Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: SHAKER HEIGHTS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Project Title: Shaker Library Public Computing, Training & Entrepreneurial Centers

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary _______________________

a) Shaker Library's purpose in seeking grant funds is to increase the accessibility and capacity of its public computing facilities for an underserved population in the district, which includes some of the poorest areas in Cleveland. Our partnership with Connect Ohio will provide a standardized training curriculum. Our customers are desperately in need of more computers with high-speed Internet access, software resources, and free training in its use. Because of a 30% cut in state funding and a decline in local property tax collections, we have eliminated all equipment purchases from our budget and cannot move forward without federal funds. Currently for adults, we have a Computer Center with 14 workstations on the second floor of Main Library that is supplemented by similar numbers of workstations on the main floor of the library and at Bertram Woods Branch Library. Including computers for children and teens at both locations, we have 64 public computers. These workstations are available 65.5 hours a week (with 4 additional hours on Sunday during the school year at the Main Library). Access to library computers has become our greatest resource, and we do not have nearly enough computers to meet the public demand. The BTOP grant will enable us to offer higher bandwidth, more computers for public use with training in software applications. More importantly, the computers will enable us to offer more opportunities to those who need us most: those who do not have the resources for their own computers. Our afterschool populations (from Shaker Heights and our border city of Cleveland) flood the library each day. Our Children's Room has 11 computers with word processing capacity and Internet access. These computers are heavily used often with waiting lines. More computers would enable us to provide our after-school population with software programs for homework as well as Internet access. The wealth gap in our community has become much more pronounced as jobs and opportunities decline. This new development has caused concern not only for those families with children at risk for failure, but also for our school system and community that prides itself on being a lighthouse district school. A review of the school's achievement data from 1995-to the present reveals an academic disparity in the achievement of African-American and white students. In general, the performance of African-American males is 34% below white males and the performance of African-American females is 23% below white females. With BTOP funds, Shaker Library can help the schools with the fourth R: remediation. Recently, Shaker Library installed SuccessMaker software on public computers in the Youth Services Department of Main Library and Woods Branch as well as on computers in the Training Lab and on laptops in the Homework Center. SuccessMaker is a set of computer-based courses that allows students to practice math and language arts skills at their own levels and to progress through a series of activities. Teachers can track their progress to see how their students are performing. This service to children is for those who lack Internet access at home or for
those who find it more convenient to use the library and is another example of the Library working with its community. The Library also operates a free Homework Help Center to help bridge the educational gap between white and African-American students and to help parents help their children have success in school. The BTOP grant would enhance our ability to continue to offer and to expand this Center, enabling us to offer more classes for families to have ad hoc time on the computers together ‘ learning how to do homework research and how to find appropriate information for school projects. In addition, we can offer classes on specific homework topics providing resources for parents and children. In recent years the tenant population of local apartment developments shifted from young couples and retirees to a majority of African-American single parent families with school-age children. Many of the children from this complex come to school with marked academic and behavioral problems. Working with the schools, the library can offer space and computers for tutoring these students and their families. We are currently working with the schools to help parents and caregivers without computers. As the schools increase their communication with parents in electronic formats, we are working with them to bridge the divide for those parents and caregivers who do not have computers. We currently link to the school’s home page and print out information on our municipal bulletin board, and are developing ways to help parents set up E-mail accounts and to teach them how to access them from the library. b) Our intent is to increase our Internet bandwidth and the number of public workstations by 50%, primarily for adults who have the greatest need in learning new skills, applying for jobs, applying for government benefits, and managing their day-to-day lives (paying bills, making purchases, etc.). We will add computers for youth, as well. The increased availability will offset the current waiting lines that exist for all computer access. Our plan is to consolidate most of our adult computers by building a new Computer Center with an attached Training Lab in an unfinished area on the second floor of Main Library. This will eliminate waiting lines and allow us to incorporate existing computers from both the Main floor and Computer Center with new equipment provided through the grant. Equipment in the expanded Training Lab will be accessible to the general public when not being used for classes. On the first floor of the Main Library, an 'Internet Caf’ will be created in a room that now houses our Local History collection, which will be moved as part of a renovation project. The Internet Caf’ will include computer workstations and space for laptop use, as well as inexpensive vending snacks so they can enjoy refreshments and continue working without leaving the building. The current Computer Center would become a Community Entrepreneurial Office (CEO) with Internet workstations and specialty equipment, including fax machine, color copier, commercial quality printers, laminator, scanners, etc. Through this new operation, we could meet the demands of the small business community, to help stimulate growth in our local economy. Besides serving business needs, the CEO would also be a job stimulus for the community as we would hire people to run the CEO. As we increase the use of underutilized space, we will be able to provide easier, better, and expanded access to library resources and to improve the broadband service adoption rates in this region of Cleveland. c) Shaker Heights Public Library serves the City School district, with a population of about 32,000, which includes the City of Shaker Heights and a portion of the City of Cleveland. Per state law, we cannot restrict library use by residency, and we offer our services to a large number of Cleveland residents and others in Cuyahoga County outside our jurisdiction, easily serving up to 100,000 people within our urbanized region. With an unemployment rate of 12%, the City of Cleveland has some of the poorest and highest minority concentrations, in the county. Our Main Library is situated within one mile of some of the poorest/highest minority census
tracts in the cities of Cleveland and Shaker Heights. Presently, about 2500 people use our computer facilities each week and we believe that we can increase that number by more than 40% through this grant. The majority of people who use our computer resources do not or cannot afford computers and broadband access at home. d) Shaker Library is ready and qualified to move forward with this project. Director Luren Dickinson has more than 25 years of library management experience including extensive work with technology grants (Gates and LSTA) in the creation of computer labs, countywide WANs, and z39.50 compatible online catalogs. IT Manager, Ray Zapp, is a Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA), Certified Novell Administrator (CNA). Microsoft Certified Professional + Internet (MCP+I), Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE). He has tripled service since Shaker Heights received its initial Gates grant in 2000. Trainer, Walter Lesch, has 10 years experience teaching adults to use computers, and recently earned a Master’s degree in Library and Information Science. We will work with architect Duane Van Dyke who is known regionally for his innovative library design work. e) Throughout the course of the project, we will save a full-time technology position and a full-time training position, and will create three part-time positions, a part-time architectural position, and a part-time design position. f) The overall cost of the project is $664,965 of which $360,506 is matching funds.