

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Project Title: Opportunities and Pathways to Education (OPEN) at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Problem Opportunities and Pathways to Education (OPEN) will address two major challenges facing today's workforce and learners: 1) Employment, career and educational success is dependent upon computer and Internet access, knowledge and skill sets. Increasingly, employment, education, healthcare and government services are offered online in part or total. 2) In today's knowledge economy, where nearly every job involves processing information electronically, a post-secondary credential is essential. Many of the barriers to overcoming these challenges stem from limited or no access to computers, the Internet, or the knowledge and skills needed to use them, including: 1. There is limited access to the Internet at current public centers. Possibilities for participating in meaningful training or education at these public sites do not exist. Persons simply cannot use the computers for longer periods of time or without multiple distractions. 2. Technical support is lacking or non-existent in current public access centers. 3. Language and culture are often barriers to success. 4. Computer and broadband application training can be costly and is often delivered at inconvenient times and locations. Approach Through OPEN, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) will increase individuals' access to and skills in using computers and broadband, eliminating a barrier to education and employment. The project targets individuals typically underrepresented in higher education: low-income, minorities, first generation, immigrants and refugees. This is in direct alignment with MnSCU's top strategic priority: 'Increase access and opportunity and raise Minnesota's participation and completion rates by recruiting and retaining students from low-income families, students of color, first-generation college-goers and students from immigrant families.' Thirteen of MnSCU's 32 institutions (12 community colleges and one university) will create 43 PCCs. In addition to those locations, 8-12 Adult Basic Education (ABE) PCCs will be established in partnership with local providers at community college locations. Strategies include: 1. Providing public access to computers and broadband applications in locations and at times accessible to those who don't have access who are pursuing a pathway to higher education or skills for employment, including dislocated workers and the long-term unemployed, 2. Creating 8-12 new ABE PCCs at MnSCU community colleges through a competitive grant process, in collaboration with Minnesota Literacy Council and ABE. 3. Conducting outreach and technology skills training to individuals pursuing a pathway to higher education or skills for employment. 4. Providing cost-effective and easy-to-access training and education that will improve the economic and employment status of individuals served. 5. Providing online tools and services to facilitate career and education planning for traditionally underrepresented individuals. An OPEN 'Toolkit' will be developed and tailored for PCC users. It will provide seamless access to existing online resources and generate

usage statistics to characterize and inform PCC operations. Best practices learned will be shared across the system to maximize opportunities and pathways to education. Areas To Be Served This initiative provides local access at facilities whose service areas include nearly 60% of the state's population. It reaches from the northern-most point of the state (International Falls) to communities along or near the Iowa border (Austin and Albert Lea). The participating schools and their partners are geographically dispersed throughout the state. At the two partner community colleges that are located in Minneapolis/St. Paul, nearly half of students are minorities. Two community colleges are located in the Twin Cities' suburbs, a region that now reportedly has more people living in poverty than in Minneapolis and St. Paul combined. Throughout the metropolitan and surrounding region, job losses, foreclosures and disappearing insurance coverage have pushed requests for food stamps, medical assistance and emergency housing aid to record levels. Five community colleges are located in northern MN, a region whose economy based on mining and logging is facing even greater employment challenges than the rest of the state. Three community colleges and the university are located in rural parts of the state (west central, south central, southern) that are challenged by low wages and rapid increases in populations traditionally underserved by higher education. OPEN will target low-income, minorities, first-generation college-goers, immigrants and refugees to provide greater opportunities to increase their basic and occupational skills and to acquire credentials that lead to family-supporting employment. The importance is clear. Minnesota has over 251,000 adults in their prime working age who have less than a twelfth-grade education, and more than 900,000 of the state's adults have not entered post-secondary education. In addition, over 360,000 Minnesotans are foreign-born, and more than 60,000 residents speak little or no English. These demographic factors have significant consequences for current and future economic health.

Applicant Qualifications With its 32 institutions, including 25 two-year colleges and seven state universities, the MnSCU system is the largest single provider of higher education in the state of Minnesota. The colleges and universities operate 54 campuses in 47 Minnesota communities and serve about 250,000 students in credit-based courses. Overall, the system produces about 33,500 graduates each year. In addition to credit-based courses, the system offers customized training programs that serve about 153,200 employees from 6,000 Minnesota businesses each year. All of the system's 2-year community and technical colleges have an open admissions policy, which means anyone with a high school diploma or GED may enroll. The system office provides coordination and leadership on many special and sector-based initiatives. The experience to manage the project can be illustrated through its other successful system-wide efforts including bi-annual federal Carl Perkins funding of \$ 19,433,205 for career and technical education, a \$1 million federal Department of Labor grant project involving 10 system colleges, a \$ 1,100,000 Department of Education grant funding a veterans re-entry project, and a \$450,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation, Shifting Gears project, designed to prepare ABE students to enter and progress in postsecondary education leading to high-demand occupations.

Jobs The project will directly create or save 65 jobs. Twenty-six indirect jobs are attributed to the project. Fifty-one jobs are estimated to be induced by the project.

Cost: The overall cost of the project is \$13,127,615. The federal contribution is \$8,782,576, with MnSCU institutions and partners providing \$4,345,039 in matching resources.