

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: New Albany-Floyd County Public Library

Project Title: Public Computing and Job Center

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

The NA-FC Public Library is seeking funding to establish a computer and job-training center at the historic Cardinal Ritter House in the S. Ellen Jones neighborhood in New Albany, Indiana. The establishment of such a center would allow the Library to fulfill a key component of its mission to serve all residents of Floyd County with their informational needs.

In the past year, Library staff has seen a dramatic increase in the number of patrons seeking help with the most basic of job search related skills. They correctly view the Library as a source of information and support. However, while the Library staff is eager to meet the needs of all patrons, those who have found themselves suddenly unemployed are frustrated, desperate for help, and many times, in despair of finding a way out of their circumstances.

The Library is responding to this situation by dedicating a portion of the book stack area to an informal job skills center. Only patrons seeking these skills would have access to these computers with programs for job seekers. Staff would be available to help get patrons started in such activities as resume writing, searching for jobs using the Library's databases and submitting applications online. While this approach helps fill in gaps, much more is needed.

The numbers are alarming. New Albany has one of the greatest numbers of public housing units and one of the highest unemployment rates in the state of Indiana. Approximately 50% of the city itself is formally defined as "low income." As of July 2009, Workforce One Employment Solutions estimates that 8.9% of the population in Census tract 704 is unemployed. However, as this rate only includes those who are currently receiving unemployment benefits and not those for whom benefits have been exhausted, a more accurate number is estimated to be 15%.

One of the neighborhoods most affected by poverty and unemployment is S. Ellen Jones. The residents in this neighborhood would greatly benefit from the computer and job resources the New Albany-Floyd County Public Library currently provides, but the majority of them do not utilize these resources for a

host of reasons, including limited transportation to the library in downtown New Albany and time constraints. The NAFC Library's solution to this problem will be to provide a public computing and job training outreach center so that this vulnerable population of 3-5,000 in this area may have access to broadband education awareness programs, job training, computer equipment, and support. This neighborhood is truly at a "tipping point," and needs resources to go in a positive direction.

The NAFC Library's job training center will host classes in resume writing, applying for jobs online and in person, job interviewing skills, and other life skills classes related to preparing the residents to compete in the local marketplace in an existing recently renovated historical house, the Cardinal Ritter home. It is strategically located across the street from the S. Ellen Jones Elementary School, guaranteeing accessibility for area residents. During the three-year project period, the NAFC Library will be able to serve up to 2,000 or more residents with classroom instruction, computer classes and individual help.

The public library is uniquely qualified to implement this project successfully, since the organization's emphasis has been on informational resources for Floyd County residents for over 100 years. Besides the main branch in downtown New Albany, the library manages and oversees the Carnegie Museum for Art and History. In addition, the NAFC Library already has qualified instructors on our staff and will be providing in-kind instructional expertise from many of our full-time regular staff. The NAFC Library team will be strengthened with the support from the local community that will include the participation of key partners. These key partners include academic organizations, Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana and Indiana University Southeast, and a countywide employment agency, Work Force One Employment Solutions, an agency which will help to create a curriculum to assist students in getting the help they need to become employable and self sustaining. This collaborative approach will create the best environment for lifelong learning and functionality; positive, productive independence that benefits the whole community.

The overall budget for this will be approximately \$515,000 the first three years, which is only a fraction of the expense of unemployment and additional assistance needed for the S. Ellen Jones area's residents to survive. The NAFC Library plans to sustain this project with the maintenance of initial equipment, utilizing general update schedules of the NAFC Library and the help of partnering organizations both with cash and in-kind contributions. Developing an active alumni association of the proposed outreach center will help to promote a sustainability and continued lifelong learning center. The library has received confirmation of \$88,000 in matching funds from community and local organizations.

It is projected that the proposed public computing and job training outreach center would create approximately 12-15 new jobs by hiring a full time project manager, two part-time assistants, and the contract instructors for this center. The collaboration with Workforce One will help to provide awareness of the employment development, and will position the newly trained users for employment. The proposed public computing and job training outreach center will help provide the availability and accessibility needed in order to conceivably help several hundred people find employment every year.