Broadband USA Applications Database

**Applicant Name:** WICHITA AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

**Project Title:** Wichita Broadband Technology Alliance

**Project Type:** Sustainable Broadband Adoption

_______________________ Executive Summary _______________________

Wichita Area Technical College has partnered with the City of Wichita, Wichita Public Schools USD 259, Wichita Independent Business Association, United Methodist Open Door, Cox Communications, and the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas to seek funding to improve broadband service adoption rates and to provide an ongoing system of digital literacy training and support. Wichita is the largest city in Kansas with a Metropolitan Statistical Area population of more than 600,000. To remain competitive and to create jobs of the future, all Wichitans need the skills and means to fully participate in the digital economy. Connecting the underserved population to broadband is crucial to the future of Wichita. Although there are a number of active broadband providers serving residential and institutional customers in Wichita, many of the underserved population have not subscribed to broadband. In 2009 the FCC conducted a consumer survey that identified three main barriers to adoption: affordability, digital literacy, and relevance. This project will address each of these barriers. Our overall approach to increase sustainable broadband adoption among the underserved population is to directly assist 4,050 households and 216 businesses to subscribe to broadband and to provide training and education to 17,100 participants to boost their ability to compete for jobs in the digital economy. This project will provide broadband service at a lower price and training programs that teach people the digital skills they need to access the internet while also educating them on how the internet can enhance their lives. An increasing number of services ranging from filing taxes to researching jobs are only available online. The most vulnerable citizens need access and training to use these services. Small businesses, critical to the economic vitality of these underserved participants, will have the opportunity to learn how to sell on the internet and use social media to promote their business. This proposal is innovative in its educational structure and use of technology to interact with participants. It is clear that the mere existence of broadband access is not enough to build a digital citizenry. Providing teachers and participants with access to digital technology and having on-site support will be addressed. The incentive of computer ownership and access to the internet will be provided to participants once they demonstrate competency in using digital literacy tools. By adding computer workstations at four neighborhood city halls, Open Door for the homeless, Workforce Alliance, Wichita Independent Business Association, Wichita Public Schools, and Wichita Area Technical College opportunities for training the underserved will be expanded. In this economic downturn the demand for computer access has increased dramatically. The provision of distance learning equipment (personal computers and lecture capture equipment) connected over broadband technologies will open new avenues of learning for the underserved population of Wichita. Teachers and participants will be able to connect to one another to share courses and programs. This proposal addresses the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program.
goals of 1) providing improved access to broadband service to consumers residing in underserved areas of the country and 2) providing broadband access, education, awareness, training, equipment, and support to community anchor institutions or organizations and agencies serving vulnerable populations. In addition, the proposal focuses on innovative training by encouraging the underserved population of Wichita to use the computer labs in new ways. To achieve these goals we have formed an alliance of community partners to create a citywide project which links collaborating organizations to create an innovative web of access and training designed to serve the underserved population in Wichita. This project is designed to reach two audiences which include Wichita’s underserved population and small business owners and entrepreneurs striving to reach broader markets. Pew Internet & American Life Project continues to report a digital divide in America, especially among those with little education, with household incomes of $25,000 or less, and African Americans. These are precisely the people that will be served by this project. Training will be provided to 17,100 underserved adults in Wichita who do not have digital literacy skills including the at-risk, homeless, and low-income populations will be provided. Broadband access will be provided to over 4,050 participants. Over 200 business owners within Wichita will subscribe to broadband and receive training on how to use the internet, use social media to connect with customers, and reach broader markets. This project stands on a strong foundation of existing partnerships. Each of the identified partners did not come together solely for this proposal; they have been working together for several years. Given that strong base, this collaborative partnership could start many project activities immediately, offering some training using existing computer labs while new computers are purchased and connectivity enhanced. The potential for Wichita’s future is limitless if Federal and State governments would support the unique innovative strengths of Wichita Area Technical College working with its public and private partners to provide training in digital skills and expand access to broadband for all Wichitans. We have a cohesive and comprehensive plan and the engine is ready. All that is needed is the fuel to drive it. In order to promote a sustainable broadband adoption, this project addresses the need to create an educational environment where broadband use is an integral part of the daily lives of students and teachers, both in and out of the classroom. Since the curriculum and professional development plans will become institutionalized in Wichita Area Technical College’s Adult Literacy Program, the digital literacy course will be offered on an ongoing basis. At the end of the grant period, a core of teachers, mentors, and volunteers will be trained to work within the designated centers. While certified teachers, teach this course, there is an opportunity for digital literacy volunteers to provide tutoring and assist participants in open computer labs. At the conclusion of the grant, these volunteers will be trained to assist in the nine sites created with grant funds. Research shows that in tough economic times high speed internet is one of the last things to go. Once the participants receive training and have access to broadband, we are projecting that they will continue receiving broadband in their homes. Although the purpose of this project is not to create a specific number of new jobs, it is targeted to train and retrain workers. During the 36-month period of this initiative, 17,100 students will receive training that will boost their ability to compete for jobs requiring Digital Literacy skills. We propose an overall project budget of $14,743,879. Of this amount, the participating partners will co-invest $6,439,400. In order to fully leverage the federal investment, participating partners are providing all indirect and space costs as a further contribution.