Applicant Name: WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY INC

Project Title: DIGITAL COMMUNITIES COLLABORATION (DCC) Economic Development through Broadband Utilization

Project Type: Sustainable Broadband Adoption

Executive Summary

The primary goal of this project is to increase individual and institutional broadband subscriptions and enhance use in communities and areas in Western Illinois with significant vulnerable populations. Many Western Illinois communities have fallen behind in local economic development efforts especially those efforts involving the use and implementation of broadband. Furthermore, many community stakeholders and citizens are unaware of the benefits that modest investments in appropriate information technology and training could bring to their communities. Western Illinois University’s Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA) and the Center for the Application of Information Technologies (CAIT) will partner with the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) which will coordinate eight community colleges and Illinois Telecommunications Association (ITA) and local telcos to increase broadband awareness and adoption in 26 vulnerable counties in western Illinois that currently underutilize broadband. This project serves 26 counties with a total population of 1,088,810 and 427,759 households (Census 2000). On average 35.3% of the population are rural, 25.3% are senior citizens (age 55 and over), 31.3% disabled (sensory, physical, mental, and/or self-care disability) and 7.6% are minority (Census 2000). The percentage of low income individuals in 2008 was 12.3%. The average per capita personal income in 2007 was $31,853, which is lower than the Illinois and national figures of $41,012 and $38,615, respectively (Bureau of Economic Analysis). The unemployment rate is 8.0% (24 month average between January 2008 to December 2009) compared to the national average of 7.5% for the same time period. (See attached demographic table and map) The Digital Communities Collaboration will increase broadband awareness of potential individual and institutional subscribers, then take a grass roots approach to help communities effectively organize and address broadband opportunities and challenges. We will train individual and institutional users in broadband use, and foster development of digital communities that increase broadband adoption by institutions and local residents, as a way of enhancing economic development and the quality of life. By the end of this project we anticipate that 874 hours of training (face to face and online) will be offered to approximately 13,800 residents. Additionally, 325,000 residents will be exposed to an aggressive awareness campaign. In a national survey conducted by Pew Internet and American Life project (November 30 and December 27, 2009) found, on average, 47% of rural households have home Broadband connections. Data for Illinois is not readily available so for the purpose of projecting impact this study is being used to establish a baseline. The 26 counties this project will serve has approximately 427,759 households and a total population of 1,088,810. If 47% have Broadband access that would total 201,047 households leaving 226,712 households not served. It is anticipated that this project can
increase Broadband subscribership through awareness and training by 25% for a total of 56,678. The estimated cost per new user is $106.38. The Council for Economic Advisors (May 2009) provided guidance on job creation under the Recovery Act through direct government funding, asking agencies to use the simple rule that "$92,000 creates one job-year" (p. 6). Based on our total federal budget request of $6,029,151, we therefore provide a draft estimate that 66 jobs would be created. This project will increase broadband adoption and sustainability by accomplishing the following six objectives: Objective One - AWARENESS ON BENEFITS OF BROADBAND: Project team members will work with Illinois Telecommunications Association and local telephone companies to create an aggressive awareness/education program through regional 'kick-off' seminars, promotions, and advertisements on the benefits of broadband to potential individual and institutional subscribers and communities. Objective Two - COMMUNITY READINESS ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING: Project team members will work with a broad cross section of people including residents, government officials, educators, local businesses and local telephone companies to assess community readiness and needs in the project area to increase broadband use/adoption. IIRA has already conducted outreach in 120 communities of the five regions we will serve in this project. Objective Three - TECHNICAL TRAINING/SUPPORT TO ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS: Project team members will train and provide technical support to local businesses, entrepreneurs and/or community colleges to support communities by supporting community web presence and setting up and supporting a centralized learning management system that provides unique custom training for each community. Objective Four - RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT/TRAINING FOR COMMUNITIES / INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SUBSCRIBERS: IIRA will provide core resources and trainings for communities, small businesses, institutions and other stakeholders on topics such as government, community, and business web presence, marketing, e-commerce, and e-communications. CAIT and the community colleges will provide core resources and trainings for potential individual broadband subscribers, including members of disadvantaged groups, on topics such as computer literacy, introduction to the Internet, consumer education, college readiness, ESL and workforce literacy. Project team members will work with constituent groups and local telcos within each community to develop additional online resources and training based on their strategic planning process. While initial outreach will be done face to face, a majority of the training and resources will be housed online and shared across the communities and small regions. Objective Five - EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT RELATED TO BROAD BAND ADOPTION/JOB CREATION: An outside evaluator will assess the progress in achieving the project goals and objectives as set forth in the application by using quantitative and qualitative methods such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, and data analysis. Surveys will be used to measure the increase in the number of households and institutions subscribing to broadband services. Performance metrics will be developed, with data gathered by the program administrator and shared with the evaluator. The evaluator will determine impact/outcomes of the project and make suggestions for improvement and recommendations for sustainability and replication. Objective Six - SUSTAIN and REPLICATE: This project will provide local telephone companies and community colleges the tools to sustain broadband adoption by providing training and web site support to community leaders, government officials and businesses, which in turn increases demand for web based services. Additionally, project members will share the partnership model, outcomes, and lessons learned with others interested in replicating this model throughout the country. The project is innovative in several ways: First, it incorporates both broad and deep approaches to increasing individual and institutional
adoption. Second, the ‘deep’ awareness and training efforts proposed here are grounded in community-based planning methods that differ from the more common individual-user focused trainings. A third innovative aspect is that the proposed training goes beyond simply preparing new and inexperienced users, by offering opportunities designed to build lifelong skills in using online resources and in learning online. Fourth, technical training and support services will help ensure that local delivery platforms and web presences are customized to local needs. Fifth, online content will be customized based on local interests to meet the unique needs of every partner and community. Through these kinds of new ideas, approaches and methods, the project will encourage sustainable broadband adoption in ways that are replicable in other states across the nation. The project partners are uniquely qualified and will ensure project quality and sustainability. The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs brings its expertise and existing partnerships of strategic planning and mapping in rural communities. The Center for the Application of Information technologies brings its web based training/support expertise. The Illinois Community College Board and 8 community colleges (anchor institutions) have established long standing relationships and currently provide outreach activities in the communities we are serving. The Illinois Telecommunications Association and its telcos mission is to promote broadband adoption and awareness in Illinois. The cost of this project over the course of three years totals $6,029,151 (federal request) and $$1,517,615 (match). Total budget $7,546,766.