

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

Project Title: Leech Lake Community Computer Centers (CCC)

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Statement of Need or Problem

The Leech Lake Reservation, over 1,100 square miles in size, is the home of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. Approximately 4,000 tribal members live in 16 cities and villages across the reservation. Population density is very low and the reservation is approximately 100 miles from the nearest urban community (Duluth). The band members suffer from very high levels of unemployment (estimated at over 40% in this economic downturn) and high levels of poverty.

In a recent survey, only 21% of band member households had broadband Internet services. Only 35% had a computer in their homes. When asked why they did not have broadband, almost one-third of total respondents and the vast majority of people who provided a response indicated that their incomes were too low to afford a subscription. The next highest response, of not wanting or needing Internet, was approximately 6%.

The average age of band members residing on the reservation is very young – 22 years of age. Without broadband access, children, teenagers and young adults lack the tools and skills to participate in today's society – to gather and share information, to receive health care, to get an education. The result will be another generation of Leech Lake members without the skills necessary to fully participate in society.

Approach

The band is applying for BTOP Infrastructure funds to build a combination fiber-wireless networking connecting the villages across the reservation. Our computer center approach will be to develop a computer center in each village. On average, 4 computers will be placed in each center based on expected demand and usage. These centers will have Internet access through the new tribal WAN which will provide no less than 10 Mb to each computer center. An open access Wi-Fi connection will be available to those with their own Wi-Fi devices.

The tribal government's MIS department will maintain the technology at the computer centers.

The centers will be staffed in a collaborative way. During the standard work day, tribal government workers will provide oversight and ad hoc assistance to those using the technology centers. In the evenings and weekends, students from Leech Lake Tribal College will provide oversight, assistance and in-depth training.

The band will use resources from CTCNet to operate the centers. CTCNet provides online guides and resources to help design and guide computer centers based on years of experience and best practices.

Areas Served

This project will provide access in 13 existing community center locations across the Leech Lake Reservation providing access to Leech Lake members close to where they live. These centers will also provide access for tribal workers as they provide services from the community centers in a developing strategy to provide more services closer to where residents live rather than the current centralized approach in Cass Lake.

Qualifications

The tribal MIS department maintains networks, Internet access and desktop support for the tribal government. They are well positioned to expand this support to the computer centers.

The tribal college has a full set of IT related courses. Student engagement as Computer Center staff will provide on-the-job experience and offer young people role models for IT as an important skill and career opportunity.

The band will utilize professional assistance from several sources to launch this program successfully. First, the band will use Bill Coleman of Community Technology Advisors (CTAC) to provide start-up assistance with policies and practices. CTAC is a Minnesota-based firm with years of experience in community broadband and economic development. Second, the band will make use of the expertise of Frank Odasz of Lone Eagles Consulting of Dillon, Montana. Odasz is an expert in working with native communities on broadband and economic development with an emphasis on youth. Finally, the Leech Lake Band has been selected as a Demonstration Community in the Blandin Foundation's MN Intelligent Rural Communities application for BTOP Sustainable Broadband application.

Jobs Created

There will be 26 permanent part-time intern/student positions created. One MIS position will be required and 1 program manager to provide oversight and coordination. In addition, employment opportunities as trainers will be created.

Overall Cost

\$1,581,252