

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Electronic Information Network, the

Project Title: Allegheny County Broadband Expansion of Public Computing Centers at Libraries

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

a) Statement of Problem

The proposed project provides for expanding capacity and access to broadband services at 73 Public Computing Centers in public libraries to benefit 1.2 million residents in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. The project specifically fulfills the BTOP statutory purpose to provide broadband access, education, awareness, training, equipment and support to the local public libraries as community anchor institutions. The difficult economic environment drives more people to libraries than ever before and the need for expanded capacity is demonstrated by several factors:

1. Staff report that some residents are discontinuing broadband service in their homes because of the expense.
2. More than 50% of the Public Computing Centers are unable to expand the number of workstations because of the port limitations on the existing network equipment.
3. It has been necessary to double the aggregate level of Internet bandwidth every 12 to 18 months for the libraries.
4. The issues of geographic location, limited service provider capacity, and significant build out costs has made increasing bandwidth in response to the increasing demand and utilization of the Public Computing Centers unaffordable and in some locations, sufficient capacity is not even available from the providers.

b) Overall approach to addressing need

The proposed solution will alleviate current capacity limitations, provide an innovative platform for future expansions, and includes a strong education and training program provided by the libraries as key partners to ensure that expanded access to job-related, education, and health care resources reach and benefit all residents. The solution includes three technology components:

1. Cisco Wide Area Application Services (WAAS) to increase broadband service delivery in locations where higher speed services are not available or affordable.
2. A modernized layer-3 switched environment to improve the speed to the desktop and provide for expanding the number of workstations.
3. Public PC management system helps enable a secure, efficient, and user-friendly environment for public access.

The proposed training and education programs will be developed and offered by the libraries with other key community partners such as the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, and Knowledge Connections (located in public housing projects) based upon the needs identified through outreach programs.

c) Areas to be served

All Public Computer Centers located in Allegheny County public libraries are open and free to all 1.2 million residents of Allegheny County (and often neighboring areas). Expanding the broadband access is imperative for some of the most vulnerable population groups:

- 17% of residents are age 65 and older. The Public Computing Centers provide Internet access that enables access for social security applications and key health and medical reference sites.
- Nearly 40,000 children live in poverty-level households. The Public Computing Centers are “safe havens” for many of these children after school and throughout the summer.

- The unemployment rate in Allegheny County is 6.7% (June 2009), and rising. Expanded access to the myriad of online resources for job search and workforce development is crucial.

- All computers have multi-language capability and assistive technology for people with disabilities.

d) Qualifications of applicant & partners

The grant applicant is the Electronic Information Network (eiNetwork), a non-profit corporation that functions as a technology consortium for the 46 independent public library organizations in the region. Since its inception, the eiNetwork has designed, developed, implemented, and supported the countywide library network, multiple shared library application systems, and the 73 Public Computing Centers; and is a recipient of E-rate discounts. Many programs that were initially funded through private grants now operate as sustainable programs. The eiNetwork has a demonstrated track record in executing projects such as the one proposed in collaboration with the local libraries as partners.

Two SDB organizations are partners in the project. The eiNetwork has established business relationships with these partners and experience implementing other projects of similar scope and scale. The relationship with eiNetwork will create and sustain jobs for these SDB partners. The 46 library organizations are the anchor institutions that house the Public Computing Centers and are key partners providing the broadband education and training component of the project. Finally, the Regional Asset District, a special purpose unit of local government which has funded eiNetwork since its inception, is also a key partner.

e) Overall costs & timeline

The proposed expansion of Public Computing Centers at Allegheny County libraries is expected to take one year (in 3 phases) to complete at a total cost of \$2.167 million. The Federal request portion is \$1.496 million. The matching funds (cash and in-kind) are calculated as 31% of the total project or \$671K. Cash matching funds are provided by eiNetwork as the applicant (\$373K); in-kind matching funds (total of \$297K) are provided by our SDB partner, TriLogic Corporation and by our community partners, the Allegheny County public libraries, for education programs offered at no charge to the public.

Summary Benefits

The use of commercially available networking technologies and software ensure the proposed solution is replicable for other organizations. The consortia organization model promotes the sharing of resources, programs, and expertise, and is also replicable. The innovative technology, relevant education programs, and experience of eiNetwork in implementing such large scale programs will make expanded broadband access in Public Computing Centers a sustainable reality.