

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit

Project Title: Wii Generations: The Web, The Internet, & InterGenerations (WiiGens)

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

The Greatest Generation and Baby Boomers are among the last to embrace computers and the Internet—more so in rural areas such as the five northcentral Pennsylvania counties of the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU): Columbia, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder, and Union. To address this, the CSIU and 3 Area Agencies on Aging proposes Wii Generations: The Web, The Internet, & InterGenerations (WiiGens). WiiGens will take the Wii system that seniors have embraced and introduce them to the power of the Internet and broadband capabilities.

Area Agencies on Aging serve seniors age 60+ years in 24 senior action centers located throughout the 1,700 square mile region. Each senior center has at least one public computer, and all but two have broadband services. WiiGens will expand broadband to the West End Senior Center and the Wilburton Senior Center.

According to the May 2008 eMarketer, seniors who use the Internet have some college education (75%) with an annual household income of \$55,000. But US Census data indicates that this region's seniors are more numerous, less educated, and poorer than Pennsylvania or the US. Many of the region's 43,000 seniors age 65 and older were once coal miners, farmers, homemakers, or blue-collar workers with little or no contact with computer technology. Over 95% of residents are white and live in small towns or rural areas.

Agency Directors cite a lack of familiarity with computers and lack of instruction as the main causes for seniors not using current resources. Though Agencies have used high school and university students for training, these efforts have been inconsistent and unreliable. But much to the surprise of Agency Directors, seniors enthusiastically embraced the Wii. WiiGens will use seniors' enthusiasm for the Wii to develop and implement innovative computer and Internet courses that cover topics of particular interest to them:

- Use of search engines (Google, Yahoo, etc)
- Keeping in touch with family/friends (email, social networking, Skype, etc)
- Gathering information
- Health-related information (medicare.gov, brain exercises, MyGeisinger (local electronic healthcare records system), etc)

- Exchanging photos/videos with family/friends
- Online shopping
- Internet safety

The courses will be run by three full-time trainers using proven engaging instructional practices aimed at adults who, research indicates, want content to meet immediate needs.

Seniors, more than others, need a training environment that is small, comfortable, and has low trainer-to-participant ratios. To facilitate this, WiiGens will provide training at the senior centers, create training groups of 4-6, coordinate with the CSIU's pregnant & parenting teens to act as "coaches" who will work with 2-3 seniors, and develop peer coaches who will also work with 2-3 seniors as well as provide on-site assistance when the trainer/teen is not available.

Among the instructional approaches will be informal tournaments that use a secure website to post scores from Wii games and Internet activities (e.g., memory games, scavenger hunts, e-pal communications, etc). Two to three times a year, a virtual "WiiGens A3 Regional Tournament" will be conducted which will go beyond the use of Wii to include Internet activities.

WiiGens courses are anticipated to stimulate demand for broadband services among seniors who may find the purchase of a home computer and installation a bit daunting. A WiiGens technology specialist will consult with seniors to provide neutral guidance on the purchase of a computer and broadband, and install the system in their homes. The specialist will also provide "help desk" services.

The estimated number of potential users at the public computer centers is: 2,000-2,500.

The estimated number of potential broadband subscribers is: 600-700.

The CSIU's Technology Group is a state leader in educational technology. In the mid-1990's, the Technology Group initiated implementation of a rural fiber optic community network originally funded by the state's Link-to-Learn technology initiative. This network, aimed at school districts, was critical in offering high-quality broadband services long before many rural regions received such services.

The Technology Group retains its expertise by continually upgrading the system and providing economic leverage for districts. It has successfully implemented projects on a timely basis at a local, state, and federal level. From 2001-06, the CSIU purchased, configured, delivered, and installed over 5,000 computers for the CyberStart project, a state initiative placing 1-4 computers in over 1,600 early child care facilities throughout PA. Like WiiGens, training for these systems was tailored for a specific audience—early childcare providers—with the development of a software "image" geared towards pre-school children.

At the national level, the CSIU consults with the Data Quality Curriculum Task Force of the US Dept of Education's National Forum on Education Statistics to develop a 12-lesson curriculum for schools and districts on creating and maintaining a culture of high-quality data. Most recently, the

CSIU—in partnership with International Society for Technology in Education—is enhancing and providing training and presentations on the School 2.0 eTool kit. This resource was developed by the US Dept of Ed to assist schools and communities on developing a common education vision that can be supported by technology.

The number of full-time jobs to be created is four: one telecommunications technology specialist and three telecommunications technology specialists/trainers. Quantifying the overall economic impact of WiiGens is difficult. Significant amounts of hardware and software will be purchased; expansion of broadband services is anticipated; and the foundation for telemedicine and other homecare services is being laid.

REQUEST: Federal: \$807,440 Match: \$226,067 Total: \$1,033,507