Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: YOURTEL AMERICA, INC.

Project Title: YourTel America Digital Community

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary ____________________

In 1995 David Garza founded YourTel America because as an entrepreneur he saw a worthy business opportunity in an injustice. His friends and neighbors had no access to telephone service and were using pagers as a stop-gap measure, obtaining them in rent-to-own shops that charged a premium because they had a poor credit history or no credit history at all. David saw an opportunity to provide home telephone service at a level of service, affordability and fairness that residents of these neighborhoods never had before. Today, YourTel America, the provider of that service to over 25,000 customers in such disadvantaged communities, submits this application for Public Computer Centers ('PCCs' or 'Centers') and a sister application for Sustainable Broadband Adoption. Together, these initiatives will create a broadband ecosystem in the inner cities we already serve to offer affordable home broadband, public broadband access and educational and training programs by leveraging our 15 years' experience in these communities in a way that will assure sustainable adoption of broadband by their vulnerable populations. YourTel will provide affordable access in its 18 stores in Kansas City, MO, Kansas City, KS, St. Louis, MO, Oklahoma City, OK, Lawton, OK and Tulsa, OK. The stores will become the neighborhood PCCs for residents who cannot afford or are not ready to adopt home broadband. Our partners are community anchor institutions including Kansas City Kansas Community College, the Greater Kansas City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, DeLaSalle Education Center, Donnelly College, the Full Employment Counsel, the Prince of Peace Missionary Baptist Church and the Samuel U. Rodger Health Center. These partners will host PCCs that, in combination with the YourTel PCC locations, will create a mosaic of community places to safely discover and explore the Internet and access the many educational and training opportunities that will be available in these Centers. Each of these anchor institutions will pursue their core missions ' education, healthcare, job training, and small business development - to meet the diverse critical needs of the urban populations they serve, and expand their missions to serve additional users. Sustainable broadband requires a comprehensive community approach. The on-ramp to the information superhighway starts in public computer centers where consumers can discover and begin to understand the internet and its life-changing opportunities inexpensively. The unique YourTel business model of establishing retail stores in the midst of these disadvantaged urban populations has given us and our customers a degree of hands-on experience and personal contact that has been core to our success. This project will leverage that investment by evolving these stores into PCCs. True to our mission, these Centers will be designed for the types of consumers we have always served, including the disabled. Our Centers will meet and exceed their needs by including the latest in assistive technology. This combination of the 18 YourTel America stores that will become PCCs and its partner anchor institution locations is critical to long term adoption. Our 15 years of experience serving vulnerable
populations teach that our customers' financial and educational resources are limited. Many local residents do not speak English and favor cash. When resources are limited, spending must be controlled because there is no backup. Hence, we must create an environment where consumers can try out the internet before they buy it. This PCC project applies these lessons to foster sustainable, long-term broadband adoption. The Pew Internet & American Life Project (2008) reveals key factors that prove the need for these centers: ' 25% of low-income Americans ' those whose household incomes are $20,000 annually or less ' reported having broadband at home in April 2008. This represents a drop from the 28% figure reported in March 2007. ' African-American adoption growth slowed as well, with 43% saying they had broadband at home in April 2008 versus 40% in March 2007. The Pew Internet & American Life Project also gives us a window into why there is not better adoption: ' 33% of non-users say they are not interested. ' 12% say they don't have access. ' 9% say it is too difficult or frustrating. ' 7% say it is too expensive. ' 7% say it is a waste of time. This proposed PCC project can make a dent in each one of these factors. Those who state they are 'not interested' must find something in broadband access that interests them. Our instructional and training programs can facilitate that discovery. A customer may be an avid stamp collector but not realize s/he can research stamps online. Another customer may get frustrated annually renewing his or her vehicle registration at the DMV office, only to learn it can be done online in a fraction of the time. PCC access will certainly move the needle for the 12% who do not have access ' we will bring it to them. Difficulty and frustration will be answered soundly by educational and professional training opportunities. An internet class conveniently located and professionally taught for $14.95 can inexpensivly cure a host of frustrations. Customers needing special help can get it from trained instructors and staff in the centers. Those who say that access is too expensive will have access for $0.99/Hr. This project will serve the urban cores of our proposed service areas. We have a total target population of 2,191,581. In this population 348,909 (43.4%) are low income households, 541,339 (23.9%) are African American, 230,753 (10.5%) are Hispanic, and 406,029 (18.5%) are disabled. This project will cost a total of $4,516,946 of which $1,528,496 will comprise matching funds from YourTel America and will in combination with our sister application directly create 390 jobs-years in the communities served by the Centers. YourTel has a 15 year history of creating inner city jobs, starting with one employee in 1995 and employing 86 today. Our outreach strategy will entail a blend of traditional advertising such as outdoor media, transit media, direct mail, local community publications and pre-printed flyers, a public relations element focused on local news outlets, and a grassroots campaign among our current customer base. This outreach strategy will result in more than 40,000 non-unique users of introductory or instructor-led courses, as well as more than 700,000 user-hours spent at the PCCs during the three-year project period. Our budget calls for a total of 250 new workstations, with each of the 25 Centers serving more than 100 people every week. Providing those critical resources in the heart of the very communities comprising these vulnerable populations will result in measurable improvements in digital literacy, broadband adoption and sustainable economic improvement for these individuals.