

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: The Coordinating and Development Corporation

Project Title: Connect North Louisiana PCC Initiative

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

During mid-2008, under contract with DOC's Economic Development Administration (EDA), The Coordinating and Development (CDC) prepared a five year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report for the 10 Parishes CDC serves in Northwest Louisiana. The lack of broadband access ranked among the top concerns expressed by the feedback received by CDC, resulting in the following statement relating to broadband being included in the CEDS report:

"According to a report entitled "A Nation Online: Broadband Age," released by the National Telecommunication and Information Administration in September 2004, Louisiana joined Arkansas as the state's with the lowest "Internet Use by Population, Age 3 or Older." Louisiana and Arkansas shared a "Lower Bound" ranking of 47.1; with an "Upper Bound" ranking of 52.8 for Louisiana. Several factors account for this low ranking in the use of the Internet: lack of high speed access in the rural areas, low income and high poverty rates throughout the region, and an unwillingness by cable and phone providers to offer broadband access in low population areas.

The lack of broadband access in most of the rural sections of Northwest Louisiana is a deterrent to the ability of these areas to attract, and in some cases, keep businesses. An additional problem is that students in areas without broadband are handicapped when it comes to using the Internet for research projects and better learning opportunities. Distant learning opportunities for all ages also are non-existent in many sections of the region, as are rural medical facilities, which could use broadband to facilitate diagnostic and treatment procedures.

As a direct result of the input obtained for the CEDS from local governments, businesses, civic and community organizations of the urgent need to address the lack of broadband access in the region's rural areas, CDC formed the Louisiana Partnership for Rural Broadband Connectivity (LPRBC), reaching out to other organizations in 29 Parishes in Central and North Louisiana are now represented in the LPRBC.

The proposed innovative solution is a multi-faceted education, outreach, and public relations campaign designed to inform, remove fear, and encourage productive use of broadband communications. This approach involves the four initiatives designed to work with other ARRA and governmental agencies to maximize effectiveness, and may easily be adopted in other regions. The initiatives are:

1. Partnership for Access to Louisiana Broadband Internet Computing (PAL-BIC): CDC, through its LPRBC initiative, has formed partnerships with Workforce Investment Boards, Public School Systems, Universities, Community and Technical Colleges, Economic Development organizations, Civic and Community Organizations, and Communities throughout north Louisiana to identify and equip the most convenient and accessible locations with computers and high speed Internet connections for public access.
2. Promotion and Accessibility: Utilizing newspapers, television, and radio, public service announcements and purchased advertising time/space, LPRBC will promote PAL-BIC computing centers and programs they will conduct. Also, local governments, when possible, will provide transportation assistance for those who are unable to provide their own transportation to the centers.
3. PAL-BIC Information Sessions: Working with mayors of communities throughout the region, LPRBC would host a series of informational sessions to identify and address questions and concerns, show people how broadband connectivity can help them in their daily lives, and provide for those with special needs (disabled, non-english speaking, elderly, and socially disadvantaged).
4. Specialized courses and seminars on broadband usage at PAL-BIC centers: A series of specialized courses and seminars will be held at PAL-BIC centers to further inform and remove hesitation to fully utilize broadband capabilities..

The goal of the LPRBC PAL-BIC initiative is to increase broadband usage by citizens currently not connected to high speed Internet access by a margin of 50% over current levels within two years. The team chosen to lead this effort, representing CDC and its affiliate, Connect the Ark-La-Tex, Inc., which together have more than 150 years of experience in economic development, community development, workforce development, education, health care, and development finance.

Population in the area totals 1,181,724 people, of which some 32% are African-Americans. Latinos are a small but growing population. 71% of the population of high school age or older have graduated from

high school. The Families Poverty Level per parish ranges from 10.2% to 29.7%. As of June 2009, the area's labor force totalled 550,368, with a parish unemployment rate that ranges from 6.8% to 16.9%.

CDC was chartered in 1954 as a private, nonprofit, membership-supported corporation that serves the economic, workforce, community, and business development and financial needs of communities and businesses in Northwest Louisiana, eight counties in Northeast Texas, and four counties in Southwest Arkansas. CDC's clientele include parishes/counties; municipalities; industrial/economic development groups; businesses and industries; special purpose governmental bodies; and universities, colleges and technical colleges. Additionally, the State of Louisiana recognizes CDC as one of the State's eight regional planning and development districts. In this capacity, CDC works with governmental agencies, businesses, civic groups, and citizens to develop programs and services that enable the orderly economic and community development of Northwest Louisiana.

Jobs to be saved or created over the two years of this project are estimated to be 50.

Overall cost of the proposed project is \$1.2 million.