

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Arizona State Library Archives and Public Records

Project Title: Arizona Public Computer Centers

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

a. A statement of the problem: A forum held in Flagstaff, March 19, 2009 led to Arizonans discussing the digital divide between metro and rural areas, focusing on “vulnerable populations.” Arizona covers 114,006 square miles, making it the sixth largest state but sorely lacks the broadband and telecommunication infrastructure needed by the community. Sara Pressler, Mayor of Flagstaff, pointed out that public libraries, “...in most instances, are the only reliable source of high speed internet access, yet, are under the threat of increased cuts in their budgets.”

“Public access computers at the library are a vital link in a small, depressed community,” says Barbara Blackburn from Duncan Public Library. “Our patrons could not afford internet at home after being laid off from the mines. They were thankful to have access at the library. With the help of the Librarian, they did job searches, created resumes using software at the library and e-mailed it to prospective employers, receiving some job offers within two weeks. If it weren’t for the library, these people would simply not be able to use the Internet as a tool to find new opportunities in this tough economy.”

A statewide survey of public libraries (July 2009) demonstrates patrons have significant wait times for public access computers (PACs). Waiting is often due to inadequate number of computers, slow internet speeds and outdated hardware. Heavy, continuous use results in rapid wear and tear, increasing downtime for PAC’s. Budget cuts have severely impacted libraries’ abilities to replace old computers or purchase new ones, and due to the current economic situation, increased demand has greatly stretched library resources. Libraries are often the only resource providing no-fee access to the internet, whether it is filing for healthcare benefits, refinancing a mortgage, looking for information on loved ones during disasters/emergencies, or for students doing home-work. Additionally, many libraries take laptops to community recreation centers and other venues serving vulnerable populations that are unable to come to the library. In today’s economy, public access to technology through their libraries is critical for people to improve their lives and regain stability.

Of the 124 libraries that answered the survey not all were shovel ready to add more computers as some needed construction or space redesign. In this grant, 84 libraries are ready to enhance their PACs to meet growing community needs. The PACs will be used to deliver a wide range of e-resources including government, business and health information while facilitating much-needed training for job searching, re-careering and business planning. Partnerships with Community Colleges and Dept of Commerce will bring in curriculum resources and instructors while the Arizona SACCCNet project (See b. below) will bring in higher bandwidth.

b. Your overall approach to addressing the need: Libraries were asked to estimate the number of computers they would need to add/replace/upgrade to their existing systems to alleviate long wait times. The survey also asked for mobile laptop requirements to be used for training within and outside their libraries.

The State Library provides access to e-resources in a wide range of topics and public libraries also subscribe to resources useful to their local communities. Libraries in partnership with other agencies provide job-seekers much needed 21st century skills, training on e-resources and effective internet searching.

The State Library is also supporting a broadband middle mile project AZ SACNet - a network infrastructure that creates five interlocking state-of-the-art SONET rings, which overlay the entire State of Arizona. The backbone drops directly into every county government seat, hospital, library, high school and three universities providing all anchor institutions a bandwidth of 100 Mbps at each site - immediately elevating and dramatically improving broadband access. The recurring costs will be sustained by E-rate funding.

c. Area(s) to be served: The 84 libraries are spread across the state covering populations that have inadequate or no access to computers and internet. Additionally some of the libraries deal with a floating population of winter visitors who also need service. The population served are from all ethnicity, ages, income and educational levels. The overall population served by the libraries in this grant is a little over 1.8 million. These are based on 2000 census figures of the specific designated service areas of the 84 libraries.

c. Qualifications of the applicant that demonstrate the ability to achieve it's intend results.

The Arizona State Library has considerable experience in fundraising, administering grants and coordinating statewide projects. Since 1997, the State Library has administered over \$61 million in grant projects, among them are grants from; the Nina Mason Pulliam Foundation, Arizona Commission on the Arts, Arizona Humanities Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities and Library of Congress, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for National Leadership Grants to develop a five-state American Indian project. A Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant directly involved adding/replacing PACs in several libraries statewide four years ago. The State Library also provides training and support for E-rate applicants to sustain telecom and internet costs.

d. Jobs to be saved or created: Although expanding computer centers, providing better broadband and linking people to key e-resources will not directly create jobs, training will enhances business and open

avenues to job creation. Help with resumes, job searches, job applications, business and banking, are key components to sustaining the communities and stimulating long-term economic growth.

e. Overall cost of the proposed project: \$1,598,160. Amount requested is: \$1,280,118. The cash match is \$318,04