

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Louisville Free Public Library

Project Title: Louisville Free Public Library Broadband and Public Computing Center Expansion

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Public usage of the Louisville Free Public Library (LFPL) system has dramatically increased in the last ten years, in large part because of computer access for those who do not have it in their home or place of work. There are regularly waiting lists at some branches, for people who are waiting to be able to use a computer, for daily tasks such as homework, banking, or basic communication.

Ten years ago, LFPL had 120 computers in its system of 17 branches. Today, there are 800 computers in all library branches, with growing demand. This grant will make it possible to increase that number to 1,000 computers in the library network. This number includes the brand new Newburg Branch Library which officially opened August 15, 2009 in a silver-accredited LEED and technologically state-of-the-art building.

LFPL's broadband system needs a major expansion to be able to meet the demands of the increasing number of users, as well as the amount of information that is downloaded from the Internet. This grant requests \$1,429,185 million to increase the broadband capacity across the entire library system, and purchase additional computers and develop targeted public programs at seven libraries serving underserved populations. The Library will match the grant with \$357,296 it has raised through its private fundraising efforts.

As part of the federal e-Rate program, LFPL is required to have a filtering mechanism that channels all connections through the Main Branch. Currently, the Library's system runs all connections through its Main Branch in downtown Louisville, from the local provider, at 45 mb/sec. Through this filter, all other branches' function with 10 mb/sec into each library, which are further diluted by the number of computers at each branch. Compared to the national goal of 768 k/sec through this grant opportunity, this is slow.

Because so much research, commerce and communication is conducted through computers and online applications, LFPL feels it is imperative that it increase the size of the line from the local provider to the

Main Branch from 45 mb/sec to 650 mb/sec. This improvement will require new technology to the library system, and will enable each computer to reach the standard speed of 768 k/sec. Increasing the size of the line into the Main Branch would allow the branches' network connections to increase from 10 mb/sec to 100 mb/sec, significantly increasing the speed at which users can pull information from the Internet.

In addition to increasing the capacity of its public computing centers, LFPL is asking for funds to add new computers with Internet access and create service programs at seven libraries serving underserved populations – in Downtown, southwest Louisville, near-west Louisville, and the Shawnee, Shelby Park, Iroquois and Bon Air neighborhoods. Adding computers also will entail tables, network equipment, updated electrical service, and some modest remodeling and reallocation of space for computer use areas. In these instances where the branches require new floor layouts, the space will not only become more efficient, it will be more meaningful and creative for the customers.

The service programs will focus on job searching and preparation, family and youth programming and education, and technology training needed by consumers to secure and maintain broadband service to the home. This will include training for library staff to support the program, three new librarian positions, and public awareness and marketing activities to drive consumers into the public computer centers.

For people who do not have computer access in their home or place of work, the new skills that these programs can provide will be critical for finding new jobs and supporting families. The new proposed programs in this grant request are sustainable and will reap lasting benefits for Library customers and surrounding neighborhoods.

Connectivity and subscription rates will be the only ongoing cost to the Library, which it will build into its budget if granted this funding opportunity. The e-Rate program qualifies LFPL for an 80% discount of commercial provider rates, allowing the Library to leverage this grant for major technological improvements as well as big savings.

As part of the Louisville Metro Government, the Library has faced major cutbacks just like cities around the country. With a local unemployment at 9% and state unemployment at 11%, city government was forced to cut back on city hours, including all library branches, downsize staff, and reduce some services. But for Federal funding made possible by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Library

would not be able to complete the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program during the grant period.

The Library has had many successes with other programs it has initiated and run out of its various branches, demonstrating the need of its customers to have a place to gather, learn and participate. Its management team has XX of years in library administration and has demonstrated the ability to complete this proposed project and achieve the intended results of the grant.

According to the demographics of each of the seven library branches' service areas, these customers are underserved due to lack of complete broadband coverage. Whether there is broadband access in the neighborhood or not, the overriding question is whether the families in the library's service areas have the disposable income to purchase the necessary computer or other device to get to the Internet, and to pay the monthly subscription rate to maintain that access. Customers rely heavily on the Library's computers and there are regularly waiting lists for the computers at several branches.