

## **Broadband USA Applications Database**

**Applicant Name:** Buffalo & Erie County Public Library

**Project Title:** CyberTrain: Fostering Access and Learning in Erie County

**Project Type:** Public Computer Center

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### **Executive Summary**

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Project and Approach: Western New York has been hard hit by the country-wide recession and New York State fiscal challenges. The unemployment rate in the Buffalo Metropolitan area has surged to 8.7% and the National Center for Education Statistics reports a 12% illiteracy rate in Erie County. Poor reading skills correlate closely with lack of employment, lower wages and fewer opportunities for advancement.

The goal of this project is to enrich career and employment opportunities, expand access to online services, and enhance technology skill-training opportunities for at-risk and underserved populations in Buffalo and Erie County. Project funding will enable the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library (B&ECPL) to employ additional staff to present job-related training classes and add up to 38 hours of public availability using two mobile CyberTrains and a stationary Training Lab located at the Central Library in downtown Buffalo.

The Library will replace dated and obsolete technology with state-of-the-art computer equipment that will be used for public and staff training and provide high-speed online access for the public. Current obsolete hardware limits programming options.

In addition, the Library will partner with Erie Community College (ECC) to provide classes from the Pre-Collegiate Studies Program. The courses are tailored for high school graduates, GED qualifiers, and adult learners. Utilizing the CyberTrains and Central Training Lab, ECC faculty will instruct Pre-Collegiate Reading/Writing and Pre-Collegiate Developmental Mathematics courses that focus on essential skills needed in the classroom, preparing students to take the next step toward obtaining a college degree. Classes will meet two days a week for 10 weeks, providing 60 hours of instruction. Students will be pre- and post tested to insure successful transition to college. Students will be mentored by a Case Manager who will assist with career exploration, college and financial aid applications, and other services that provide the student with a seamless transition to ECC. The ECC Pathways Department has a history of providing no cost educational opportunities for the residents of Erie County. The Library and ECC Pathways Department will develop a lasting partnership offering underemployed and unemployed Erie

County residents an opportunity to enhance their skills, earn college credit and become more engaged citizens. This partnership will provide additional courses and services and therefore create a more skilled workforce, leading to enhanced educational and employment opportunities.

**Service Areas and Users:** The primary beneficiary of this project is underserved populations in the City of Buffalo and rural areas of Erie County. The project will also serve at-risk populations living in poverty, with low literacy skill levels. The target audience is predominantly adults, with some at-risk youth (16-21) programming available through the Training Lab and through Erie Community College programming.

The CyberTrains will be available for programs at 36 branch libraries in the Library System, insuring that classes will be offered to throughout the county. A minimum of 200 classes will be presented. Proposed classes include (but are not limited to): basic computer skills, MS Office Products, resume writing, interview techniques, online job searching, and business tools for entrepreneurs. These classes will provide the unemployed and under-employed opportunities for career enhancement. Class size will range from 13 (CyberTrain) to 22 (Training Lab). In addition, up to 38 hours of "open lab" time will be made available.

88 prospective students will be targeted to participate in pre-collegiate courses that will enable them to qualify for college level credit. In turn, college credits increase their employment opportunities.

**Qualifications of the Applicant:** The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System is a federated system consisting of a Central Library and 36 branches located in urban, rural and suburban areas. The System serves the chartered population of 950,265 (2000 census) and covers 1,045 square miles. Technology infrastructure and all associated data and hardware support are administered through a centralized network support department housed at the Central Library. The System currently administers 1,210 fully networked PCs (779 public and 431 staff). The B&ECPL has demonstrated ongoing successful grant partnerships with the Gates Foundation (most recently Opportunities Online Hardware Grants Phase I and II) and successfully implements e-Rate funding each year. The Assistant Deputy Director and System IT Administrator will oversee project implementation.

**Jobs to Be Created:** The project will create jobs in our region, and help to retain current positions. The Library will hire a full time Technology Trainer and two part time Library Tech Specialists will be employed to configure, install, transport equipment and act as classroom monitors. In addition, two Library Techs will be hired to act as classroom monitors providing additional public availability up to 38 hours per week. The Library will also employ a project coordinator and a librarian to oversee Curriculum

Development and Class Scheduling. Library System IT staff will research, specify, purchase, configure and install all hardware and associated software for two mobile CyberTrains and the Central Library Technology Training Lab as well as supervise Library Tech Specialists. In addition, Erie Community College Class Instructors, Data Coordinators, Case Managers and Mentors will be employed to offer courses which otherwise could not have been accommodated using traditional ECC classrooms or outlets.

Overall Project Cost: Salaries \$189,754; Computer Equipment \$78,034; Supplies/books \$3000; PR/Graphics \$1,500; Mileage \$2,000; (Additional In-Kind \*Use of Training Lab \$20,000) TOTAL PROJECT COST: \$294,288