

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs

Project Title: ODVA Tele Mental Health and Video Conferencing Broadband Initiative

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

Statement of the Project

The purpose of the Oklahoma Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) Telemedicine and Video-Conferencing Broadband Initiative is to address three areas for improvement. All three areas are a direct result of our agencies geographically dispersed facilities and offices. We have twelve facilities, spread throughout the State of Oklahoma.

Our responsibilities include the transportation of our veteran residents to federal VA hospitals from our remote care facilities. Currently, our veterans are transported from their remote facility to the VA hospital, in some cases as many as four veterans in the same vehicle. These veterans spend the day at the hospital while waiting on other members of their party to complete their appointments. Considering the average age of our residents is over 70 years of age, this amount of travel adversely affects their health and quality of life. For example, our Talihina facility is two hours and twenty minutes from the federal VA in Muskogee. These veterans leave early, get back late and spend around five hours in transit, all for a fifteen minute appointment. Also, to help with patient care there are many times when an extra staff member must be sent in addition to the driver. This creates an overtime issue with not only the transporters, but also the staff necessary to cover their positions at the facility.

Due to the nature of the mental health issues, there are times when a patient may have an immediate mental issue. By the time the patient gets to the VA the symptoms have often passed. Tele-mental health would provide a means to help administer emergency mental health services.

The geographically dispersed area of our agency adversely affects the training levels of remote personnel. For example, IT staff are required to visit remote locations in order to effectively train new personnel in the use of the applications required to perform their duties.

ODVA conducts departmental meetings at a central location. All other divisions must drive to this central location to conduct meetings that could be conducted using teleconference equipment. When only considering standing meetings the hourly rates, fuel costs and vehicle usage total over \$60,000 per year. This does not include ad hoc meetings or the liability of having employees and vehicles in transit.

Solution

The overall scope of this project is to provide telemedicine, video-conferencing, on-demand staff training and advanced healthcare alternatives to rural wartime veterans of the State of Oklahoma. This video-conferencing solution will allow direct interaction with the federal VA hospitals and eliminate some of the need for patient transportation to and from remote veterans' facilities. The federal VA hospitals currently support a video-conferencing network. This project will allow our organization to directly connect with their existing system.

This initiative will also allow us to create an efficient means of broadcasting an on-demand educational library for departmental education to our medical staff and core resources. This library will consist of tutorials enhancing the knowledge base of all resources, as well as establishing a more unified training mechanism across the agency.

The telemedicine project would allow the physician at ODVA to speak directly with the provider at the federal VA while the patient is present. Currently, the ODVA physician is at their facility and the federal VA provider is with the patient at a distant VA hospital.

Demographics

With the implementation of this broadband project, the ODVA will be able to provide broadband video-conferencing services to over 3,450 new users. This includes 1,450 veterans that will be able to receive telemedicine health services from their own facility. In addition, we will provide on-demand training to 2,000 personnel.

Qualifications

The IT Division consists of twelve full-time employees with six holding IT related Bachelor's degrees, four with Associates degrees and approximately one hundred and eighteen years of combined IT work related experience. Certifications IT personnel hold include, MCSE, CCNA, A+, N+, and SEC+. In addition, seven Computer Coordinators provide frontline IT support at their respective facilities across the state.

Impact

The cost savings from implementing broadband video-conferencing will allow the ODVA to more effectively budget rate increases for current and future salaries. The project will also allow us to be able to train and equip our staff with technology not normally available to the region. This should decrease the amount of turnover in our agency and draw new professionals to the ODVA.

Overall Cost

The grant request for the ODVA Broadband Initiative is the total cost of the teleconferencing and networking equipment. The total amount of our request is \$723,000. The ODVA does not currently have the upfront capital to implement a project of this size. However, we do have the ability to implement and maintain the system and are continuing to plan for the implementation of this project. We have already moved toward and prepared for the implementation of this equipment by upgrading our network from an older frame relay network to an MPLS network. Once we have secured funding for the equipment, we can have the system operational and in production within five months. Our initial goal is to conduct tele-mental health with the federal VA, then expand this platform to other hospitals and institutions that support our veterans.

The result of this project will be increased quality of life for the veterans we serve, reduced overhead, provide consistent and uniform training for staff, increased system security and data accuracy via uniform applications training, and reduced travel expenses and increase medical technology options provided to underserved areas in the State of Oklahoma.