Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: City of Anniston

Project Title: BEAR: Anniston Museum and Library

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

_______________________ Executive Summary_______________________

a) 1) The broadband grant affords the community an excellent opportunity to take advantage of some unique educational enhancements. The Anniston Museum of Natural History and Public Library of Anniston and Calhoun County would provide invaluable niche services & programming if each had capabilities. Local school systems are already outfitted with virtual capabilities funded by earlier grants. Because the Museum and Library do not have similar equipment, they are unable to provide remote programming to schools and to the public. One of the largest programs the Museum offers is the field trips for students. The rising costs of the economy are making it more cost prohibitive to transport classrooms to the museum, thereby missing a unique opportunity to learn about natural history. Last year, 35,000 students visited the Museum; this year, it appears that number will be reduced to 10,000.

2) The Library has an excellent public computer center. It is so well-used that there is always a waiting list to get access, even though patrons are limited to 1/hr/day. There is no available physical space to add more desktop computers to alleviate this problem.

3) Because regionalism has taken a foothold with our local governments, it is quite common to have meetings with officials that must travel 1-2 hours to attend. State meetings can entail 4-5 hours of 1-way travel. Many times, officials that are more than 1 hour away cannot justify the travel time in their busy schedules. Attendance by these travelers is not as regular as it is with those who work closer. It is becoming more obvious that a teleconference center would become a valuable tool for the region.

b) The Museum and Library propose a 3-fold program: 1) The installation of equipment that will enable the Museum to give public access to virtual tours of the museum, as well as unique programming classes such as botany and archeology. 2) Since the Library is illuminated with wifi internet coverage, it intends to purchase notebook computers that patrons can check out for use within the building. There are many sitting areas and conference rooms to accommodate people using these portable devices. 3) The Library proposes to purchase teleconferencing equipment for the community’s use. Those wishing to join meetings at the Library from remote sites will have the option of participating through another teleconference center, or, more simply, from their desks. This equipment would be available for webinars and other training opportunities with minimal financial obligation.

Implementation of the proposed project would allow both the Museum and the Library to present educational programming to schools, as well as to after school youth programs, childcare facilities, home-schooled students, and classrooms not only in East Alabama but from anywhere in the United States (or beyond).
c) The Library’s service area, Calhoun County, has a population of 112,249. Its per capita income is $20,791, 79% of the nation’s average. 78.1% of the population has earned high school degrees, compared to the nation’s 84%. 13.3% of its families live in poverty compared to the nation’s average of 9.2%. The library’s current public computer center averages 3,500 users per month. It is estimated that, with the addition of 16 new notebook computers, that another 10,200 users/year could be reached. With the addition of a teleconferencing center, it is estimated that 720 individuals from businesses, non-profits, and local governments could be exposed to the power of the internet each year.

The Museum, due to its uniqueness, has a much larger service area, serving populations within approximately a 1-hour commute, although its sign-in book lists addresses from all over the world. In addition to Calhoun County, this includes the surrounding counties (Cherokee, Cleburne, St. Clair, Talladega, Clay, and Randolph), with a total population of 435,516. These counties have high school degree rates of 69.5%, 62.9%, 71.3%, 69.7, 66%, and 61.9% respectively (USA ave. = 84%). The percentage of families living in poverty are: 11.4, 10.9, 9.6, 13.9, 12.9, and 12.6 respectively (USA ave. = 9.2%)

d) The Museum, 80-years-young, has a history of successful federal, state and foundation grant awards & management. Accredited by American Association of Museums, its operating standards are monitored and continually exceed standards for the Museum field. The Museum is Alabama’s first Smithsonian Institution Affiliate, a distinction which required exceptional professional standards in all areas of operations. Well-respected staff members with longevity and experience in the museum field are in place to implement the project parameters. An award-winning programming department enjoys great success with school-site programming and attracts a broad range of users from the general public.

The Library boasts a 91-year history of successful grant awards & management. Ranked 10th of 209 public libraries in the state by Alabama Public Library Service in regard to number of patrons served and services provided. It is the largest public library in northeast Alabama. This Library provides leadership in district-wide projects and has managed federal grants benefiting as many as 35 Alabama libraries. Thirty-one percent of fulltime staff holds masters degrees in library science and the remaining 69% paraprofessional staff members have served this institution for 12-25 years. Ongoing library programs draw a wide variety of patrons from all sectors of life.

e) 2.7 jobs would be created. f) The overall cost of this proposed collaborative project is $272,325. The vast majority of the budget is the cost to acquire equipment, an expenditure which would not be possible without federal funding. The expertise in training and programming is already in place with existing staff members of the Museum & the Library.