

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: City of Minneapolis

Project Title: An Engaged Community, Minneapolis Public Housing

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

The City of Minneapolis will create an innovative model program to address the digital divide between the low-income, underserved residents of Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA) high rises and the rest of the City. This program will develop a methodology that addresses the communities suffering from a disparity in access to broadband, education, and equipment. The engagement campaign will result in An Engaged Community of informed, skilled broadband subscribers with an increased capacity to manage health and wellness, community resources, financial planning, communication, education, citizenship, civic activities and employment.

The City is turning its initial attention on the 4,958 households in the high rises due to height restrictions on the municipal WiFi network preventing connectivity above 3 stories. Plans to bring broadband connectivity to the high rises and leverage the existing Wireless Minneapolis network for reduced costs beyond the grant period are addressed in the City's BTOP Infrastructure application.

Approximately half of the households in MPHA high rises are occupied by foreign-born residents with a large contingent of east African immigrants. The majority of residents hail from minority populations. The average annual income across the high rise population is \$14,000. Socioeconomic factors are a major indicator of broadband usage. Several studies have indicated that, in Minnesota, for households with an annual income of less than \$15,000 only 26% owned a computer and 18% had access to the Internet at home. An MPHA survey of residents showed that 70% of high rise residents do not have access to internet in their homes, well above the threshold definition of underserved.

This Sustainable Adoption effort focuses on an innovative, multi-pronged approach to reaching the underserved populations of the MPHA high rises: engagement, education, technology and sustainability.

The City will launch an Engagement Campaign that goes well beyond simple awareness messaging. The City will engage the vulnerable populations through the construction of first-person cultural narratives that highlight how broadband education and usage can and will be meaningful in their lives. Understanding that people replicate the behaviors of those that surround them, particularly in tight-knit ethnic minority immigrant groups, the City will cultivate relationships with bridgers in each community. Bridgers are individuals or small groups from an underserved population that have a foot on either side of the digital divide. By growing these key relationships, the City will be able to understand and use the way these hard-to-reach populations get their information, how they synthesize it, what persuades them and what ultimately drives their decision making regarding broadband adoption. The heart of the

Engagement Campaign's success lies in this relationship marketing, and use of targeted messaging systems that speak to each community's needs.

The City has created Broadband University (BBU), a series of three training courses starting with basic computer skills and graduating to more advanced skills. BBU courses will be taught on-site in each high rise by experienced community-level instructors using existing, culturally sensitive and language-appropriate curricula. Continuing education at BBU allows residents to become peer tutors, lead user groups and qualify for a small stipend for providing instruction to fellow residents.

The technology component of the City's proposal is targeted towards the end use needs of the targeted population. Graduates of the first level of BBU courses will be eligible to receive their choice of wifi-enabled devices – laptops or handheld iPod Touches. Recent studies have shown that immigrant and minority groups are leading the mobile Internet movement and the City wishes to address those trends. A community partner will provide technical support for BBU instructors and for resident's troubleshooting issues with their devices.

The City will make use of technologies available to enhance and support the program efforts and end goals. As a part of this proposal, the City will refresh the Civic Garden portal hosted by the City's wireless network provider for free as part of an innovative Community Benefits Agreement. This portal is a launching pad to provide useful, public sector information on the Internet. No commercial or partisan websites are included, and many of the websites reflect city, county, and state resources. The existing Civic Garden portal will be amended to include a garden site tailored to the needs and values of high rise residents. As these concepts are refined, the City will add a civic ideation component to the Garden portal. Oftentimes a population that is hard to reach struggles to have its own voice heard in the civic process. The City envisions the Civic Garden as a social networking ideation center that helps it better understand the needs and priorities of citizens and stakeholders, act on these needs with greater effectiveness, achieving improvements in efficiency and effectiveness across all levels of government and informing citizens of these actions and improvements, thereby increasing public trust.

With an eye to the future of the Engaged Community program, the City will leverage existing and future infrastructure and funding streams. The City has already invested in the wireless system necessary to offer affordable broadband to all residents, and will make use of the Community Benefits Agreement negotiated with the ISP. As part of this agreement, the ISP contributes 5% of net income to a Digital Inclusion Fund.

The Engaged Community project will create 9 new jobs, sustain jobs for business partners, and train an estimated 6,300 of under-served populations in broadband and Internet use and create countless opportunities to access information that changes the lives of the users. The overall cost of the project is \$ 5,298,236.