

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Kennesaw State University

Project Title: Project Click: Sustainable Broadband Adoption in Southwest Georgia

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

Early and Calhoun in Southwest Georgia are two of the poorest rural counties in a region of the state that suffers from persistent poverty and its terrible toll on educational advancement, healthcare and employment. Distance from urban centers, lack of major highways, low population density and low income all limit opportunities. Recent closings of a peanut processing plant, a youth detention facility, and layoffs by the largest employer have added to the woes.

These counties are fighting for better lives for their residents. In the broadband arena, South Georgia Regional Information Technology Authority (SGRITA) has for two years pursued a goal to deploy a state-of-the-art broadband network in the region. Broadband is now a reality for 4,000+ households; if SGRITA's separate Broadband Infrastructure Recovery Act proposal is accepted it will, within nine months, make broadband available to all residents in both counties. However, access is not the same as adoption. Awareness and training are key components for sustained adoption. But in low-income rural areas even owning a computer is an obstacle. In June 2009 ProjectClick surveyed 228 households and found that 40% had no home computer.

ProjectClick's innovative approach will allow 575 residents to "earn" laptop computers by taking at least 50 hours of basic computing and broadband skills classes. Each earner may also opt into 30 hours of advanced training in educational advancement, healthcare or entrepreneurship. The project begins with our "Network Weaver" enlisting the local publics and weaving them together, face to face at first and then via the Internet as new users go online. This PR specialist will conduct civic mapping to determine gathering spaces, make contact at those places, and jumpstart the awareness campaign, building a database by personal relationship building.

The Center for Sustainable Journalism's Citizen Media Division at Kennesaw State University (KSU) will oversee this bottom up/top down enterprise. Well before this RFP was posted, ProjectClick researchers visited the counties and met more than 20 community organizations. Eight are now solid partners. They will help distribute the computers and provide class and office space for a team of trainers, help-desk workers, Network Weaver, onsite project manager and administrative assistant, all of whom will be fulltime employees—nine new positions. They will get continuous training to do their jobs well and will also be trained in how to turn their talents into potential businesses. Our entrepreneurship master teacher will help them develop business plans, which in turn will help these employees start broadband training-related businesses after this 18-month project ends. The central idea is to teach people how to use broadband computing power to improve their health, economic and educational status as a means

of breaking poverty's cycle. This is a demonstration project that KSU will disseminate for replication and build upon in future funding rounds.

The longevity of this project grows from the newly built peer-to-peer online networks and the new computing power injected into the community, plus the involvement of community organizations. That community-wide stimulus of 700 computers (575 for households and 125 for public computing places) sparks the tipping point that makes online computing a necessity. Once that critical mass is reached and broadband is a way of life, there is no turning back to analog. As well, ProjectClick's nine key employees will be trained in how to earn a living or start new businesses based on that now established computing power. Finally, SGRITA, ProjectClick's local anchor institution, has a vested interest in continuing the training aspects of this project as it expands its infrastructure. So too does KSU, which sees the state's rural areas as new markets for its growing online for-credit and continuing education courses.

The combined population of Early and Calhoun counties is about 18,000 people. Demographically, they are 7,643 diverse households. Neither community is majority white. Both are designated Hispanic growth areas. They also have substantial aged (about 14% of the total population) and disabled over five years old (about 24%). ProjectClick is mindful of the diversity and its awareness plans will cross the "fault lines" of age, geography, class, ethnicity and gender. The direct increase of computing power in the two counties by 700 computers is the estimated number of potential broadband subscribers this project will reach.

KSU has a long history of service and with 22,500 students is the third largest university in Georgia. Leonard Witt, the project's Principal Investigator and executive director of the Center for Sustainable Journalism's Citizen Media Division, has overseen four previous projects funded by federal and foundation grants that focused on similar training (teaching teachers how to blog in classrooms and a digital entrepreneurship program for at-risk youth). Tamara Powell, KSU online learning specialist, will consult with the master teacher and trainers providing the skills training for participants. The Edge Connection, a microenterprise training center housed at KSU, will consult for the entrepreneurship training. The A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service and Research will evaluate the project.

The nine member operations team will have office space arranged by SGRITA in a central location for both counties. The project manager, trainers and network weaver will confer regularly with our community partner organizations, which have been very active in the proposal's planning stages. In addition to the grant-created jobs, ProjectClick's 575 computer "earners" who take advantage of the entrepreneurship and educational advancement training will be better positioned to find new jobs or create their own small businesses. The funding request is \$1,800,683; the total cost is \$2,257,318.