Applicant Name: PARISH OF CALCASIEU

Project Title: Upgrading and Expanding Public Online Access in Response to Increased Need

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Our project addresses two problems. First is the problem of not having enough PCs and network infrastructure to meet the increased need for public online access in the library. Second is the problem of not having sufficient PCs available for training classes and programs either given by the library or by other agencies in the library. The first problem is a reflection of the changes in our society regarding how ordinary citizens live. More and more resources and services are moving to a primarily online environment. To access these services requires internet access but for some members of the community the cost of internet access puts this out of reach. Without online access at the library they could not participate in what is rapidly becoming the default method for communicating with government agencies (obtain information and apply for benefits online), education (homework and tests online), job searching (many businesses require online application), doing business, getting information, personal communications and leisure activities. Many agencies and organizations are downsizing their physical facilities as a result of the downturn in the national economy and, in an effort to be ‘green,’ eliminating paper forms and brochures and alternatively referring users to their websites. All of this magnifies the need for increasing the availability of free public online access, a service the library has been providing for 14 years. Usage of our library systems' 116 broadband PCs increased 9% last year to over a quarter of a million walk in users. This project will add 60 PCs to the quantity available for public online use and add an estimated 1,486 users weekly bringing the weekly average to 5,564 public PC users. Increasing the quantity of public PCs will increase the ability of the public who cannot afford personal internet access to participate in the online environment for all purposes. To maximize the benefits of additional PCs the network infrastructure will need to be upgraded to support faster speeds, more available bandwidth, and more equipment. Funding this project will result in a gigabit network with room to grow and the ability to support future external bandwidth increases. The success of training programs is directly affected by the network infrastructure. When the network is slow, providing online access and training programs becomes problematic. Funding this project will assist with improving the available network bandwidth and provide fixed resources at the buildings with meeting rooms so they may be used for more classes/programs. The network Infrastructure upgrade is a crucial investment in the future for public online access. Our second problem relates to being able to address the need for public training classes in our libraries, and especially to support the classes and programs provided by other government agencies and organizations. For many years, the library has worked with government agencies (federal, state, and local) and service organizations to share information about available services that positively impact jobs, education, health, and safety. We are being asked more and more frequently to provide PCs with internet access for classes and programs hosted at the library for other...
agencies and service organizations. Because of the limited quantity of this resource (16 wireless laptops shared between 12 library branches over a 1,000 sq. mile area) we have not always been able to provide the service. For example, a couple of years ago we were unable to host a program to teach migrant workers English because of a lack of available PCs for classes at the local library. Funding this project will provide a solution that will address both the need for additional public online access and the need for more training facilities. Specifically the 6 library buildings with meeting facilities will be able to create on demand training labs in the existing meeting and conference rooms by moving the public laptops purchased for this project out of the public area and into the conference or meeting room. In this way the public will have maximum use of the laptop for online access when it is not being used for training. Each of the six buildings with dedicated meeting facilities will get 8 laptops and computer tables with built in laptop garages that will provide security and power in the public areas. At the other six public buildings that do not have meeting rooms they will receive additional desktop PCs (between 1 and 4 each depending on available space). These branches will continue to have access to the current portable wireless training lab which will have greater availability because all 12 branches will now not have to share this limited resource. Funding this project will allow the library to not only provide more training for the public but to also support the efforts of other community agencies and organizations serving all segments of our populations, especially those identified as vulnerable. Last year use of meeting facilities by organizations other than the library totaled 983 bookings with an attendance count of 14,652. As a result of this project we estimate a 25% increase in bookings and attendance. Our 12 public buildings are located across our over 1,000 sq. mile service area and are easily accessible by the majority of the population. Located east and west of the Calcasieu River our two largest buildings are open 7 days a week. Five of our buildings are located in rural areas and provide the only free online access for the surrounding community. In the rural areas there is only one telecommunications service provider available. In many areas fiber is not currently available and would require significant build out costs. The 2008 population estimate for Calcasieu Parish according to U.S. Census Bureau: State and County Quick Facts was 185,618. Internally maintained library statistics for 2009 indicated 79,142 active library users visiting the libraries 632,787 times. The library serves ALL of the public which includes vulnerable populations as defined on this application. The libraries can best serve these populations by supporting the efforts of agencies primarily tasked with providing services for the vulnerable population. Vulnerable population percentages of the total population of Calcasieu Parish are 2.1% Hispanic, 24.6% Black/African-American; unknown percent disabled, 15.4% below the poverty line, 6.9% unemployed, 12.5% age 65 and up, and 33% are under the age of 18. In every instance, funding this project will provide more PCs that can be used by these populations and will provide more PCs to be used to support other agencies’ programs and classes in the library that benefit these populations. Calcasieu Parish Public Library has been serving the public in our community for 37 years and has developed partnerships with many agencies and community organizations over the years. The library has provided support for a number of federal, state, and local agency programs and, by funding this project, we will be able to provide more support for their programs, including Recovery Act programs, which in turn will offset some costs to these agencies related to facilities and some costs to us related to providing needed programs for our community. For 21 years the library has used strategic plans developed with community involvement to plan library services. The library's 2008-2011 strategic plan was the result of 6 months collaboration between the Community Committee, Library Board of Control and Library Staff.
The process included identifying parish needs and determining how the library could work with other parish organizations and agencies to meet those needs. 'Connect to the Online World: Public Internet Access' was one of the top 3 community service priorities selected by the community committee for the library. Relationships developed through the planning process will help reach this project’s goals of increasing training classes and informational programs for the public. Over all the Calcasieu Parish Public Library system has the community connections, staff, skills, plans, and dedication to complete this project successfully and sustain the increased levels of service created. Although no new library jobs will be created our project will have impact on vendor jobs and the general economy. Using the 'Simple Rule for Estimating Job Years Created by Government Spending' 5 direct job-years will be created from the project, 3 indirect jobs, and 2 induced jobs. More importantly the increase in availability of public online access will provide job seekers more opportunities for looking for employment and other government agencies a facility to present programs that assist job seekers both directly and indirectly by providing informational and educational support.