Applicant Name: NORFOLK REDEVELOPMENT HOUSING AUTHORITY
Project Title: Neighborhood Network Centers
Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

The cost of broadband access remains prohibitively high for residents living in Norfolk’s subsidized housing, effectively limiting their access to the information highway. NRHA proposes to provide broadband access by developing 2 additional Neighborhood Network Centers and enhancing broadband capacity at an existing Neighborhood Network Center. Access to broadband connectivity aids in empowering vulnerable residents to achieve economic self-sufficiency by having quick and most up-to-date knowledge of academic, employment and health resources available on the internet. With less than 50% of our youth who live in subsidized housing graduating from high school every year, the average household income is below 60% AMI (average median income), and seniors suffering from a myriad of chronic illnesses, this population is defenseless against almost all social ills economic downturn, unemployment and poor health. Knowledge is power and knowledge of how to access information is empowering. The academic, economic, health and social conditions of the whole community improves when the underserved community gains access to broadband internet. With accessibility to broadband connectivity, citizens in underserved community, have access to the same internet resources as citizens in the most affluent neighborhoods. Grant funding through BTOP will allow NRHA to implement 2 new Neighborhood Network Centers and upgrade an existing center that will increase broadband accessibility to underserved residents living in Norfolk’s subsidized communities and housing program. The synergy produced through partnerships will create sustainable Neighborhood Network Centers. Working age adults in the underserved community have quick access to employment information and opportunities and students will have quick access to the most up-to-date academic resources. Through the Neighborhood Network Centers, seniors will be offered free access to computers and broadband internet and provided free computer literacy training for the purpose of gaining confidence to use new technology and building a community of social inclusion among the seniors and eliminating their feeling of isolation in this digital age. The Neighborhood Network Centers in Calvert Square, Young Terrace and Grandy Village will serve collectively more than 5000 residents annually. The Workforce Development program will target un/under employed residents living in Norfolk’s subsidized housing. The Workforce Development component of the Neighborhood Network Center will target at least 100 residents per center per year for a total of 300 residents annually. The ABE / GED component of the Neighborhood Network Centers will target 100 students per center per year for a total of 300 residents annually. Although the senior component of the Neighborhood Network Centers will be open to unlimited number of seniors, it will target 50 seniors per center to participate in the program per year for a total of 150 seniors annually. The tutorial component of the program will target 300 youth per center per year for a total of 900 youth annually. It is anticipated that a minimum 200 residents per
center per year will participate in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program getting assistance with completion of income tax files and electronically filing which helps residents save money by getting a faster refunds and avoiding the quick loans, promotes greater accuracy and it is environmentally friendly because there is no paper to file. Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, a political subdivision of City of Norfolk since 1941, continues to be a well structured and managed organization committed to improving the lives of the citizens. The fiscal management of the organization is the responsibility of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) who reports directly to the Executive Director. Internal controls are maintained over existing functions through separation of duties and proper review and approval of transactions by staff both within and outside the Finance Department. The Independent Auditors’ Report on Compliance with Requirements Applicable to Each Major Program and on Internal Control over Compliance reflects that NRHA complied, in all material respects, with the requirements described in the OMB Circular A-133. NRHA received a 3-year grant award of $250,000 to develop a Neighborhood Network Center. It was designed to digitally link residents to services and programs that promoted self-sufficiency. As a result of the grant funded program, 75 residents participated in a GED program. Eleven residents earned a GED and 95% of the participants increased their grade level functioning. An additional 49 residents earned their learners permit while 27 earned a driver’s license and 118 seniors participated in the interactive health and information program. NRHA has additional experience in the implementation and management of grant funded programs without problems. Experience with the first Neighborhood Network Center taught NRHA what programs are viable and how to better implement those programs. NRHA will partner with Norfolk Public Schools for the purpose insuring correct SOL objectives are reinforced in the tutorial program. NRHA will partner with Internal Revenue Services for the purposes of continuing the existing VITA site and establishing 2 more sites at the proposed Neighborhood Network Centers. NRHA will partner with The Planning Council and Senior Navigator for the purpose of providing instructional workshops to train seniors to access health and aging websites and information. NRHA will partner with Virginia Tidewater Consortium to assist students in accessing post secondary education information i.e. financial aid, enrollment, etc. NRHA will partner with OppInc of Hampton Roads to complement the Workforce Development program by providing job training to eligible residents. The Neighborhood Network Centers will create opportunities for 27 direct job years. Each center, operating 12 hours a day / 5 days a week will require 2 coordinators to be responsible for day to day operations of the center as well as program development. The 3 centers will share 1 ABE / GED instructor, 1 computer instructor, 1 computer technologist (who will be responsible for management and maintenance of the software and hardware) and a program manager (who will provide oversight to all the centers and insure that the program goals and objectives are met). Funding through BTOP will conserve the positions of workforce development specialists and coordinators (who will facilitate and manage the workforce development component of the program) and resource development administrator, who will be responsible for the program evaluation. The overall cost of the 3-year project is estimated at $6,133,056 with $3,970,766 in leveraged services and $2,162,280 requested from federal funds (BTOP). It is anticipated that the 3 Neighborhood Network Centers will serve 15,000 individuals throughout the life of the grant at a cost of $144 per person.