Applicant Name: PUGET SOUND CENTER FOUNDATION FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY, THE

Project Title: Communities Connect Network

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Washington State is committed to ensuring that all residents have equitable access to the education, job, health, and the civic tools that information technologies and the Internet provides. At a time when being online is getting more critical, the sour economy, job losses, and cuts in services are causing an increasing number of vulnerable residents to look for one-stop Internet access, training and assistance with employment, education, financial, domestic violence and civil law related help. Public agencies, nonprofit organizations and libraries across Washington see the need and are working to provide effective services. However, these public computing centers (PCCs) lack the funding and technical assistance needed to deliver current technology and implement best practices in education, let alone expand their services to meet the increased needs caused by the current recession. Stimulus funding and technical assistance is needed to meet increased demand. The recent announcement of a BTOP infrastructure grant to Washington State also provides an opportunity to leverage broadband to support these organizations and their clients. The 2009 Technology Access and Adoption study by the City of Seattle reported that 44% of the immigrant focus group participants assessed their computer skill as 'none or not very skilled.' Eighty-five percent of Washington households earning less than $15,000 per year have no broadband in the home and 63% have no Internet connection at all (TechPolicyBank). Washingtonians with lower-incomes, less education, and living in rural areas are being left behind. The EdLab Group is proposing a multi-sector collaboration linking experts and resources to provide public computing centers that effectively help meet our broadband access and adoption needs. The participating programs are training low-income youth with basic and advanced technology, helping high school dropouts with GED’s, upgrading the skills of recent immigrants and unemployed, and working with a host of other residents to bring them towards success in the 21st century. The Communities Connect Network Project will expand the capacity of 37 public computing centers and add 5 new public computing centers to serve 424,368 people with limited technology access or low adoption rates in both rural and urban areas of Washington State. The 42 public computing centers (PCCs) are located in 5 libraries, 20 in public community centers/non-profit organizations, 12 public and low-income housing complexes, and 5 justice centers in 7 counties, including 10 rural communities. Through an application process, CCN selected PCCs in Pierce, King, Skagit, and Yakima, who could most benefit most. CCN will foster equitable access, training and increased broadband adoption through 1) adding 244 computers, upgrading 74 computers, adding software, extending operating hours; 2) improving the amount and quality of training offered at PCCs in the areas of digital skill building, education, and workforce preparation; and 3) encouraging information distribution and sharing on the topics of education,
workforce preparation, online safety, legal, financial literacy and PCC management and sustainability through an online resource portal linked to training. This investment will enable 2,176 clients per week to receive training and for PCCs to double the amount of clients currently served annually. A diagram of the project model has been uploaded as part of supplementary documents. The Communities Connect Network Project provides a model to bridge and enhance the delivery of services between libraries, Worksource, public computing centers, and the justice system. This project will establish a PCC Directory and referral pipeline to help PCCs and Worksource providers be able to refer clients to services and support them as their skills progress. We are partnering with the Workforce Development Council and Worksource to obtain workforce preparation resources, financial literacy resources, and training. Other partners, NPoer Seattle, Northwest Justice Project, SDK Bridge, and Seattle Housing Authority’s Special Technology Access Resource (STAR) Center have expertise in assistive technology, social networking technologies, multimedia technologies, and justice services and resources. The libraries and community technology center partners provide the resources and expertise to reach diverse, vulnerable populations. Communities Connect Network (CCN) started in 2006 with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as a statewide coalition of public and private organizations working to ensure that all individuals have access and the skills to use the Internet and information technologies. The EdLab Group manages CCN and our state Council on Digital inclusion. The proposed Communities Connect Network Project is based on the research-proven model developed by CCN to best support technology adoption. The research shows that three components are necessary for adoption: access, training, and relevant content and services. CCN piloted this delivery and evaluation model in ten sites with funding from the Gates Foundation and Washington State University (WSU) in 2007 and 2008, with results documented in the book ‘Digital Inclusion’ (Crandall & Fisher 2009). This project replicates and expands that small scale experience to new areas of the state, engaging additional institutional partners and designing a public computing center strategy that will expand the job, education and service delivery pathways between community-based computing centers, libraries, WorkSource centers and justice centers. The author, Dr. Mike Crandall, is leading our data collection and evaluation. Our project has potential for broad national replication by PCCs, evaluators, and other digital inclusion program funders. We estimate at least 45 jobs will be created and 26 will be saved as a result of this project which has a total cost of $6,456,916.