

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications on Behalf of The City of New York

Project Title: NYC Connected Communities

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Mayor Bloomberg has recognized the importance of maintaining New York as a thriving urban center not only for its own residents and businesses, but also for the impact it has on the nation and world. The Mayor has undertaken a number of ambitious programs designed to ensure that the City remains vibrant and strong, such as PlaNYC 2030, a blueprint for environmental sustainability. Similar in spirit is NYC Connected, a series of initiatives aimed at increasing broadband use and adoption among vulnerable New Yorkers. These efforts are crucial at a time when the country faces a major economic crisis, with New York City at the epicenter. With historically high unemployment rates and the City facing an underlying structural shift in its economy, it is critical that all New Yorkers are provided the skills and access to broadband to enable them to contribute to rebuilding the City's, and the nation's economy.

Recognizing the increasingly important role broadband plays in the economic and social well being of all New Yorkers, the Mayor commissioned a Broadband Needs Assessment Study in 2006/7. While broadband availability was found to be high, with at least 89% of New Yorkers having access to two options for broadband service, the Study identified a stark disparity in broadband adoption. Citywide adoption was comparable to national averages at 47%, yet adoption by for low-income residents was strikingly low at 26% as compared to 54% in other income groups. Furthermore, this gap was projected to persist well into the future, absent targeted, large-scale initiatives aimed at addressing it. The Study further found that multiple, interconnected issues conspire to slow adoption in low-income households. These obstacles include the inability to afford a computer and broadband service, lack of recognition of the value of technology, and poor digital literacy skills.

In a City where the number of low-income households exceeds the total number of households in almost every other city, this disparity demands action. In 2008, in response to the Study findings, the City crafted a Broadband Action Plan, calling for a set of aggressive programs to spur broadband adoption by its vulnerable populations. Confronted with a contracting national economy and severe resulting budget cuts across the City, however, the Plan could not be implemented. The BTOP brings new opportunity to implement these important programs. NYC Connected Learning, an education-focused program proposed under the BTOP Sustainable Broadband Adoption category, and NYC

Connected Communities, a holistic program to expand public computer center capacity, and the subject of this submission, were developed based on this larger Plan. Unlike many well-intentioned programs that address only portions of the adoption problem in isolation, together these programs target New York City's poorest communities and saturate them with targeted and holistic interventions to drive sustained broadband adoption.

NYC Connected Communities is intended to build on NYC Connected Learning by making critical enhancements to public computer centers in the same low-income communities. Both programs will be implemented in the highest poverty communities in each borough, such as Harlem and the South Bronx. Under the leadership of the Mayor's office, and the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, the City agency most knowledgeable of citywide broadband trends and needs, NYC Connected Communities will work in partnership with a diverse group of anchor institutions. Partners include the City's three public library systems – Brooklyn Public Library, New York Public Library and Queens Borough Public Library – as well as community centers located in New York City Housing Authority, Department of Parks and Recreation, and Department for the Aging facilities. These partners are positioned at the "front lines" of serving the City's most vulnerable populations. They are well versed in the specific needs of their patrons, and best equipped to implement specific programs that meet those needs. Flooding each community with resources through these multiple channels will ensure broadband and the critical services offered through this program are widely available.

Taking a holistic approach that confronts multiple obstacles to broadband use simultaneously, the program invests in four key areas across these centers: 1) Basic Investments in Public Access, increasing the availability and capacity of public computers and broadband connectivity, 2) Digital Literacy Training and Support, providing residents the skills and support they need to use broadband, 3) Advanced Training and Services focused on employment support services to address the particular economic challenges currently facing New Yorkers, and 4) Marketing, Awareness and Program Administration, to promote the availability and benefits of programs offered, and of broadband more broadly.

Employment support services are highly needed in New York City. In June 2009, the number of unemployed New York City residents reached 381,200, the highest level since September 1992, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The rate of unemployment reached 9.5%, the highest level the City has seen since June 1997. Public computer centers across the City are seeing a surge in broadband use in the last year. In particular, these centers are on the front lines of providing job-related services under these trying conditions. Job search support and resume building services, as well as workforce training programs, are experiencing increased demand as New Yorkers seek to boost their skills and qualifications to compete in the lagging economy.

The program is expected to serve as many as 323,581 users in two years, create or retain 117 jobs, and cost a total of \$20,118,806. The City and its partners are providing \$4,025,000 in cash, \$4,098,756 in-kind, and are requesting a total of \$11,995,051 in BTOP funds.