

## **Broadband USA Applications Database**

**Applicant Name:** Montana Department of Commerce

**Project Title:** Montana Tribal Computer Center Project

**Project Type:** Public Computer Center

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### **Executive Summary**

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Montana's Tribal Computer Center Project is a partnership between the State of Montana and six federally recognized Tribal governments located in Montana – the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribe of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation; the Blackfeet Nation of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation; the Chippewa-Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation; the Apsaalooke Nation of the Crow Reservation; the Fort Belknap Indian Community of the Fort Belknap Reservation; and the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation – to increase Tribal members' access to broadband by expanding computer centers at selected Tribal community anchor institutions. As the attached letters of support indicate, these six Tribal reservations strongly support the Montana Tribal Computer Center Project.

Available data indicates that rural American Indian households may have a broadband subscription rate as low as 16.9%. All six of the Tribal reservations included in this application are either unserved or underserved, as defined by the NTIA. The Tribal reservations included in this application are home to some of the most impoverished, isolated, and vulnerable populations in Montana. While Montana's 2000 median household income (\$33,024) was below the national average (\$41,994), the median household income for American Indian households on the six Tribal reservations of Montana included in this application was only \$22,557. The average poverty rate for American Indian residents on the six Montana Tribal reservations included in this application is 41.53%. Data from the 2000 Census shows an average unemployment rate for the six Tribal reservations included in this application of 21.4%, with an average of 17% dependent on some type of public assistance.

During the 2006-2007 school year, only 66% of all eligible American Indian students in Montana completed high school, compared to the white student graduation rate of 89%. For the 2007-2008 school year, 81% of the public school districts located on Montana's Tribal reservations did not meet federal No Child Left Behind Adequate Yearly Progress requirements. The mean age of death for all American Indians in Montana, averaged over the years 1998-2007, was only 56 years old, compared to 77 for the population of the state as a whole. American Indians are more than twice as likely to lack health insurance as the rest of the nation.

Montana's Tribal Computer Center Project will meet three of the five BTOP statutory purposes by providing broadband access to these vulnerable populations. The centers will provide access or improve access to broadband service to consumers residing in these unserved and underserved areas of Montana; provide broadband education, awareness, training, access, equipment, and support to schools, community colleges, and other community support organizations and entities to facilitate greater use of broadband service by low-income, unemployed, aged, and otherwise vulnerable populations by or through these organizations; and stimulate the demand for broadband, economic growth, and job creation on Montana's Tribal reservations. The Tribal Computers Centers will be located in Senior Centers, Boys and Girls Clubs (BGCA), Head Start Centers, Tribal community colleges, Tribal community centers, and K – 12 schools, all of which already provide critical education services and serve children on the Tribal reservations.

In addition to partnering with the six Tribal reservations, the State has reached out to several Tribally owned, small and disadvantaged businesses to solicit their participation in this Project. This alliance of Tribal governments, the State of Montana, Tribal community organizations, and the private sector will help each create and retain jobs, stimulate the Tribal reservation and Montana economies, and assist the vulnerable populations in Tribal communities by providing computer equipment, software, training, support, and community outreach to the Tribal Computer Centers.

The overall cost of the project is \$3,738,424. The requested grant funding includes \$446,884 for project management; \$2,459,140 to purchase equipment, software, and training and support services for establishing the Tribal Computer Centers and providing monthly broadband service thereto; \$725,000 for training center staff members and patrons and providing support services to assist each center with maintenance and trouble-shooting; and \$100,000 for contracts with the Tribal economic development planner at each Tribal reservation to provide public outreach for the Tribal Computer Centers. To ensure the success of the Project, Montana will leverage other government funding and resources. In December 2008, the State used approximately \$479,000 in legislatively appropriated funds to purchase a 3-teraflop high-performance computer from IBM. To date, operation, maintenance, collocate charges, electricity charges, and rent charges for the high-performance computer have amounted to \$130,000. Recently, the State invested \$328,000 to construct a state-of-the-art room that will permanently house the supercomputer, which will be available to Tribal businesses and academia with broadband access provided by the Project at low or no cost. These total expenses of \$937,000 represent the State's in-kind match for the Project.

The Tribal Computer Center project is part of a larger, coordinated push to bring broadband to Tribal populations in Montana, complementing the separate Bresnan Communications Montana Native American Reservation Broadband Connectivity Project infrastructure application and State of Montana Broadband Mapping Grant application. This grant application represents a critical piece of the State's

efforts to utilize federal broadband funding opportunities to open the door for investment in communications infrastructure and services in Indian Country.