Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: GREATER LANSING AREA DEVELOPMENT

Project Title: Northwest Public Computer and Business Development Center

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary_______________________

Greater Lansing Area Development (GLAD) Community Development 501(c)3 is developing the Northwest Public Computer and Business Development Center (the Center) in Lansing, North Carolina. The Broadband USA funding for the Center will bring economic growth through education and digital literacy to a small town with a rich cultural heritage and a wealth of natural resources yet generally isolated from the Information Technology Revolution and the economic benefits thereof. Lansing is the center of a low-income quadrant of Ashe County that sits in the northwest corner of the State in the heart of Appalachia. Ashe County has 25,000 residents, Lansing 151 and the service area includes 5,171. The service area population has income, education levels and home values well below that of the County, State and Nation. Drop out and Disability rates are higher. Vulnerable residents have not developed expertise in technology critical for education and employment opportunities. Internet access and equipment is not affordable for many, and the closest access can be as much as an hour away. Many have had little or no exposure to computers and the Internet. Residents are falling further and further behind the population of NC and the nation, becoming a more disadvantaged group due to digital illiteracy. As manufacturing jobs are lost or outsourced the community is depending more on successful small businesses development and tourism. The Center has a three-prong mission: Education Programs, Small Business Development and Business Growth. By building on the rich cultural and natural resources of the region while working with resources of key education, corporation and government partners, the economic benefits of technology training and education will be brought to the region. A renovated 1955 commercial building in downtown Lansing will serve as the home for the Center which will house public Internet access center, 30 computer workstations, a Webinar-Seminar-Video Conferencing facility, five affordable offices, retail space for local products, a business incubator, a small conference room, a business service center with copier, scanner, Basic and advanced computer skills, ESL, GED, Photoshop, PowerPoint, QuickBooks and Web Design will be taught. The Webinar-Seminar-Video Conferencing facility will be available to Local Fire Department and Hospital for basic education, and training activities. Small business development classes and support will be offered for those who are marketing local products, or utilizing local natural resources for their businesses i.e. outdoor recreation, heritage arts/crafts, produce farming, mountain music, oral traditions, and green economy promotions. The annual results of this broad-based community effort are expected to be: Creation of 4 new jobs Stabilization of 5 local small businesses Grow 5 new businesses Encourage and support the growth of 2 green businesses Increase computer literacy among people considered vulnerable populations Educate 400 people in basic and advanced computer skills, and basic education Provide public computer access to over 5,000 people Preserve a valuable historic building
increased employment opportunities. Assist in job searches and successful employment. Increase the number of tourists visiting the area by 10 percent. Educate and train 31 local firefighters and first responders. GLAD has brought together all of the resources needed to successfully implement the Broadband USA grant for a public computer center. Hundreds of volunteer hours have been contributed to the planning tasks of this grant. A grassroots effort of local residents aware of the advantages of digital literacy, tenuous local economy, and the wealth of opportunities natural resources provided, have worked tirelessly to bring together a solution to a problem. This small grassroots effort expanded from a handful to a roomful, to a community of people representing the local community college, the local internet provider, downtown business owners, the local hospital, local governments, small businesses, local volunteer fire department, and local corporations. There are 10 key partners in this effort; however the level of support goes beyond these few and beyond the boundaries of Ashe County. An experienced, motivated team has been assembled to create the new public computer center. GLAD is the funding applicant and will own, operate and staff the facility with employees, contract employees and volunteers. In operation since 2005 GLAD has managed 3 grants to make improvements in the Lansing business district, is managing the process to have downtown Lansing designated a National Historic District, and manages the Ola Belle Reed Music Festival, which is in its 5th year. A Board of Directors representing key partners has been created by the GLAD Board of Directors to oversee the development of the Center and the ongoing operation of the facility and report to the GLAD Board. Ashe Campus of Wilkes Community College will provide experienced and qualified instructors to teach basic computer skills, advanced computer skills, English as a second language, GED, web design, and a series of business development classes. ACWCC has volunteered the assistance of their Dean and IT Assistant/Instructor to assist with the planning of the Center, and will continue as regular advisors during project start up and operation. Skyline/Skybest will provide 6 megs of DSL broadband and WiFi to the center at no cost for the three year grant period. The Chief Regulatory Officer will be available to assist with planning and implementation and will sit on the BOD during the three-year grant period. The Lansing Volunteer Fire Department has provided cash contribution and will provide the instructors for classes to be held at the center for volunteer firefighters and EMS members. The N.C. Rural Center designated Lansing as a Small Towns Economic Prosperity Program (STEP) community. Lansing Aldermen have provided a large cash match from that grant in the amount of $62,000. They have provided funds to the Town, which have provided funding for a consultant, Paul Combs Enterprises, Inc. to assist with project planning. Mr. Combs has 30 years of experience in economic development and will volunteer additional time to support the Center Board of Directors during the three-year grant period. GLAD will hire a Project Manager with over 30 years of experience in grants administration and construction and development. This is a local woman-owned small business who will manage the design, construction and up-fit of the facility and ensure that all grant requirements are met. High Country Council on Governments will administer a part of the grant. Center Director will be responsible for day-to-day operations, supervising employees/volunteers and seeking continued financial support for the facility. Highly qualified candidates have been identified and will be hired upon receipt of the grant. The Director will work with Project Manager, Contractor, and Skyline/Skybest during construction and up-fit to ensure the facility meets all program requirements, and with Ashe Campus of the Wilkes Community College to develop curriculum and scheduling of events. The Director will hire three local small businesses to provide technical support, marketing assistance, and building maintenance. A part-time
person and volunteers will staff the Center during hours of operation to provide general administrative support, greet the public and answer questions.