

## **Broadband USA Applications Database**

**Applicant Name:** University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

**Project Title:** Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband Above Ground PCC (UC2B Public Computer Centers)

**Project Type:** Public Computer Center

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### **Executive Summary**

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A. Statement of problem/need with regard to improving broadband adoption rates.

UC2B Below Ground will bring needed big broadband to community anchor institutions and to homes in underserved areas. The complementary need and solution addressed in this UC2B Public Computer Center proposal is to stimulate broadband demand by helping people in those areas and other vulnerable populations use a reliable and cutting-edge set of big-broadband-based tools and services. This includes hardware, software, people, and social arrangements. In July, UC2B carried out a door-to-door household survey which found census block groups of <40% broadband takeup, exactly aligned with the lowest income and highest social isolation (joblessness, lower education, lack of access to services, and so on).

B. Overall approach to addressing the need.

Our overall approach is bottom-up, locally rooted cultural and entrepreneurial innovation, facilitated by North Champaign-Urbana's own social capital together with UC2B's structures and resources. The set of big-broadband-based tools and services mentioned above is centered on:

1. a self-organized network of 46 public computer centers, with technology both comprehensive and cutting edge, and a uniformly educated and mobilized support staff of 31 core staff (including 17 cybernavigators—local people helping and teaching);

2. 50 student interns (high school, community college, university) rolling through a three- course sequence on big broadband, community institutional transformation, and big-broadband-based entrepreneurship, culminating in start-up awards to each year's five best projects; and

3. a hub public computer center featuring three locally relevant technology foci and called the Mad Lab (for Music, Access, Digitization).

C. Areas to be served, population of the areas with demographics, estimated number of users of public computer centers.

UC2B will serve Champaign and Urbana, Illinois. This encompasses a population of 113,000, 15.6% African American, 4.5% Latino, and 27% living below the poverty level, according to the 2005-2007 American Community Survey. We estimate the annual number of users of UC2B's network of public computer centers to be 22,000 individuals.

D. Applicant qualifications.

UC2B's public computer center work builds on the last 15 years of activity by community informatics scholars/professionals at the University of Illinois (<http://www.cii.illinois.edu>). As demonstrated by our record of publications/presentations, this has involved:

1. establishing, operating, and/or studying more than 100 public computer centers;
2. IT-enabling and/or studying more than 500 community groups and institutions; and
3. convening and steering 15 plus conferences on the topic of technology and community (Job?Tech, CTCNeT, Ending Poverty/Day of Discovery, Paseo/Community as Intellectual Space, and eChicago).

The university's community informatics team has worked in Champaign-Urbana, East St. Louis, Oak Park, and Chicago, Illinois; Toledo, Ohio; Ann Arbor, Michigan; Manchester, England; and São Tomé (Africa). At a close-up, in-community level, for 15 plus years we operated the community network Prairienet (<http://prairienet.org>), the only TOP grant that NTIA awarded to a university's library and information science program and a W. K. Kellogg grantee. At the large-scale dataset level, we created an archive of the physical and digital records of the Technology Opportunities Program (<http://hdl.handle.net/2142/5139>) and initiated the collective study of the 606 projects, all of which

used technology to solve problems in underserved areas/among vulnerable populations. This work has built the largest community informatics program in the country, graduating professionals and Ph.D.-level researchers.

E. Ability to implement the project, achieve its intended results.

City and university managers steering the UC2B intergovernmental consortium have personally collaborated on no less than four generations of successful campus–community computer networking: PLATO (begun 1960), the first public access point to a university’s online library catalog (1984), Champaign County Network (ccnet, 1993), Prairienet (1994), and now UC2B. This expertise is on top of the campus community informatics expertise described above. Important off-campus initiatives include the Champaign-Urbana Community Wireless Network (CUWiN), begun in 2000, funded by the National Science Foundation and the Open Society Initiative, and the Urbana Champaign Independent Media Center (2001), an anchor of global Indymedia and one of the 46 public computer centers in UC2B.

The University of Illinois unit leading the UC2B public computer center proposal is the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), which has long ranked number one in the U.S. News and World Report rankings. Research, teaching, and service projects have received major funding from such sources as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Library of Congress, Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the National Science Foundation.

The hallmark of UC2B is its sustainability, especially with regard to job creation and big broadband adoption. Of the 81 jobs created, the bulk of the payroll is in 31 positions which will be supported by UC2B for years 4 and 5 of the project. As for big broadband adoption, the three-pronged transformational strategy is aimed at a cultural shift whereby social and work lives in underserved areas/vulnerable populations are converted from offline to a seamless combination of off- and online, much like the area’s higher-income population who already use little broadband, and clamor for big.

F. Jobs to be saved or created: 81.

G. Overall cost of project: UC2B Above Ground: \$5,000,000. (This includes Public Computer Centers and Sustainable Broadband Adoption.) UC2B Public Computer Centers: \$1,255,568.