Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, GOVERNMENT OF

Project Title: "DC-CCR" - DC Community Computing Resources

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary _______________________

With high unemployment and population density, and low per capita income, broadband adoption and digital literacy rates, the District of Columbia (DC) offers prime opportunity to address the high level of identified need in the national effort to bridge the digital divide. Its substantial low-income population relies heavily upon government-provided, public facilities for basic computer usage and Internet access, but the existing resources are insufficient to meet the demand. As a result, the District, led in this DC Community Computing Resources (DC-CCR) project by DC Public Libraries (DCPL), proposes to improve its public computing facilities capacity, reaching 590,000 users for only $1,553,310 in federal funds.

A. Statement of Problem/Need
   At the Capitol View Neighborhood Library, customers put the public computers to heavy use. They line up outside the branch before it opens, waiting to sign up for the opportunity to use a computer. During the course of the day, and especially after 3 p.m., customers often wait as long as three hours for computer time. Long delays are common: at most library facilities, the public computers are in such demand that average wait time for computer use is 45-90 minutes on a weekday, and 1-2 hours on Saturdays. At the central library location, the wait is 1-2 hours on weekdays and 2-3 hours on Saturdays. At DCPL branches in Ward 7 (where Capitol View is located), public computers are in even greater demand: wait times are 1-3 hours on weekdays, and 2-4 hours on Saturdays. According to Capitol View branch manager Winnell Montague, customers frequently complain about the shortage of available computers. On Mondays, when unemployed customers are filling out unemployment claims, looking for jobs and writing résumés, the computers are in even greater demand than usual. 'Computer usage has become 62% of our service, including computer classes,' says Montague. Like the DCPL system overall, Capitol View simply does not have sufficient computers to meet the need. Currently, DC libraries average 42,000 computer usage sessions per month, limited to 70 minutes because of demand. Usage is so heavy that current bandwidth of 10 Mps at each location is no longer adequate, exacerbating the problem by slowing internet access. The root of the enormous need for public computers in DC is easy to understand. At 15.8 percent in December 2009, DC has one of the worst state unemployment rates in the country; in its underserved area (Wards 5, 7 and 8), 21.5 percent of residents are unemployed. In Ward 5, per capita income was $21,551, or 68.1 percent of the national average (based on 2003 data, the most recent available). In Ward 7, per capita income was $19,035, or 60.2 percent of the national average. In Ward 8, per capita income was $14,137; only 44.72 percent of the national average. At such low income levels, the decision to purchase a computer and broadband Internet access is understandably one that many District residents cannot afford to make. As a result, they must rely on publicly available computers. When people need a public computer, they typically rely on the local public library. As the Federal Communications Commission reported in its paper,
'Broadband Adoption and Use in America,' of those Internet users who do not access the Internet from home, 57 percent do so at the library. Computer and broadband access affordability, however, is only part of the problem; training is also critical. DCPL-provided computer training to 7,600 customers in 2009. Again, the computing resources are insufficient: training classes are oversubscribed and capacity is inadequate for demand. To increase the number of people trained, the District needs more public computing workstations.

B. Overall Approach
The solution to meeting the District's overwhelming demand for public computers and adequate bandwidth is simple: provide more computers and bandwidth. DC-CCR will improve and augment equipment and broadband connectivity for public computing facilities in the District, increasing the number of computers available for public use at these locations from 1,673 from 603 and increasing bandwidth to 1 Gbps from 10 Mbps at computing center locations. DC-CCR will upgrade equipment for 30 of the existing computer work stations and add 1,070 more. At the 26 libraries and two recreation centers included in this project, bandwidth upgrades will benefit the users of 1,100 public workstations, as well as those members of the public who live or bring their laptop within range of each location’s existing free, open wifi hotspot. (View an interactive map of the District's existing free wifi hotspots: http://dcatlas.dcgis.dc.gov/agencyapps/wifi.aspx.) Though it represents the vast majority of District public computing resources, DCPL is not the only agency included in this DC-CCR project that serves this critical need. DC Public Schools (DCPS) will increase computer resources for its students, and both the University of the District of Columbia Community College (CCDC) and the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) will provide improved computer resources to the public. The DC-CCR project includes equipment and bandwidth for 26 public libraries, two recreation centers, a community college library, and three public schools.

C. Area and Populations to be Served
DC-CCR will serve the entire area of the District, with a focus on the underserved area and the District's vulnerable populations, particularly seniors, students, the unemployed, and low-income residents. Specifically, DC-CCR will improve and increase public computing resources not only at DCPL locations citywide, but also at the only community college library in the city (UDC's Community College of the District of Columbia, or CCDC, located in Ward 8), three DCPS locations in Wards 7 and 8, and two District recreation centers in Wards 6 and 8. A visit to any public library in the District will show that senior citizens, public school students, and the unemployed are among the heaviest users of its public computer resources. DCPL estimates that because of DC-CCR, it will be able to more than double the number of public computer sessions it provides the public to as much as 85,000 each month. Because of the multitude of training opportunities currently offered by DCPL, DCPS, DPR and CCDC at these locations, and the additional opportunities that will be offered under the District's SBA project (called DC Broadband Education, Training and Awareness, or DC-BETA), the improved computing resources that will be provided by this DC-CCR project will also spur the demand for broadband in the District and help provide a key ingredient for economic growth: a skilled workforce.

D. Qualifications of the Applicant
As one of the original grantees of the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, DCPL has provided public access computers for over a decade. With a highly-skilled Information Technology Department led by an experienced Chief Information Officer, and staffed by Microsoft certified systems engineers, DCPL has experience managing over 1,000 desktops. DCPL guarantees uptime of 91% on its public access computers, a figure that has been exceeded by 4%. DCPL tier II and III technicians are trained to address both internal (employee) and external help desk requests, and utilize a state of the art trouble ticketing system to track and assign all service calls. DCPL installs and
configures approximately 200-300 PCs per year, and it has infrastructure to accommodate the additional equipment included in this funding request. In addition, all DCPL facilities are undergoing substantial renovations that will improve power, physical access, and ergonomics in preparation for an eventual increase in public computer capacity. Computers at recreation centers and public schools are supported by the DC Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO), a 600-person centralized technology support organization that includes a dedicated help line and geographically assigned tier II and III technicians. The CCDC library location is supported by the college's own IT department. Both are sufficiently robust to support the additional public computer capacity. E. Jobs Saved/Created DC-CCR will directly and indirectly save or create a total of approximately 25 jobs. In addition, because so many users of public computers rely upon them to create resumes, prepare for work, and look for jobs, the project will contribute indirectly to many more people finding work. F. Overall Cost Total project costs are $2,220,310; DCPL is committing $667,000 in cash match against a Federal grant request of $1,553,310. This match comprises 30% of the total project cost.