

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Regents of the University of Minnesota

Project Title: Broadband Access Project

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Our Broadband Access Project addresses the problem of the growing disparity created by the Digital Divide. Evidence indicates that the Digital Divide is increasing in the State of Minnesota and the Twin Cities in particular. By 2007 while Internet usage increased overall across the State, “The socio-demographic factors of age and income are still important determiners of who has computers, Internet and broadband. The older age groups and lower-income groups are still less likely to have computers, Internet or broadband [...]” In fact, several studies indicate that in Minnesota for households with an annual income of less than \$15,000 only twenty-six percent owned a computer and only eighteen percent had access to the Internet at home. More specifically the Twin Cities has the second starkest differential between city poverty rates and suburban poverty rates in the country. The central cities’ poverty rate is 4.5 times higher than the suburban poverty rate, which is a higher ratio than the Baltimore, Detroit, Cleveland, and Philadelphia metro areas. Our project will close the Digital Divide in four federally designated high poverty areas in Minneapolis (Empowerment Zones) and St. Paul (Enterprise Zones). Our approach is a demonstration project based on model replication and adaptation. The model is a successful, three-year, on-campus University computer lab (BCED lab) that has provided broadband training, Internet usage, and relevant software and content aimed at economic and community development to 378 nonprofits and small and disadvantaged businesses that serve vulnerable populations. The BCED computer lab will serve as a training hub for the eleven community computer labs. Data gathered for the BTOP project indicate these centers are not consistent in their broadband and Internet delivery and are operating at less than full capacity. It is fair to say that currently ten community computers labs are under serving their underserved populations due to financial, educational, and technological constraints. The 11th site, Glendale Townhomes (public housing) currently has no access to broadband. With BTOP support the BCED model will be adapted and rolled-out as a demonstration model working with eleven community computers labs serving north and south Minneapolis and the Frogtown area of St. Paul including the new lab in public housing. These labs will be standardized and upgraded, and training will be provided (initially at the BCED hub, then at the community lab) using materials designed in a culturally, linguistically, and technologically appropriate manner. Each computer lab will be equipped with additional computers to meet increased demand, access to high-speed broadband and the Internet, software, and printers. Training will include materials for new users, nonprofits, small businesses as well as a curriculum designed uniquely to access information on education, health care, job opportunities, ‘knowledge economy jobs,’ emergency information, economic and financial literacy as well as information for children and youth. A Broadband Apprenticeship Team, designed to create both new jobs and training, will support each computer lab,

provide training for the users as well as upgrading the skill set of the existing computer center staff. Qualitative and quantitative data will be collected and analyzed over the life of the project to shape the curriculum development designed to meet the specific cultural and linguistic needs of the vulnerable populations served. A public awareness and advertising campaign via appropriate venues will draw these users to the sites. The project will increase the number of broadband and Internet users in the aforementioned zones by 17,000 and will be replicable and sustainable.

Three offices at the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Multicultural Media Consortium (MMMC) are uniquely qualified to carry out this project. The Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center (UROC), Office for Business and Community Development (BCED), and Extension Services have decades of combined experience in public engagement, broadband and Internet training, writing computer curriculum for various public audiences, and education. MMMC is experienced in communicating successfully with under-represented and ethnic immigrant groups in the community; in other words, designing materials with appropriate linguistic and cultural sensitivity. We are proposing a framework for success, which includes continued investment in the "basics" by making sure education, health care, and public safety meet the needs of the population and increasing income and wealth by helping minority groups close the gap on economic measures. The Broadband Access Project will create 36 new jobs, save 12 jobs, and train an estimated 17,000 individuals from under-served populations in broadband and Internet use and create countless opportunities to access information that changes the lives of the users. The overall cost of the project is \$3,661,087.