

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: COUNTY OF ANOKA

Project Title: Anoka CAN (Computer Access Now)

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Anoka CAN (Computer Access Now) addresses key consequences of the current recession and of the lack of broadband access in Anoka County. Led by Anoka County, supported by County financial and technical resources, Anoka CAN is a collaborative approach amongst Anoka-Ramsey Community College, two library systems (Anoka County's and Columbia Heights), three school districts (Anoka-Hennepin, Columbia Heights and St. Francis), and Anoka County's WorkForce Center. Over half of the geography of Anoka County is underserved ' without access to minimal broadband speeds ' placing our citizens at severe disadvantage to participate and compete in today's society. To address this issue, the County is initiating a tightly coupled PCC application and a public-private CCI solution and joining in support of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) PCC application. Anoka County has historically lagged behind the seven counties comprising the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area now with the greatest seven county unemployment rate; the lowest percentage of college graduates; and, the highest commute costs to the centers of economic development. Within county boundaries we have pockets of poverty, racial and new immigrant concentrations, high unemployment, areas where 38 different languages are spoken and low income families. Even with success in bringing broadband to our citizens through CCI, these pockets of need will continue to exist. Numerous studies affirm the relationship between lower incomes, computer ownership rates and the lack of higher speed Internet access. Our pockets of need cannot, by themselves, move into today's networked society. This is why our need for Public Computing Centers is so dire. The libraries have attempted to serve this need for access. They have some computers and some very limited access through congested T.1 connections. But during this recession the pressure on all governments to maintain services has been overwhelming. Anoka County has seen revenue from historical state allocations decline during 2009 by 19% or \$3,200,000. The unavoidable consequence, reluctantly taken, has been to reduce library hours, and with it public access. Wait times for the few available computers is more than people can bear ' after hours of waiting, they leave. Fair scheduling and re-scheduling of computers is to no avail. There simply is not the capacity to serve a needy public. Anoka-Ramsey Community College also experienced reductions in State aid during 2009 of 11% or \$1,700,00 and at a time when experiencing a double-digit year-over-year growth in enrollment. In fact, enrollment, since initial tracking began in 2004, grew from 7,286 credit hours to 21,648 ' an amazing 200% increase. Yet despite this growth, and cutbacks, it appears this year will see another reduction of \$1,680,000. Other partners in Anoka CAN have experienced this frustrating rise in need married with systemic problems that, if not addressed, leave a sense of hopelessness. Many residents are lack basic skills necessary for today's jobs. They lack basic computer literacy. They lack tools and knowledge about office systems. They do not possess the latest techniques to find

employment in today's networked world. For those slightly better off, they often lack requisite skills sets to make their businesses grow. They need to compete using an enticing web presence and strong marketing outreach. The growth of small businesses is essential for the local economy and to create the jobs people seek. More than just Internet access is required. To address these pressing issues, to climb back from the devastation of this recession, we need to train those affected residents: from people with limited computer skills, to those needing the ability to grow small businesses and create jobs. Anoka CAN developed three goals. First, implement centers that serve as public access to the Internet. Second, train those needing computer literacy. Third, develop a three stage curriculum that addresses skills and know how to (a) find a job; (b) be fully capable and skillfully operate office application systems ' how to do a job; and, (c) to be knowledgeable in the modern technologies for web and print design, accounting systems and small business development. The alignment with ARRA statutory goals and BTOP purposes could not be clearer: preserve and create jobs, promote economic recovery, assist those most impacted by recession; stabilize local government budgets; target underserved areas for broadband and provide broadband education, awareness, training, access, equipment; to support libraries, schools, community colleges and other community organizations and to facilitate greater use of broadband services by vulnerable populations. Anoka CAN began by addressing those targets. We sought out the pockets of concern and established thirteen (13) sites, each in the heart of vulnerable populations and underserved locations: nine libraries, two schools and two community college sites. Anoka CAN's focused approach provided for the upgrade of 35 existing computer systems and the addition of 228 laptops, creating a total of 340 systems available system-wide. These computer systems were judiciously applied based on the need in each center. Four centers were dubbed training hubs and provided with additional instructional tools. Communications equipment and circuits will be upgraded through either Anoka County's CCI project, if approved, or with local providers. The CCI approach would offer substantially better performance and reduced costs. Anoka-Hennepin schools will address computer literacy through Adult Learning classes to be held at all training hubs. This curriculum was developed in concert with Microsoft's Digital Literacy Program. It provides instructor lead learning from basic computer introduction ' features, terminology and use ' through Internet usage, email, messaging and standard applications; and ultimately strives to introduce the student to today's networked world. These courses will be offered at multiple hubs with day, evening and weekend classes to conveniently reach the greatest number of people. Anoka CAN expects to serve 4,680 students during the first two years. Anoka County's WorkForce Center will provide all job seekers, unemployed adults as well as teens and seniors, in need of job search assistance, workshops to aid in finding and locating jobs, using the Internet effectively in both sourcing and posting applications, and utilizing the array of on-line resources. Once trained on these resources, job seekers will be prepared to conduct a self-directed job search and utilize either the WorkForce Center or PCC sites for continued Internet access. An additional course will address career evaluation: how to explore, assess, and evaluate skills and desires, followed by how and where to take action. The WorkForce Center expects to serve 1,500 people with this skill development. It is targeted at the unemployed/underemployed. Anoka-Ramsey Community College will conduct the next two stages: office application skills and advanced applications for small business development. Office software skills provide beginning, intermediate and advanced training in Microsoft's Word, Excel, Access and additional classes in PowerPoint, Publisher, Outlook and Visio. Continuing education credits will be given. Courses will be provided free to unemployed, displaced workers and qualified low-income

people. Anoka CAN expects to train 256 students in this subject matter providing 20,480 hours of training during the first two years. Anoka-Ramsey's Community College's highest level of training under Anoka CAN will be directed at advanced business applications and business development. Business applications will include web and print design (e.g. HTML and Adobe CS applications: Dreamweaver, Flash, Photoshop, etc.), QuickBooks for payroll and accounting. Also offered will be specific knowledge on small business development. The intention is to spur both personal and business growth. Anoka CAN expects to serve 214 students, providing 15,560 hours of instruction during the first two years. The combination of building public access to broadband and developing people's skill in using today's networked marketplace will accrue benefits for years to come. The overall cost of this effort is \$3,311,516, of which Anoka CAN's partners will make cash contributions of \$833,969 or 25.18%. Through Anoka CAN we seek to open up 759,964 hourly user access slots at 13 public computer sites, enable 470 students with office application and business development skills, train 4,680 persons in need of basic computer literacy, assist 1,500 people in networked job search skills, and make assistance available to over 12,000 unemployed. Anoka CAN believes this is a fully aligned and powerful impact on the goals sought by ARRA.