

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Tri County Economic Development District

Project Title: Rural Library Fusion Center

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Stevens County, Washington has significant social and economic challenges. The county is the size of Delaware with a population of approximately 40,000; the largest city in the county has a population of 5,000. The entire county is considered rural. The terrain is mountainous, forested, and sparsely populated.

Many families live on gravel roads, miles from their nearest neighbor and lack basic residential amenities, reliable transportation, and understanding of the services and programs available to assist them in meeting basic needs including employment, education, medical care, and obtaining food and living supplies. One of the most powerful barriers is the distance a person needs to travel in order to access the resource. The Rural Library Fusion Center addresses this by maximizing, but not duplicating, technology resources using web or videoconferencing to facilitate meetings and conferences (e.g., one of the requirements of a federal assistance program is that clients check in daily at the Colville office – that means a 100 mile round trip drive every day for many.)

The number of families with children living in poverty exceeds 18% of the population.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly 20% of adults in Stevens County have a literacy level below the 8th grade. Only 16% of the population has a college education. The unemployment rate has ranged from 12.4% - 16.1% in the last several months and the median income is about \$39,000.

The challenges posed by insufficient infrastructure, geography, poverty, and low education levels results in the people of Stevens County being unable to be productive members of modern society, access educational and governmental resources, or provide their own voice in the national discussion.

Overall approach to addressing the need

The Rural Library Fusion Center is an innovative, cooperative effort of five anchor institutions:

- Libraries of Stevens County
- Rural Resources Community Action Agency

- Stevens County Government
- Tri County Economic Development District, and
- Washington State University Extension

Libraries have a tradition of collecting books, references and databases. This Fusion Center takes a unique approach to “collecting” by adding local agencies and services. It is an integrated multi-agency, multi-use facility which provides a single access location for services, resources and education. Broadband infrastructure is the tool that will enable the facility to house, under one roof, a gateway to people and information for:

- the public library as the cornerstone information agency
- public computer center
- business development center
- private business broadband access point
- intake for social services (e.g., employment security, legal aid, family support services)
- workforce development services (e.g., employee retraining, skill building, resume writing)
- energy and weatherization assistance and education
- county government offices
- technology training
- higher education distance learning
- noncredit education courses (e.g., grant writing, family asset building)

Washington State University will evaluate and document our efforts so the Fusion Center can be used as a prototype for other communities in the region.

Area to be served, population of the target area, and the estimated number of potential users

Fusion Center agencies serve all of Stevens County, however, the target area of users of this Center is roughly the southern third of Stevens County; nearly 833 square miles. This area has a population of 15,350 and includes the town of Springdale (283 pop.), the Spokane Indian Reservation,

and several unincorporated communities. The Fusion Center will be located in an unincorporated area known as Lake Spokane.

Based on existing library usage and anticipated use with the additional services, it is estimated 850 people per week will use the Rural Library Fusion Center to access resources, services, and education.

Qualifications of the applicant

Tri County Economic Development District was designated in 1969 and has extensive experience developing and implementing federal and state programs. The District operates a revolving loan fund program to assist businesses with financing, initially capitalized at approximately \$5 million dollars. For the past ten years the District has served as the lead organization for the Five Star Enterprise Community program of USDA Rural Development resulting in more than \$1 million dollars in community improvements and infrastructure. The Executive Director and Finance Manager each have more than ten years of direct experience with program and fiscal aspects of grants. The Fusion Center Leadership Team and their staff members possess a broad array of skills and knowledge that will be applied to the Fusion Center project.

Jobs to be saved or created

The Fusion Center Leadership Team is committed to using local people and firms to accomplish this project. Where possible, the project will be used as a learning lab for skills development and other job enhancement activities. Initially, jobs will be created as the project implementation and engineering begins including project staff and consultants. During the construction phase jobs will be created.

Once the Fusion Center is operational, and through the resources, services and education offered, it is anticipated job/employee matches will increase, broadband support businesses may be started, "virtual" businesses may be launched or expanded, and education levels will rise. Broadband connectivity in the Fusion Center will provide a mechanism for local entrepreneurs to participate in virtual business opportunities, telecommuting, and skill building. These outcomes are solid foundations for job creation in southern Stevens County.

The overall cost of the project will be \$4,157,139.00.