

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: City of Okmulgee, OK

Project Title: CyberLearning Project

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

Need for improving service adoption rates

Okmulgee has an unemployment rate of 11.4%, and we are facing out migration rates which are not yet serious, but are a concern for our population of 13,000. Every resident that leaves is one less taxpayer and reduces our share of state and federal dollars. We also know that rural counties with higher concentrations of high-skilled labor have higher concentrations of high-knowledge occupations. In rural counties, a one percent increase in the educational attainment of a bachelor's degree translated into a 0.84 percent rise in the concentration of high-knowledge occupations. The employers in the area tend to be looking for ever-more highly skilled workers for the healthcare and petroleum industries in particular; we will use this funding accordingly to upgrade the digital literacy skills of our workers and prepare more of our residents for this higher paying work. A key for us has been partnerships – on the advanced end of that scale we have benefited from our association with Oklahoma State University-Okmulgee which has helped manufacturers in northeast Oklahoma gain Defense Department contracts by helping engineering firms produce parts for the US DoD – but we need to make that investment on the other end of the scale for those workers who believe that unskilled and semi-skilled work will return to the region.

Apart from the role of such workers in some parts of the retail industry, those jobs have largely disappeared. Our project plans to prepare a younger group of workers, high school graduates, single parents and recently displaced workers, with basic digital literacy skills and then advanced training depending on an assessment that they will take when they register. That assessment will analyze their current skill levels mapped against their career experience and aspirations and then matched against existing employment realities.

Approach

Online courses, supported by a state of the art Learning Management System (LMS) that can accurately track progress, will be used in conjunction with career trainers who will be selected from the community. They will then recruit volunteer mentors to assist particularly learners who have been out of school for an extended period of time and may initially need a lot of hand holding.

To maximize the use of this kind of investment, we need to maximize the ability of our residents to benefit from it. By helping to bridge the educational and skills gap, we will make the entire investment more sustainable. Our innovative approaches are evident in three main ways. First, we will be using our broadband connectivity and our public technology centers to provide the customized skills training for jobs that are in demand in the local area and for future-oriented “green energy” jobs that will be a key growth industry in this area. We will not overlook, however, the needs of a significant proportion of the population we are serving, who may not have graduated high school or who graduated without needed skills. We will encourage everyone in Okmulgee to become digitally literate and to prove their competencies by taking an industry-recognized certification known as the Internet Core Competency Certificate (IC3). Secondly, we will be setting up teams of stakeholders, businesses, educators, health care and emergency service workers, and others to inform people about the use and value of the courses. These teams will set up groups of volunteers who will support workers in key job skill areas and using our tele-mentoring platform if necessary. The third innovative element is an electronic database (job bank) that will be available to local employers. It will document key information about our students, if they wish to be included, such as the courses they took, the hours spent, the tests passed and the certifications achieved (validated from our state of the art Learning Management System). This will provide all parties a clear incentive to fully participate in the system and to find simple mechanisms to recognize and reward effort and results. We plan to celebrate achievements through public ceremonies where awards will be issued and media invited.

Target population

Our population is about 13,000 people and the target population consists of workers between the ages of 16-64 who are either unemployed or under-employed. We estimate a total of approximately 5,000 people would be our target population – comprised of people who may have been unable to find employment through disability or because they have been discouraged given the high unemployment rates.

Applicant qualifications

CyberLearning’s training has helped not only individuals, but also entire national economies, to use education to become more competitive. For example, Mauritius uses these courses in efforts to diversify its economy so it can become less dependent on sugar and tourism and can compete in higher wage industries. The CyberLearning team has strong experience in bringing stakeholders together, organizing a vision and implementing a “management by objectives” plan.

Jobs to be saved or created

We will be hiring five trainers and 20 counselors, as well as two directors. NEF courses are designed to prepare citizens to be more competitive when applying for existing and new job markets. For example, Project Management, IC3, and Microsoft Office certification courses make workers in a range of industries (any field that uses basic computer skills or runs projects) more qualified. In turn, these workers then make the companies they work for more efficient and able to save and create jobs.

Total Cost

Federal funds needed: \$2,682,738, which includes

\$205,000 for the Learning Management System

\$2,194,769 for training

\$282,969 for technical support

NEF will donate \$910,000 worth of online course licenses (enough for 5,000 users).

This adds up to a combined total cost of \$ 3,592,738.