

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Housing Authority of the City of Prichard

Project Title: Prichard Computer Technology Center

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

The Housing Authority of the City of Prichard (HACP) is proposing to expand public access to broadband service and enhance broadband capacity by encouraging public use of the Neighborhood Networks Center (NNC) in Prichard, Alabama. The expanded program, Prichard Computer Technology Center, will target vulnerable population groups where broadband technology has traditionally been underutilized.

The target geography for the public computer center are the census tracts that comprise the City of Prichard, census tracts: 40-50, 61.03 & 61.05. The City of Prichard is a working-class community of approximately 25,000 residents of predominantly African-American descent. The City of Prichard is located in the southwest corner of coastal Alabama, and is located in the Hurricane Katrina Recovery Area. Over the past decade, the City of Prichard has experienced a period of disinvestment. Since the 2000 Census, the population has decreased 10.5%, the median household income is 43% of the national average and unemployment increased from 5.7% in December of 2007, to over 10%. The proposed public computer center program is designed to assist the vulnerable population groups in the City of Prichard cope with the problems of health, education and unemployment by providing access to programs through broadband service.

The current Neighborhood Networks Center was established as a component of a HOPE VI grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2003. The target population for the current NNC program is public housing residents. The computer center is located in a 250 square foot area of the HOPE VI property management office. The Housing Authority proposes to construct a new facility adjacent to the existing center in order to expand the program to all vulnerable population groups in Prichard. Based on an assessment of need and the estimated number of potential users, the Housing Authority of the City of Prichard has performed preliminary predevelopment work for the design of the computer center. To accommodate a 30-computer lab, training rooms and offices, a floor plan for a 3,000 square foot building is being proposed. Based on the current \$133.00 square foot construction cost in the area plus soft costs, the total development cost is \$495,900.00.

To facilitate public access to the computer center, HACP proposes to construct the facility according to a master plan of community resource buildings adopted in the HOPE VI revitalization plan. Current facilities include a senior center built with CDBG funds and a recreation center and property management building built with HOPE VI funds. As funds become available, the master plan includes a day care center and a health facility. This approach will allow the public using the computer center to also access other services and programs in the same geographic area.

The program approach will build on the successful programs established in the HOPE VI Neighborhood Networks program and be expanded using nationally recognized model programs such as the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) initiative. The core initiatives will focus on health, education, childhood development and job training.

The current curriculum of the Neighborhood Networks Center will be expanded and enhanced by adding early childhood development programs, health and nutrition programs and educational programs. NNC staff and instructors will use interactive internet-based programs to facilitate learning.

It is estimated that over twenty percent (20%) of the target population or 5,500 people will use the computer lab annually and 2,800 residents will be enrolled in classes. These estimates were prepared based on the reporting data in the HUD eLogic Model system.

The Housing Authority of the City of Prichard, its staff and partners have the demonstrated skills and qualifications to implement the proposed program. The director of the current Neighborhood Networks Program has been involved in the planning, design and implementation of the NNC programs since the inception of the program. HACP's partners include the workforce development agency, Mobile Works, Inc., Bishop State Community College, the Alabama Neighborhood Networks Consortium, and a network of fourteen (14) social service agencies.

Local support for the proposed computer center is evidenced by the firm commitments for matching funds. \$100,000.00 in cash funds has been pledged for the construction of the computer center and a \$165,000.00 of in-kind contributions has been firmly committed. This represents over twenty percent (20%+) in matching funds.

The implementation of the computer center program in Prichard will create three new jobs to operate the center. The job training component of the program is designed to assist twenty-five (25)

unemployed residents gain employment through subsidized training resources and an additional three hundred (300) residents will receive assistance to gain employment through the job referral programs.

The overall cost of the proposed project is \$1,240,900.00; \$495,900.00 for the construction of the computer center and \$745,000.00 for program costs. \$265,000.00 will be defrayed with matching funds, therefore, the total request for BTOP funds is \$975,900.00.