Applicant Name: Blue Mountain Community College

Project Title: Leaping the Digital Divide in Rural Eastern Oregon

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

_______________________ Executive Summary _________________________

Covering over 21,000 square miles in 9 counties in rural eastern Oregon is only one challenge in narrowing the Digital Divide. Equally as daunting is the task of introducing new users and vulnerable populations to the benefits of broadband. Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) proposes to develop an innovative and easy-to-understand broadband training program to be offered at 42 community anchor institutions throughout rural eastern Oregon. BMCC’s key technical partner, ezWireless, LLC, proposes a unique approach for equipping the small, rural community anchor institutions with modern, innovative wireless LAN and 802.11n wireless broadband capabilities. Together this project delivers engaging, innovative but replicable and sustainable results that “leaps the Digital Divide.”

This proposal is innovative, unique and, most important, effective. It is innovative because it delivers, through BMCC, professionally designed broadband awareness programs to vulnerable populations at their trusted small community anchor institution. It is unique because it equips 42 rural community anchor institutions with the latest 802.11n Wireless LAN technology, all within the first year, so that they can provide high-quality, reliable and cost effective broadband reception to their local community stakeholders. It is effective because it uses professional educators and professional systems integrators to leverage technological and instructional economies of scale to provide high levels of services that none of the communities could provide on their own. Local ISPs have neither the incentive nor the skills to deliver either of these essential components for sustainable broadband adoption.

BMCC will implement a community-based train-the-trainer model to engage and empower local community participants. It will identify and train local “broadband evangelists”—respected role models such as librarians or school teachers—to promote the program and to build awareness and interest within the communities. Together, the professional educators working with community leaders and anchor institutions can deliver effective, motivational, and long-lasting broadband sustainable-adoption topics to targeted vulnerable populations. The innovative technical approach “elevates the playing field” by simultaneously providing key government, law enforcement, educational, health care, and community agencies/community centers with modern high speed, enabling technology to support broadband use and promote adoption.
This project also will provide unprecedented enhanced economic viability opportunities for vulnerable populations and, especially, small businesses located within the project service area. Small business is critical to Oregon’s economic and job growth, especially in economically struggling, small rural communities. This project will leverage BMCC’s successful Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs).

The combining of state-of-the-art equipment, leading-edge delivery methods, and ongoing development of instructional materials to fit local needs is a design for long-term success. The instructional plan approaches the grant’s overarching goals of economic growth and job creation by moving the newly trained adopters into distance and hybrid educational programs—with a focus on developing a more highly trained workforce in order to attract economic development.

Without federal assistance the vulnerable populations in the communities in the nine counties served by the forty-two community anchor institutions most likely would not have access to either effective training or consistent modern broadband connections at any of their community anchor institutions.

Without federal assistance the community anchor institutions in this very rural corner of Oregon would probably not even know about the ability to provide their vulnerable populations with broadband awareness and a consistent, dependable and high speed connection to the local ISP. The institutions would, at best, have to learn about technical applications by word-of-mouth and then would not have the technical or practical expertise to specify a professional WLAN installation.

Without federal assistance there would be no economies of scale on system design or installation; no professional, consistent and coordinated broadband adoption training materials; and, no locally coordinated awareness campaign to encourage their stakeholders and vulnerable populations to learn about how to use broadband to their benefit.

We believe a positive broadband user experience delivered by a pervasive and top-notch WLAN will improve user satisfaction, increase usage and generate demand for broadband services. More importantly, we believe the high-speed and high-quality technical and training experience will encourage vulnerable population members to seek valuable benefits and knowledge-transfer for their lives, careers, businesses, and community via access and adoption of high speed broadband Internet skills.