Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

Project Title: Building Community Capacity through Sustainable Broadband Adoption

Project Type: Sustainable Broadband Adoption

_______________________Executive Summary_______________________

a. The problem or need with regard to improving broadband service adoption rates: For Wisconsin today, broadband construction and skill-building is not a question of opportunity it is an issue where survival hangs in the balance. Wisconsin leads the nation in the percentage of employment in manufacturing (~16%), a rapidly dwindling source of employment. One of five communities identified for participation in the proposed project is the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, where unemployment has hovered in double digits throughout the past decade. Four of the five participating communities are in economic distress: per capita income of 80% or less compared to the national average, or unemployment rate greater than the national average. Wisconsin's plight is dire. Increases in broadband availability and adoption, with education for the populace about broadband, are essential for Wisconsin to be competitive. Broadband has become a survival issue for communities, including Wisconsin's farming economy. Yet we estimate that 50% of state residents and businesses lack broadband and technical expertise to leverage connectivity for their communities. As Wisconsin municipalities seek sustainability, they recognize the need for broadband as a prerequisite for community survival. Communities are struggling with the complexities of broadband acquisition, as well as leveraging its full potential. Efforts to date fail to position connectivity as the life-blood of the community. This struggle points to the need for technical and community development expertise. When these critical factors are engaged for broadband, Wisconsin communities will be empowered to make sound economic decisions.

b. Overall approach to addressing the need, and how approach is innovative: The University of Wisconsin-Extension (UWEX) is submitting two linked applications for stimulus funds to promote broadband construction and adoption. UWEX presents a plan that addresses several BTOP initiatives. This project, Building Community Capacity through Broadband (BCCB), moves beyond the goal of our fiber construction grant to building capacity to leverage this access. The goal of BCCB is to capitalize on increasing access by developing innovative models, built on cross-sector and cross-institutional collaborations, that advance economic development through utilization of broadband. This project engages communities to build capacity for education, awareness, and training. Attaining computer literacy is a prime goal for all community members. The project will build digital literacy by transforming institutions reaching underserved areas and vulnerable populations, and by assuring broadband support. Through its awareness campaign and community training, this project will raise consciousness about broadband and spur the desire to personally invest in broadband adoption. When residents collectively access broadband and appreciate its benefits, BCCB will expand broadband adoption to 23,500 subscribers, especially among vulnerable populations. UWEX will collaborate with the demonstration communities to help them implement: 'Grassroots engagement that will strengthen
Community Area Networks (CANs) into collaborative learning communities that exchange methods for broadband applications, training and promotion. Locally creative outreach to build ownership among targeted groups and vulnerable populations, developing familiarity with broadband services and awareness of its potential. Interactive tools and content providing videos and webinars that, for example, build computer skills, promote broadband demand, and offer instruction in e-commerce. Replicable models and roadmaps detailing how other communities can emulate strategies for building and sustaining broadband adoption.

c. 1. Areas to be served: Five Wisconsin communities are partnering with UWEX (see 'Demonstration Communities' map in 'Supplemental Information'): Chippewa Valley: This three-county region of west central Wisconsin will stimulate new business opportunities through virtual innovation and entrepreneurial think tanks in rural areas, while meeting needs of free clinic patients through telemedicine services. Menominee Nation: Menominee County in east central Wisconsin is the reservation of the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin. The tribe will create computer labs to train its large population of unemployed, while connecting its sizeable corps of Army troops with their families. Platteville: This far southwestern Wisconsin county will serve vulnerable populations at the Senior Center, while training farmers at the university agricultural center. Superior: This far northwestern Wisconsin county will train teachers, students and their families, in educational technology concepts for 21st Century Learning. Wausau: This central Wisconsin county will establish a broadband computer lab at the Neighborhood House to train Hmong residents, elderly and unemployed populations. These five communities emerged as 'broadband ready,' meeting qualities described in the 'Request for Community Participation' provided as Supplemental Information: Vigorous activity to start the process before the BTOP program was announced Stakeholders that understand the opportunity and have developed a coalition of technical resource persons and community leaders Openness to explore infrastructure configurations Excitement about building community ownership and creating new models Agreement to participate in e-commerce and e-literacy training With collaborative guidance from UWEX, the communities have committed to this opportunity. See partnership letters, Section 8. They will pool their resources and experience to design community-based strategies for broadband. They will share with Wisconsin communities and other states models for network building that result from implementation of the BCCB project.

c.2. Population of the target areas, including demographic information: The five demonstration CANs comprise a combined population of 426,660, including 169,817 households. The BCCB project will reach out with culturally-sensitive approaches to three unique populations: Hmong: A Hmong population of 5122 in Marathon County (the second largest county concentration of Hmong in Wisconsin) and a total of 10,085 Hmong within the five regions; approximately one-quarter of the state's Hmong will be served by this project. Average family income of Hmong residents is $35,898 per year. Native American: A population of nearly 4000 Native Americans living on the Menominee reservation, and a total of more than 6500 Native Americans within the five regions. Average family income of Menominee reservation residents is $31,448 per year; unemployment among this target group is approximately 18.1%. Hispanic: A population of nearly 5000 Hispanic residents in the five regions. Average family income of Hispanic residents is $34,978 per year.

c.3. Estimated number of potential broadband subscribers: A marketing and education campaign will maximize broadband adoption rates. Approximately 165 community anchor institutions will benefit from BCCB. Through the work of local broadband instructors conducting marketing, 23,500 subscribers will initiate broadband service.

d. Applicant qualifications: Over the past century, Extension has built
local capacity and project ownership through community educators. UWEX is the best-qualified entity to implement the BCCB project, in collaboration with the Community Area Networks. UWEX brings decades of experience managing Federally-funded projects. During its most recent fiscal year, UWEX received more than $45 million in grants, of which $20 million represents funding awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Small Business Administration. The Wisconsin Department of Administration received a $22.9 million NTIA grant during BTOP Round 1 competition. BCCB will leverage the value of this Federal stimulus investment in the state's middle mile infrastructure. The Chippewa Valley Community Area Network has compiled a decade-long history of broadband expansion. For this project network representatives will create resources to inspire additional communities. Jobs to be saved or created: As indicated in section 14, 'Project Benefit,' UWEX estimates that the BCCB project will create approximately 35 jobs. In addition we estimate that 8106 jobs will be saved or created from increased broadband penetration over the two years of this project. e. Overall cost of the proposed project: The budget recommended for BCCB totals $3,265,832, of which $2,390,416 represents the requested Federal share. Matching contribution: The remaining $875,416 represents the local applicant match, for a 26.8% share of the overall project budget.