

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Sistema Universitario Ana G. Mendez, Inc. dba Universidad del Turabo

Project Title: Universidad del Turabo Center to Encourage Sustainable Adoption of Broadband Services (CESABS)

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

The main goal of the Universidad del Turabo (UT) project “Center to Encourage Sustainable Adoption of Broadband Services (CESABS)” is to serve the target service region by establishing a broadband program comprised of Public Computer Centers and through training delivery on how to implement and use broadband technologies. Specifically, deliverables are the following: (a) development of a Basic Certificate Program in Broadband Literacy; (b) expansion and strengthening of the broadband infrastructure at the institution; and, (c) creation of the CESABS public computer centers as virtual computing labs.

The CESABS model is oriented to providing consolidation and development of infrastructure; public access to computing resources; education and training; and adoption and diffusion strategies. UT proposes six (6) public computer centers in total, all coupled with remote access to the virtual computing labs, 3 at the UT main campus in Gurabo, PR and three (3) at university centers located in Cayey, Naguabo and Yabucoa, PR. The main campus center will provide three different PCCs: the Electronic Information Library, the Job and Community Career Center, and the children’s on-campus library named “Mi Ventana al Mundo Global”. Proposed trainings will provide understanding on essentials of broadband access technology that will create new opportunities of employment currently not available on the insular labor market; moreover, the activities will be replicated in other areas in the future.

UT is a nonprofit, Hispanic-serving institution of higher education. It is the largest independently accredited private institution of higher education in Puerto Rico, focused on formulating ideas through the use of its resources, both internal and external, for the socioeconomic development of Puerto Rico, and for the creation of innovative solutions for the global community. Students work in partnership with faculty, researchers and the community to assure that their academic endeavors lead them to make real contributions to the community.

The target population of the proposed service areas is 155,230 persons according to available census data divided as follows, by municipality: Gurabo – 43,000; Cayey – 47,369; Yabucoa – 40,542; and Naguabo – 24,319.

In March 2009, Puerto Rico's unemployment rate increased to an unprecedented 14.7%, the highest rate in 14 years. According to the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources, there have been 109,000 lost jobs in the past 12 months. As of March 2009, there have been 25 months of continuous employment fall. The number of employed people fell to 1,127,000, the lowest number since March 2006. The data demonstrates an 8% reduction in the number of self-employed persons; also the lowest number since March 2003.

According to Labor Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), from January to March 2009, the employment market with the highest significant change was the San Juan–Caguas–Guaynabo area, with a reduction of 49,400 employed persons. The unemployment rate increased in almost all labor markets, the highest being in San Juan-Caguas-Guaynabo with 17,000 unemployed persons. Seventy-four percent (74%) of the towns (31 out of 42) of the area are distressed communities. All of these towns are communities with an unemployment rate greater than the Puerto Rico unemployment rate of 14.1. The mean family income in the region was \$26,975 for 2005. In 2006 this figure increased to \$27,499, or a 1.9% increase. For 2007, the family income was \$28,056 (US Census Bureau) showing no significant changes with the previous years.

In order to address this unemployment situation, UT created a Job Placement Center in 2002. Since then it has developed projects directed to encourage economic development and promote self-sufficiency and economic self-reliance of the Institution's surrounding communities. The Center has based services in promoting employment opportunities directed to self-sufficiency of the people served. The UT Job Placement Center has demonstrated significant achievements since then. It has served more than 14,236 community participants in direct employability services. As of today, the Center employers' database includes 872 employers and it has been able to place over 3,080 persons in jobs. Through approved project grants from federal agencies, state and community organizations, and internal resources the Center served more than 39,491 persons in employability and entrepreneurial activities. Nevertheless, the challenge for higher education to address this economic situation demands newer ways to serve the community and UT students. Changing academic and modern workforce needs require the provision of increased access to technology and information resources. Katz et al. (2008) argue that in order for an educational institution to maintain coherence to a mission and the various educational programs it pursues, it will need to address the challenges of broadband access.

The major outcomes in a 2-year period for the immediate vicinity of the UT main campus and University Centers located in Gurabo, Cayey, Naguabo and Yabucoa, and the broader San Juan-Caguas-Guaynabo

area as defined by LAUS, are as follows: 25 participants will be trained and receive a certificate in Basic Broadband Literacy, thus making them job ready in the information technology labor market; 100 participants will receive employability technical assistance in job search and computer literacy; acquired equipment will be installed and in use; approximately 1,500 persons/week (all age groups) will access the public computer centers. Virtual servers will have been installed to offer access to multiple operating systems and applications, locally and in remote locations, thus allowing at least 800 virtual users/week to access the computing resources remotely.

The total project costs are estimated at \$2,771,566 of which \$2,038,603 is BTOP funding and \$732,963 is UT cost share.