Bridging Colorado's Great Digital Divide

The PCs and training programs provided by Bridging Colorado's Great Digital Divide will empower vulnerable populations with the opportunities provided by broadband access. In Colorado's poor rural and urban areas, public computer access is severely limited and the high demand for programs/services is unmet. 100% of the existing public computer centers in this project report that their patrons experience waits for Internet access. Our project will address the needs of vulnerable populations for PCC access by replacing out-of-date computers 4 or more years old, expanding computer lab capacity, and provide training. Project Approach The key components of Bridging Colorado's Great Digital Divide are increased computers, training, partnerships, public awareness, and evaluation. We will expand public Internet access, awareness and training in 76 PCCs including 62 public libraries, 2 Ute Tribal facilities, 5 school library/public library combined facilities, and 7 library-run PCCs in rural communities. The 76 PCCs are run by 49 library organizations. 43% of PCCs included in this project serve underserved areas with an estimated broadband penetration of less than 40%, due to their impoverished and rural locations. Overall, 70 of 76 PCCs are in locations with below the national average of 63.5% broadband penetration. 20.6% of the citizens served by this project (versus a 15.4% national average) are Hispanic. Overall, Colorado ranks highest in the nation in high school dropout rates and lowest in high school-to-college attendance. These trends are especially alarming among our state's black and Hispanic populations. Furthermore, our project serves many disabled who lack public Internet access that suits their handicaps. The key components of the CSL approach are: 1. Expand public computer capacity to meet need: Our project requests 451 desktops, 692 laptops, 69 Americans with Disabilities Act compliant workstations, and other equipment for PCC use. We are utilizing a mix of desktop computers and wheeled laptop carts. Local libraries have selected the solution that best meets local needs. Wheeled laptop carts provide the flexibility to augment computer capacity within libraries themselves and also enable training in the community at a manageable cost. Furthermore, ADA equipment makes computers and training more accessible to the 86,827 sensory disabled and 169,740 physically disabled living in project service areas. 2. Train library staff: A recent focus group of library trainers conducted by CSL revealed that large numbers of at-risk populations are showing up for computer classes with little or no computer skills. Our project team will train library staff to teach basic computer skills, as well as Word, Excel and other technology to promote computer proficiency and broadband adoption. We will also train staff on leveraging laptop carts to offer training at other community institutions. Program partners will also train library staff to teach courses on jobs skills development, health care, and other topics of interest to library patrons. 3. Public awareness to engage Colorado citizens: In order to reach the underserved communities targeted by this grant, CSL will
develop a statewide public awareness campaign and distribute collateral for local implementation. This campaign will promote broadband adoption and PCC use to vulnerable populations. To determine impact of the outreach, Library Research Services will conduct both input and outcome-based evaluation. 4. Deliver training programs to PCC patrons: Libraries have agreed to partner with local bodies such as community colleges, schools, Chambers of Commerce, senior centers, and others to deliver training. Libraries will also organize classes in conjunction with statewide training partners. The wheeled laptop carts will provide flexibility to bring training to community centers where vulnerable population groups congregate. Training and programs will be focused on five core goals: 'Address broadband use gap through computer/Internet skills training from library staff, local and state partners as well as utilizing mobile carts to engage with vulnerable populations throughout each community. 'Increasing minority and rural access to higher education by partnering with College in Colorado and local partners to deliver training on college admissions and financial aid resources, and collaborating with community colleges to reach targeted populations. 'Increasing adult education levels by engaging with workforce development, State Adult Education and Family Literacy, and Colorado GED to deliver services through public computers and training. 'Increasing access to jobs databases and career development resources by partnering with Colorado Workforce Development to provide workforce training and support. Each library will provide access to jobs databases, computer skills training, professional education and other relevant local resources. 'Providing computer center access to disabled persons by deploying ADA-recommended workstations, and collaborating with the Rocky Mountain Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center to train library staff on how to engage with and serve disabled and elderly citizens. Service Area Demographics These libraries serve approximately 2.5 million people, about 52% of the state's population. Many of these are vulnerable populations who cannot afford broadband at home and rely on the PCCs for Internet access. The service areas selected include the estimated following vulnerable populations: 'Hispanic/ESL: 523,016 citizens in project service area 'African-American: 80,469 citizens 'Native Americans: 14,119 citizens 'Disabled: 86,827 sensory disabled citizens, 169,740 physically disabled citizens 'Low-income and Unemployed: 1.15 million low-income citizens, 185,000+ unemployed 'Senior: 257,952 citizens 'Youth: 623,974 citizens 18 or younger Colorado State Library Qualifications The CSL has an effective leadership team with a commitment to library goals, including providing free public Internet access to Colorado's residents. CSL has a strong track record of bringing citizens to libraries, ranking 2nd out of 50 states in library visits per capita. (StateMaster, 2009) Libraries are historically the primary provider of free public computer center access in Colorado, with CSL providing strategic guidance, programmatic oversight and e-resources. CSL has strong experience in program and project management oversight, and has successfully implemented many statewide deployments of technology with local implementation, training, matching funds, and outreach similar to this one. For instance, the CSL recently implemented AskColorado, a live online chat reference service with 74 partner libraries and over 300 trained library professionals who provide live, online one-on-one research support for Colorado residents. The CSL also administers $2.6 million in LSTA funding for technology and special learning resources using a sub-grantee process similar to the process that will be used for this project. In order to be included, partners have agreed to perform outreach in their communities to ensure high usage of the new PCs and conduct computer-related training that is specifically relevant to the locale. Jobs Saved/Created Based on the CEA job creation model, this project will save/create 36.3 job years. 10.1 jobs will be direct, while 13.2 job years will be indirect and 13.1 job
years will be induced. Additionally, the training and computer skills generated by the project will contribute to work force productivity for many years in the future. Overall Project Cost The overall cost of the project is $3,345,721, with $2,275,526 being requested in federal funds. The Gates Foundation is supplying $753,776 in cash matching funds. The libraries are providing $210,791 in cash match. Another $114,627 is accounted for by in-kind match from the CSL and its programmatic partners. The total match is 32%. 28.6% is cash match and 3.4% is in-kind. Significant, Measureable Impact CSL is confident that we will be able to execute on the outlined project and improve public computer access and computer-related training that will empower the neediest citizens in Colorado. Based on survey information provided by the target institutions, we anticipate an increase of more than 26,000 PCC users per week due to the capacity increases. Overall, we expect more than 10,000 new public training sessions will be provided. Outcomes will be tracked in partnership with Library Research Service through surveys. The much needed PCs and services funded by the Bridging Colorado's Great Digital Divide project are essential towards bridging the gap in our state's broadband use and ensuring that our vulnerable populations have access to the opportunities afforded by the digital age.