

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: LAFAYETTE CITY PARISH CONSOLIDATED GOVERNMENT

Project Title: Lafayette Parish Public Computer Centers

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Lafayette Parish is a cultural mixture of tradition and progressiveness with a rich French heritage blended with Spanish, American, Indian and African influences which result in a colorful combination of lifestyles and attitudes. Unfortunately, these traditions include a history of underemployment, low literacy rates, crime and poverty, which have been handed down from generation to generation. Approximately 21% of Lafayette's population is at or below the poverty level; 6.1% are unemployed and 10.3% are 65 years or older. The Lafayette Parish School Systems has approximately 30,000 students in its 38 schools. Of those schools, 25 are considered underperforming schools in decline with little or no growth. Additionally, 60% of the students participate in federal free or reduced lunch programs, an indicator that their families are below the poverty line. The need for education and training in Lafayette is significant. The Lafayette Public Library system enhances the quality of life of the community by providing free and equal access to high-quality, cost effective services for information, life-long learning, recreation and cultural enrichment. Since 1998, the Library has provided access to the internet, a variety of informational and educational electronic resources, and training for the general public from within the library facilities with the goal of bridging the Digital Divide in our community. Now more than ever the citizens of Lafayette need reliable access to the internet in their daily lives. School children need additional practice and assistance with language, math and science. Employers are turning away from newspaper classified ads; job seekers must be tech savvy to locate and apply for positions, and they often need other computer skills in order to qualify for available jobs. Residents who are not fluent in English need assistance to participate more fully in the community. Parents and grandparents are beginning to rely more heavily on technology to keep in touch with family and friends. Grant funds will enable Lafayette to quickly expand its service offerings as we work with community groups to bridge the Digital Divide by reaching more people and by providing more opportunities and resources than are currently available in the current library facilities. The project goal is to educate our citizens and increase access to the Internet in our community. This grant program will allow the Library to expand the range of training it offers to meet the needs of school-aged children and teens, senior citizens, and the job-seeking public. The Library currently provides over 180 computers for public access throughout its ten library locations, laptop training classrooms at three larger library facilities, and a small mobile computer lab for use at the other seven library facilities. The library subscribes to various electronic resources and databases to assist with the research needs of the public and students, and to assist with test preparation. The library employs one full-time librarian trainer who offers up to 20 hours per week of computer training classes, including basic computing skills, software applications and use of the databases at no cost to library patrons. Since 2007, computer usage in Lafayette's public libraries has

increased approximately 58%. In response to increased numbers of patrons bringing their own laptops and smart phones into the library, the Library has added 802.11g wireless access in every library branch. The Library also has increased its connection to the internet from 6 mbps to 50 mbps to accommodate the increasing demand. Lafayette Consolidated Government proposes to expand its current public computer centers, upgrade outdated and slow computers, establish new computer centers, and increase the level of hands-on training and databases available to its residents. This effort will be in conjunction with the Housing Authority of the City of Lafayette and Lafayette's two Senior Centers. Grant funds will allow Lafayette to offer additional hours of computer training, and expand its training offerings to neighborhood and community locations outside of the traditional library environments, including the Housing Authority, Senior Centers, and recreation centers. This will enable people with limited transportation to access and learn how to navigate the information highway, to cross the Digital Divide, and to take advantage of opportunities that many more affluent citizens take for granted. The Library will acquire new electronic resources to assist people with job skills and career transitioning, as well as educational and language resources to assist with writing and testing skills. These new resources will enhance the Library's current abilities to assist the public, and will compliment the new databases that the State Library plans to acquire through its recently awarded BTOP grant. The Housing Authority addresses the housing and community development needs of the lowest to moderate income residents throughout Lafayette, currently serving approximately 5,223 residents. The Housing Authority continues to identify and develop activities and programs to create safe, decent, accessible and affordable housing to this lower-income population. The Housing Authority also implements a variety of programs and activities to enhance the quality of life and promote advancement for the community it serves. Although much progress has been made by the LHA in providing decent housing and quality-of-life enhancements to this segment of society; many limitations, disadvantages and problems still plague this vulnerable population: ' 90% of HA residents have incomes that are at or below poverty level ' 90% of all HA households are without computers in the home ' 94% of the HA households are headed by single-parents ' 100% of the junior high and high school students living in HA housing are attending schools which have been identified as poor performing schools ' 74% of parents or heads of households do not have full-time employment. ' 60% of HA households are without personal transportation The Housing Authority proposes to create computer centers within three (3) of its housing developments. These centers would provide tremendous opportunities for educational growth and advancement for all participants by granting easy access to a safe learning environment with up-to-date computers equipped with broadband internet and software applications for educational enhancement, career-building, and homework assistance. Formal computer training would also be provided from professional instructors. Lafayette's two Senior Citizens' Centers, the Greenhouse and Rosehouse, have been providing a wide array of programs and services to Lafayette's senior population, aged 55 and older, for over 20 years. The Greenhouse currently provides health and wellness education and services, recreational activities, arts and crafts, and computer access and training. The current computer center is using outdated computers that have been discarded by Lafayette Consolidated Government, therefore, the Greenhouse proposes to upgrade their current computer center with new computers. The Rosehouse serves as a health and wellness facility for seniors. This center provides passive and active recreation, supervised access to exercise equipment, health and wellness education and programs, and computer access for educational and recreational purposes. The proposed new and enhanced computer centers in Lafayette

would create jobs, improve job skills, improve education, and enhance health for all local residents. The combined efforts of the Lafayette Public Library and the Housing Authority will assist with a critical step toward ensuring higher academic achievement for all students, reducing the student achievement gaps, and preparing students and the general public to be more effective citizens in the global marketplace. The upgraded Senior Center computers would enhance the health and wellness of Lafayette's senior citizens and provide computer access for educational and recreational purposes. This program expects to create a total 42 ' direct, indirect and induced. The anticipated cost of implementing this program is \$3.9 million.