

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Kansas Farm Bureau Foundation

Project Title: Connect Kansas - Sedan Broadband Communications Center

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

This Project would create a “public computer center” and program for the Sedan Region of rural South Central Kansas. This Region includes the four counties of Chautauqua, Elk, Wilson, and Montgomery, with a combined population of approximately 51,000. The Region is among the most chronically economically distressed communities in Kansas and the Central Great Plains Region.

This Region is experiencing generational economic crisis. Depopulation, weak job and personal income growth, coupled with major job losses created by the 2008/2009 recession (unemployment rate in June 2009 of 10.1%: Source: Kansas Department of Labor) and recent natural disasters (flooding) have created unacceptable poverty and unemployment. There is a profound need for appropriate, effective and sustainable economic development. Central to this need is a strategy for economic diversification that can create a wider range of economic opportunities. The cornerstone to economic diversification is access to and utilization of broadband related technologies. While the Region is economically challenged, it is located within the larger Wichita/Tulsa Metropolitan corridor. Increased access to and use of information technologies for education, health care and business represents the Region’s greatest opportunities for economic and social renewal. This Center and the proposed program could help the Region “connect” into the economic growth of the Wichita/Tulsa Corridor. The proposed Center and Strategy will directly enable the kind of human, organization and economic development to occur that is critically important to the future of the community. This Center, located in a historic hotel building, will be come a focal point for a community wide commitment to broadband adoption.

Number of potential users of the PCC: 2,200-15,000

The SBCC will serve as a base operation and incubator for local technology planning teams focused on sustaining broadband adoption strategies. This strategy, as supported by a complimentary Kansas grant under the BTOP Sustainable Adoption category, seeks to tap into the same spirit that successfully addressed challenges related to the electrification of rural America. By working through existing county or regional structures to engage with community leaders, these leadership teams will encourage technology availability and adoption first by assisting community leaders in identifying and utilizing

relevant strategies. This highly collaborative and localized effort focuses on developing a comprehensive technology growth plan for the community – one that encompasses the current and future needs of all relevant sectors in the community, from healthcare, education and agriculture to business and industry, local government and tourism.

The applicant is qualified to implement the project and achieve its intended results through its partnership with the Southeast Kansas Education Service Center (SEKESC), which is the state's leading provider of distance education through broadband application. The SEKESC will provide curriculum advice, purchase all relevant equipment, and will be instrumental in the physical setup of the Center.

In addition, the applicant's collaboration with Connected Nation, the country's foremost practitioner of broadband supply and demand analysis, will assist in project implementation. The applicant is collaborating with Connected Nation on a complimentary grant to ensure broadband adoption sustainability not only in Sedan but across the state.

The state has also signed a contract with Connected Nation to provide statewide broadband availability mapping.

Jobs to be created:

The Sedan Region is experiencing chronic depopulation. Between 1970 and 2006 the Area's population declined by 14%. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009) These depopulation conditions are creating significant economic crisis and decline. We expect that this project will primarily save jobs through enhanced personal, employment and business broadband access and skill development. Once this Center is fully operational we expect its contribution to job creation or saved to be 15 to 30 jobs annually. (RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, 2009)

The overall cost of the project, including federal funding and match, is estimated at \$2,278,546.