Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name:  MYWAY VILLAGE, INC.

Project Title:  Getting Illinois Low Income Seniors and People with Disabilities Online

Project Type:  Sustainable Broadband Adoption

a. The Problem: Only 30%, or 12 million, of America's 40 million seniors (65+ years old) use the Internet. An even lower percentage of poor, lesser educated, or minority Seniors go online. Less than 5% of the 3,296 seniors and people with disabilities who live in the 23 low income housing developments of this Illinois Senior Internet Adoption Coalition proposal currently use broadband. For all practical purposes, low income seniors in Illinois are not using the Internet. This vulnerable population is missing out on the many educational, job training, informational and health benefits that Internet usage can bring. That, in turn, costs our society. For example, depression alone costs the United States $100 billion annually, yet studies show that Internet use by the elderly can cause a 20% reduction in depression. A 2009 Phoenix Center study concludes: 'expanding Internet usage among the elderly may have significant economic payoffs.'

b. Approach to the Problem: We use a proven Internet adoption program called Connected Living Adoption and Sustainability Program ('CLASP') which ties technology, training and support together in a holistic and senior-specific way. This program directly confronts traditional barriers to Internet use by seniors. First, we focus on relevance to the specific priority needs of individual seniors. For each senior, we identify the interests and experiences that can be advanced through the Internet and then illustrate that advancement, whether it is staying connected with children and grandchildren, writing and sharing memoirs, accessing information via the web or accessing health care or government services. We start by teaching the basics of e-mail, web access and practical applications relevant to daily living. Our individual and group training then expands the Internet foundation skills upon which other and more advanced skills and applications can be built. A case management system ensures that the personal objectives of each senior in the program is identified and achieved. Second, we make learning easy and convenient. The CLASP program uses off-line methods (video, individual instruction, discussion groups) as well as a simplified software to draw in seniors and demonstrate the practical benefits of the on-line world. Comprehensive instructional content is oriented to the actual interests of seniors. Finally, Internet awareness-raising and training is conducted by friendly 'Ambassadors' (trainers) in the very housing communities, community spaces and units where residents live, so learning takes place in comfortable surroundings with neighbors in a controlled and semi-social setting. Third, we eliminate cost as a barrier to Internet use. The computer learning center and all of the training are provided by the program and program partners. We also provide a free computer and Internet connectivity to each program participant who attends education and training programs and passes an Internet literacy and skills evaluation. Throughout the program, we will make aggressive efforts to minimize the costs of devices, connectivity and instruction during the period of the BTOP subsidy so that seniors will have the advantage of the lowest possible costs of Internet adoption when they are paying...
for the costs of service themselves. Our entire program is leading to an 'end game' where seniors acquire and pay for Internet services within the structure of the marketplace. Because subsidized senior housing is present across the country, the experiences of the demonstration projects made possible by this grant have the potential to be replicated (with appropriate local adjustments) throughout the country. We will evaluate the results of the awareness-raising and education and training efforts by creating a 2010 baseline of demographic and computer/Internet experience and use for each senior participating in the program and then use analytics and regular performance evaluations to determine progress and results. We will collect the experiences of each individual housing community so that a comprehensive knowledge-management database can be developed and experiences disseminated in an online format, including ideas and demonstrations developed by seniors themselves. c. Areas and Populations to be Served. The primary audience for this proposal is the senior and disabled residents living in low-income subsidized housing since they have the lowest usage of the Internet at present. Our secondary audience consists of the seniors living in the surrounding neighborhood and the local service providers working with building and neighborhood seniors. We have compiled detailed information about the demographics and Internet experiences and interests of building residents along with a list of current service providers to the building seniors, the nature of the services and how they are delivered. Building residents will have the advantage of an on-site computer learning center, broadband to their units and an Internet device, and the seniors on the waiting list and in the neighborhoods will receive awareness raising materials, invitations to group meetings, the controlled use of the computer center and access to the offline and online computer/Internet training materials. d. Qualifications of the Applicant. MyWay Village, Inc., one of two Coalition managers, has designed and implemented successful training and adoption programs in senior housing settings in Massachusetts and Illinois in the past two years, and has developed a Connected Living Internet Portal specifically for seniors (See Exhibit D). MyWay Village has detailed documentation regarding its experiences during 2008 and 2009 in providing the personal, one-on-one and online instructional programs at the core of the proposed program (See Exhibit E). The second Coalition manager - DSSA Strategies ' was one of the core group that developed the Illinois Housing Development Authority in the 1960s and has 30 years of experience developing and managing subsidized housing as part of neighborhood development strategies in Illinois. DSSA Strategies also has 10 years experience operating resident services programs and onsite computer learning centers in Illinois senior buildings financed by HUD, the Chicago Housing Authority and the Illinois Housing Development Authority. e. Jobs Created: Each of the 23 buildings in this demonstration will have a team to plan and implement outreach, Internet awareness raising and education/training programs in small group and personal training settings. Each team will include a full-time instruction and training manager ' a Community Program Manager - and a second 'shared work' position filled by a volunteer or community service student. Since these positions don't exist in the marketplace at present, it is expected that all of the training managers will leave Coalition employment after one year, to be placed in a similar position. We expect that all of the first and second year training managers at the demonstration locations will move into other senior buildings and provide experienced training services to senior buildings not involved in this demonstration. f. The Cost of the Program: The overall cost of the proposed program will be $6,804,067. The breakdown of program components, described in great detail later in this proposal, is: Network infrastructure & connectivity distribution in 23 buildings: $1,056,735 (15.5%) (an average of $45,945 per building); Equipment, broadband access, installation and technical
support costs for individual subscribers -- $2,186,622 (32.1%); Training program costs -- $2,764,969 (40.6%); Project evaluation and dissemination of best practices -- $300,000 (4.4%), and Project administration and other costs -- $495,741 (7.3%).