartland (Windsor Co. / 24 libraries / pop. 55,821). The Labs will rotate among these libraries for training and public use at libraries and other community sites. In some towns, this will be the first-ever opportunity for free public computer training.

To address the need for training, VSC will provide a range of computer classes for community members at 4 key public libraries and 16 state and community college sites around the state. VDOL will arrange for public training at libraries in the 4 rural counties cited above and for further public training at the 4 key libraries. VSC training will focus on “training trainers” and then on teaching basic computer and career development/job-search skills to be marketed to reach low-income, unemployed, aged, and other vulnerable populations. VDOL will work with locally based qualified trainers and college student interns to provide training in the 4 counties and at key libraries: computer skills, career/jobs, consumer health, small business, and social networking. VSC Student Tech Interns will offer scheduled one-on-one assistance and support for citizens using PCCs.

Vermont has a population of 621,254 and is the most rural state in the nation. Because Vermont's 190 independent public libraries are located in small towns and are locally funded, they are unable to provide the level of service common in many libraries elsewhere. Computers and Internet technology are core services in the modern public library, and Vermont's libraries struggle to provide adequate computer access and training. In 2007-08, 167 libraries reported having 912 computers with Internet access for the public and Vermonters used these computers 14,980 times each week. At the completion of this 3-year program we expect to see an increase of at least 25% in public computer use in our designated libraries. For the first time we will have an accurate picture of public training at these 65 libraries. Staff located at PCCs will collect use data and will conduct evaluation surveys. Our budget includes \$10,000 for marketing to be targeted to vulnerable populations that most need this service.

One 1/3 FTE Project Coordinator and 15+ student interns will be hired. Interns will receive training in computer skills and customer service. High unemployment rates in areas targeted in this project underscore the need for PCCs and training; we expect that people will use these centers to find jobs. The ability to use computers and online resources is essential to securing new, well-paid jobs. Unemployment rates in the targeted towns/counties are: Burlington (6.5), Brattleboro (6.7), Lyndon (10.0), Rutland (12.1), Addison Co. (6.3), Franklin Co. (6.8), Orleans Co. (8.7) and Windsor Co. (5.9). Burlington has the greatest number of refugees and immigrants needing English language skills.

The total cost of the grant project is \$754,476.63 including 20% matching funds of \$152,724.03 (81.9% of the matching funds are in-kind contributions of \$125,224.03.)

VDOL, in the Agency of Administration, is a qualified applicant with experience administering Federal grants and Federal LSTA (Library Services and Technical Act) funds. Regional and specialized library consultants in the Department provide support and technical assistance to libraries and the Department coordinates Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation computer hardware grants to public libraries.