

## **Broadband USA Applications Database**

**Applicant Name:** State Library of Louisiana

**Project Title:** Louisiana Libraries Connecting People to Their Potential

**Project Type:** Public Computer Center

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### **Executive Summary**

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Louisiana faces many critical social challenges. Statistics reveal that we have an unhealthy and poorly educated citizenry with a high incarceration rate. Although we have a rich cultural heritage, we lack the culture of literacy needed for our people to be successful. Until we build a literate society and a society with the 21st century skills required in a modern workforce, these problems will continue to plague us. In today's global economy, access to broadband is a necessity for success and should be available to all. In Louisiana, last year we saw over 6,500,000 uses of computers in public libraries, which clearly demonstrates that people do not have broadband or computers in their homes.

This proposal will offer (1) laptops for the general public that can be checked out from Louisiana public libraries, (2) assistive technology for those with disabilities so that they can access broadband from every public library in Louisiana, (3) 2774 technology and soft skills workshops for the general public hosted in public libraries, (4) access to online career development tools and high quality health and wellness information (5) online tutoring for all ages and (6) creation of 4 mobile laptop labs that will be used to deliver additional training across the state. We seek to eliminate the digital and educational divide that we know exists in Louisiana and that keeps many of our citizens vulnerable and disenfranchised. The service area is all 64 parishes (counties) in the state and complements our Sustainable Broadband Adoption proposal #970 by updating and expanding libraries' broadband services to the public.

Philosophically we deeply believe that libraries have both an opportunity and a responsibility to change Louisiana's standings in the most important indicators of success. We are the University of the People. By engaging our citizens from the neediest socioeconomic groups, we can better equip them with the tools they need to be able to succeed and to compete for jobs. We believe doing this will bring about the economic development that will allow Louisiana to compete on a global stage.

The 2008 NTIA list of broadband adoption rates shows Louisiana 11th from the bottom. 57.1% of households in Louisiana are without broadband access, either because it is not available or because it is unaffordable. When you tie this factor to our low standing in most indicators of success, our children

born into areas of poverty are almost certain to fail and repeat the cycle they were born into. Some of our most telling indicators are:

- As many as 20% of Louisiana's adults are non-literate and not able to read simple instructions.
- More than 18% of our population lives below the poverty level. The national average is 13.6%.
- America's Health Rankings, 2008 ranked Louisiana #50 & in the bottom 2 positions since 1990.
- Louisiana ranks #3 in obesity.
- Louisiana is #1 in the number of cancer deaths per 100,000 population.
- Louisiana ranks 5th highest in the nation in crime rate per 100,000 population.
- In 2008 the labor force participation rate for Louisiana was 59.4%. The national average is 63.4%. This explains Louisiana's relatively low unemployment rate.
- Over 17,000 legally blind and more than 57,000 seriously visually impaired Louisianans cannot read standard print.
- Approximately 26%, or over 1.13 million, of Louisiana's 4.3 million residents are individuals with disabilities or functional limitations, including some 493,660 persons over the age of 64.

Libraries make a difference in people's lives. Libraries can make a bigger difference by providing high quality information, technology, expert assistance, greater access to broadband and making the world of information more accessible to those with disabilities. Currently Louisiana libraries do not have the funding to do this.

The public libraries in Louisiana are very heavily used, but are funded by dedicated property taxes that, in the rural areas of the state, amount to a very small operating budget. They are routinely in need of more funding, more staffing, and newer equipment. The State Library of Louisiana has worked diligently to build upon and sustain the public library networks but with 340 outlets, this is a challenge. With Louisiana facing the same financial crisis as the rest of the nation, our economic outlook remains bleak for several years. A project of the size and scope of our application will not be possible without BTOP funding.

The State Library will work in partnership with libraries, state government, local government, and all media outlets, including Louisiana Public Broadcasting, to inform potential users of the training

opportunities we will be offering. This media campaign will especially focus in on entities that serve the underserved, such as the Louisiana Workforce Commission, to ensure that we are reaching the unemployed.