

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation

Project Title: Digital Philadelphia: Neighborhood Internet Access Project

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

The 21st century will undoubtedly be defined by the advent of the digital age; however, in Philadelphia 41% of residents do not have Internet access at home and are being left behind without the ability to connect with job opportunities, healthcare information, or educational resources. With an increasing amount of information and resources available exclusively online, Digital Philadelphia: Neighborhood Internet Access Project provides a unique national model for a community-based approach to increase Internet adoption among vulnerable populations.

The Neighborhood Internet Access Project provides a sound operational plan that combines the resources and community penetration of a large urban public library system with several key partners who each work with a network of community organizations that combined reach more than one million people. In this way, the project will be far reaching—impacting each neighborhood within the target area—while utilizing respected representatives within existing community structures to ensure cohesiveness. The unique coalition will initially reach a target area of 144 census tracts with approximately 442,672 residents (data from 2008 MRI Internet Use Profile from Knight Center for Digital Excellence), where at least 52% of households have not adopted the Internet. (See Attachment 1 for maps of target area).

Central to the NIAP model is a city-wide web portal that offers relevant and easily navigable content to connect residents with a multitude of community organizations, businesses, and government agencies, providing vital health, education, job readiness, and financial information. As part of the portal the Free Library will redesign its website, which receives 22 million hits a month, to make it easier to find the wealth of resources available, and will create pages specifically for job seekers, small businesses, and entrepreneurs. By combining clear language with pertinent content in a format that is interactive, the portal will encourage adoption among 25,000 people with limited computer skills. An oversight group will manage the portal and develop a business plan to sustain it; the portal will also help sustain training efforts by providing a vehicle for computer literacy training videos.

Utilizing four primary training models that include computer literacy instruction in multiple formats, equipment, free Internet subscriptions, and access to public computers, the initiative proposes to result in at least 39,850 new broadband adopters and will reach more than 50,300 through trainings and the portal. In order to reach this underserved audience, a broad based marketing campaign targeted to these communities will encourage residents to attend trainings and learn to use the roughly 1,000 public computers of several partner organizations.

The training models have been selected because of the variety of barriers and vulnerable populations they address, and because the partners are well connected within the target communities through a network of community organizations. Digital Impact Group targets households and Small Disadvantaged Businesses (SDBs) and will provide 2,600 households and 400 SDBs in the target area with their “TechPacks,” which include a new mini laptop, training, and Internet subscription. Media Mobilizing Project (MMP) responds to studies that indicate the importance of engaging hard-to-reach audiences through content generation; since youth and those interested in civic engagement are often initially attracted to the Internet through social media, MMP will drive adoption by offering training in audio and video production and web design to 3,000 participants, enmeshing the Internet into their social and educational lives. Recognizing the disproportionate number of people in the target area struggling with HIV and other infectious diseases, Philadelphia FIGHT will encourage adoption by working with shelters and recovery houses to provide 1,500 people with training and free computer access to manage their health and address other social or economic challenges. Four Free Library computer labs and four Philadelphia Housing Authority Neighborhood Network Centers will offer scheduled “open hours” with computer assistants offering help with specific tasks like writing a résumé or setting up an email account, as well as trainings in computer literacy and specific topic areas like English Language Learners, adult and post secondary education, job readiness, and small business. The Library’s trainings will serve an estimated 16,000 people.

All components of NIAP will be evaluated to assess the impact on broadband adoption—through household or institutional subscriptions or regular use of a public computer, defined for this project as an average of once a week. In addition the project will track the number of people trained, including an analysis of the types and topics of trainings that are most popular, and demographic information. The marketing plan will also be evaluated to determine if broadband interest has been generated, and the portal will track adoption and usability information.

The Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation, in existence since 1891, is serving as the applicant and has a long and successful record administering large and complex grants, including multi-million dollar federal grants with multiple partners/subgrantees. The Foundation’s professional Finance Department manages an \$8 million annual budget and a \$15 million endowment. Marketing staff have many years of experience in the Philadelphia area, and the Library’s dedicated IT Department manages a system of

1,800 public and staff PCs as well as a robust website. The Free Library Foundation, which supports the country's 10th largest library system, is confident it can manage a \$14,985,577 sustainable adoption grant. Additionally, the project offers a strong sustainability model and will create 68 jobs and retain 27 jobs.