Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: DARTON COLLEGE

Project Title: Darton College Community Computer Center

Project Type: Public Computer Center

__________________________________ Executive Summary __________________________________

The primary need the Darton College Community Computer Center (DCCCC) will address is the long term depressed economic conditions of the citizens of Albany MSA and Southwest Georgia. The rurality of this region of the state has severely limited access to broadband and, therefore, its benefits. In recent years, the area has been hard hit with business and industry closings. Basically, extreme poverty makes it impossible for many families even to purchase a computer, much less to purchase broadband access. The area is severely underserved, especially for the vulnerable and disadvantaged. The DCCCC will address the need by providing much needed access and training that will help to break the poverty cycle. Broadband and technology skills are critical to improving individual and regional economic conditions. Essential to providing effective broadband access, especially to the vulnerable and underserved populations, is awareness of broadband and technology opportunities, and availability of the training and education necessary to take advantage of the wide range of opportunities. Darton College will provide a comprehensive approach to awareness, education and training for a range of demographics. The DCCCC is located in Albany which is approximately 1 hour 15 minutes from the furthest points in the 21 county region of Southwest Georgia. The DCCCC and the educational programs available on site and through distance learning technologies will stimulate sustained broadband usage and economic growth. Our approach is innovative because we will provide training and education at no cost, and because we will have assistants in the proposed center to aid the patrons; no other public computers in the area have enough staff to give patrons the help they request. We will have an extensive website with workshop/seminars available 24/7 to those not able to attend in person, as well as extensive information for healthcare, business and industry, students, senior citizens, the disabled, etc. In addition, our ability to gain the support of many organizations in the area through our long term relationship with them gives us an advantage in making this center a success. They have agreed to be on our Advisory Board and will, therefore, provide overall project guidance and input into courses, seminars and website content. They will also provide us much needed awareness of the needs of business and industry. Each of the partners has expressed enthusiasm for the project. Each has offered to advertize the DCCCC and its services to their clients. Those having websites will use them to inform and link to the DCCCC website. The area to be served is the 21 county region of Southwest Georgia. This entire region has a high concentration of our target populations, especially low income citizens. For example the city of Albany's poverty rate has risen from 21.8% in 1970 to 27.1% in 2000, and the unemployment rate almost doubles the national average at 18.6%. The average household income for a family of two is $19,601 which places two working adults supporting a family below the poverty line. In the region, 40% of the total population is listed as insecure for necessities such as food, and clothing
according the SW Georgia Food bank. Georgia has a poverty rate of 13.9%, the 15th highest in the United States. Over half of the counties in the 21 county region have poverty rates that are actually 50% or more, worse than the average for the state. This region of the state is significantly impoverished because of its low population and isolation from larger metropolitan areas with more opportunities for education and jobs. Because of this, these areas are somewhat stigmatized, discouraging business and industry from locating there. That in itself causes more unemployment, making it more difficult to attract health care workers and teachers. Because of this, poor quality education and health care is found here. The DCCCC will be able to improve this picture through our innovative proposal. This 21 county area has a population of 423,918. We estimate that we can serve at least 105,600 patrons per year through the center itself and more through the website. Darton College is uniquely qualified to run a public computer center and to construct our planned website. DC is an experienced, successful digital content provider with expertise in audio/visual, multimedia, broadband streaming media, and digital content design & development. Darton College is a leader in the state in the use and production of instructional technology applications and distance learning programs as evidenced by a successful history of distance learning grant awards. With more than a decade of experience in the field, Darton can leverage production and delivery of educational content through a variety of modes, including digital video production, video conferencing, streaming media and online content development. For five years Darton College has been in Top 10 Digital Community Colleges awarded by American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Center for Digital Education (2004 10th, 2005 6th, 2007 2nd, 2008 2nd, 2009 3rd.) In 2009 the College was awarded the Digital Education Achievement Award from the Center for Digital Education and Converge magazine in the Learning and Engagement category for "Motion Capture in the Classroom." This has been made possible through our commitment to our Instructional Technology and Distance Learning department with its eleven full-time professionals with extensive education and experience and well-developed multimedia facilities (digital imaging and graphics production, digital audio, non-linear video editing, digital cameras, digital video cameras, etc.). More details are provided elsewhere in the application. Darton College is very experienced in implementing grants. We have been awarded more than 7 million dollars in technology and distance learning related grants. These are described elsewhere in the application. The overall cost of the project is $3,758,571.74. Darton College will provide a 30.7% match.