Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: NORTHWEST ARCTIC, BOROUGH OF

Project Title: Relevance on the Tundra

Project Type: Sustainable Broadband Adoption

Executive Summary

a. Need The Northwest Arctic Borough (NWAB) has a population of 7,407, living in 11 communities scattered across an area the size of Indiana. These communities have been occupied by Inupiaq Eskimos for thousands of years, and around 82 percent of NWAB's current population is Inupiaq. There was no substantial non-Native presence in this part of the world until the 1890's, so the pace of change here has been quite rapid, and opinion is still fairly divided on whether it's more important to be successful in your career, or to be successful in hunting, fishing, and gathering and preparing subsistence foods. 42 percent of the NWAB population lives in the hub community of Kotzebue. In many ways, Kotzebue is more like a small city than a village. The majority of the region's jobs in government, health, education, and transportation are found here and broadband is available in Kotzebue, while it is not in any of the outlying villages. However, even in Kotzebue, communications services have lagged far behind the rest of the country. As recently as 1990, over 30% of households did not have phone service, and although nearly all households have phone service today, Kotzebue is still very much an underserved area when it comes to broadband. Kotzebue has 889 households, 100 licensed businesses, and about 750 internet subscriptions, 311 of which have download speeds faster than 768 kbps. This indicates that there is strong interest in internet service, but broadband speed for downloads is only available to 35% of households, or 31.4% of households and businesses combined. That's without factoring in that it costs $164.99/month to get 1.5mbps downloads and 256kbps uploads, and there are probably very few residential customers paying this rate. It is also impossible to say how many people in each household are using the internet or broadband. In the rest of the region, there is only one service provider, and their fastest advertised download speed is 256 kbps. Because this service is satellite-based, it is subject to frequent weather interference, meaning that it is often slower than dial-up service, and frequent interruptions make both downloads and uploads highly unreliable. Problem Statement: The awareness challenge is to convince people that broadband service is relevant to their daily concerns. But before that, we have a practical hurdle to contend with: the greatest need for broadband education is in the outlying villages, but there is likely to be little or no interest there until broadband is actually available, and we can't currently predict when that will happen. b. Approach The key to this project is relevance, but one cannot will people into understanding the potential of the Internet to offer new opportunities. You have to demonstrate how it works. Anchorage has iPhone application developers in the news, making six figure incomes, but people here don't see how they can do it: how the unique experiences of life in their villages have value to the world, not just for academics and journalists, but from our own rich stories of where we come from, how we survived, and how we live today. We know that need drives use, and unlocking that need is key to demonstrating how new economies can be built and, like
the hunters of old, we are focused on that task not with a shotgun approach that hopes to hit here or there, but with a bullet that we believe will shatter that lock. Because of our low bandwidth, we have been acting as passive consumers of internet material. Look at the way youth are using the internet now and it has no relation to jobs or to Inupiaq traditions. It seems to be all about pop culture that celebrates urban lifestyles. So why would community leaders want anyone to use the internet more, or faster? Isn't it just a high-tech distraction from the things that really matter? This project, Relevance on the Tundra, would demonstrate how by working with a core group, culturally relevant content we have already begun creating can be brought to market and sold with benefits to the local community. This project will provide kindling for the fire, so we can see and feel the warmth it brings in keeping our economy alive, as young and old understand and find relevance in the internet. Activities are already underway in producing digital video material and a flash-based interactive game, all of which incorporate Inupiaq language, culture and history, and all of which will also be treated as products for sale to regional, national or international markets. They will serve the dual purpose of showing how the internet can celebrate Inupiaq life and educate our people about our culture, history and language. The sales aspect will begin to show significant economic promise by the 2nd year of the project, and will serve as a proof of concept on how focusing on a specific community’s needs, will nurture use in the Arctic and beyond. The majority of our project activities are planned in Kotzebue for two reasons. The first is simply that this is where broadband is already available, so both the technology and the local attitudes allow for immediate startup of the project, in concert with the Entrepreneurial Business Incubator (EBI) team we have assembled. The second is that we need to have finished products for people to see, and actual sales and profit numbers to share, as soon as possible. Our work in Kotzebue is part of a longer-term strategy that will eventually involve using the internet to coordinate substantial, regionwide-collaborations but this can only happen once leaders in the villages have clearly seen the benefits and want those benefits in their communities, too. We will also have extensive outreach to the 10 smaller communities in the 2nd year, with program staff visiting each community and staying for two days, in order to have both formal and informal meetings about the project, engage the community and garner support. Towards the end of the second year, 2 leaders from each village will attend a Grand Regional Broadband Gathering in Kotzebue to learn more about the EBI team's products and the results of their training, marketing and sales efforts, as well as the critical role of broadband in developing communities' plans. c. Population served: Education: 5 individuals will join an Entrepreneurial Business Incubator (EBI) and will receive 2 full-day trainings in financial literacy, 2 in entrepreneurship, and 2 in digital animation. Each of these trainings will be repeated in a half-day introductory format for the general public on the following day. We expect a total of at least 300 people to participate in one or more of these second-day trainings, bringing the total audience to 305. Outreach: Outreach will include print, radio, online, and information sharing at existing regional gatherings. There will also be one public meeting per year in each of the villages, several informal meetings, and a Grand Regional Broadband Gathering for community leaders. Total awareness through these combined efforts is expected to reach 90% of the population in Kotzebue and 50% of the population in the villages for a total of 4,824. New Subscribers: By the end of this project, we estimate there will be 234 new broadband subscribers in Kotzebue, and 87 new broadband subscribers in the outlying villages, for a total of 321 new subscriptions. Vulnerable Populations: 80 to 90% of persons served by this project will be Alaska Native. Youth, Seniors, and persons who are unemployed or in poverty will also be involved. d. Qualifications and Partnerships: The
NWAB has served the population of Northwest Alaska since 1986, and has managed several large federal grants during that time. The project leaders, D’Anne Paaniikaaluk Hamilton and Norman Jayo have worked together on projects involving digital media training and internet training for over 12 years, including 5 years of work with youth and adults in Kotzebue. Project partners include the Native Village of Kotzebue, Nikiatchuat Ilisagviat Inupiaq language immersion school, the Aqqaluk Trust, and a potential partnership with ARRA middle mile applicant Kodiak-Kenai Cable Company if the application is funded. These partnerships add credibility and feasibility to our project. e. Jobs: 16 *5 EBI jobs. *1 job as Village Catalyst *At least 20 jobs will be created over the course of this program as a result of promoting entrepreneurship in the region - and at least 10 of these will prove to be sustainable. f. Overall cost: $819,897 - Fed Share: $572,936