Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: MYWAY VILLAGE, INC.

Project Title: Getting Massachusetts Low-Income Seniors and People with Disabilities Across the Digital Divide

Project Type: Sustainable Broadband Adoption

Executive Summary

a. The Problem: Only 30%, or 12 million, of America’s 40 million seniors (65+ years old) use the Internet. An even lower percentage of poor, lesser educated, or minority Seniors go online. Few of the 6,000 seniors and people with disabilities who live in the 48 low income housing developments and communities to be reached by this proposal currently use broadband. For all practical purposes, low income seniors and people with disabilities in Massachusetts are not using the Internet, and our mission is to get them connected. These vulnerable populations are missing out on the many educational, job training, informational and health benefits that Internet usage can bring. That, in turn, costs our society. For example, depression (often caused by isolation) costs the United States $100 billion annually, yet studies show that Internet use by the elderly can cause a 20% reduction in depression. A 2009 Phoenix Center study concludes: ‘expanding Internet usage among the elderly may have significant economic payoffs.’

b. Approach to the Problem: We use an innovative but proven Internet adoption program called Connected Living Adoption and Sustainability Program ('CLASP') which ties technology, training and support together in a holistic and senior-specific way. This program directly confronts traditional barriers to Internet use by seniors and people with disabilities. First, we focus on relevance to the specific priority needs of each individual. For each senior or person with disabilities, we identify the priority interests and experiences that can be advanced through the Internet and then focus on that interest, whether it is staying connected with children and grandchildren, writing and sharing memoirs, accessing information via the web or accessing health care or government services. We start by teaching the basics of e-mail, web access and practical applications relevant to daily living using the simplified Connected Living Internet Portal or standard programs. Our individual and group training then expands foundation skills upon which other and more advanced skills and applications can be built. Second, we make learning easy, convenient and even fun. The CLASP program uses off-line methods (videos, discussion groups) to draw in participants and demonstrate the practical benefits of the online world, and instructional content is oriented to the actual interests of seniors. Most important, Internet awareness-raising and training is conducted by friendly 'Ambassadors,' often in the very housing communities and units where residents live, so learning takes place in comfortable surroundings in a controlled and semi-social setting. Some Connected Living Ambassadors -- like those in a current West Roxbury, MA program -- are high school student volunteers, so training creates both inter-generational exchange and a great volunteer/social service experience. Third, we eliminate cost as a barrier to Internet use. Each participant who attends our training programs and passes an Internet literacy and skills evaluation gets a voucher that makes purchasing a computer and Internet connectivity more
affordable. Throughout the program, we will make aggressive efforts to minimize the costs of devices, connectivity and instruction during the period of the BTOP subsidy so that seniors will have the advantage of the lowest possible costs of Internet adoption when they are paying for the costs of service themselves. Our entire program is leading to an 'end game' where seniors acquire and pay for Internet services within the structure of the marketplace. c. Areas and Populations to be Served. The primary audience for this program is seniors and people with disabilities living in low-income subsidized housing. This population has one of the lowest usage of the Internet at of any demographic. Our second audience consists of the seniors living in the surrounding neighborhood and their local service providers including Area Agencies for Aging (AAAs). A very important third audience is the remote family, friends and caregivers who need better ways to stay in touch with their loved ones and who, through positive reinforcement and example, keep their loved ones online. Our partners have compiled detailed information about the demographics and Internet experiences and interests of community residents along with a list of current service providers to the communities and the nature of the services and how they are delivered (See Exhibit K). Community residents will receive awareness raising materials, invitations to group meetings, the controlled use of the computer center and access to the offline and online computer/Internet training materials. d. Qualifications of the Applicant. MyWay Village, Inc., a Massachusetts based technology and service company, has designed and implemented successful Connected Living training and adoption programs in senior housing settings in Massachusetts and Illinois in the past two years, and has developed a Connected Living Internet Portal specifically for seniors (See Exhibit D). MyWay Village has detailed documentation regarding its experiences during 2008 and 2009 in providing the personal, one-on-one and online instructional programs at the core of the proposed program (See Exhibit E). e. Jobs Created: Each of the 48 communities in this program will have a dedicated team that will plan and implement outreach, Internet awareness raising and education/training programs in small group and personal training settings. Each team will include a full-time instruction and training manager - a Community Program Manager - and a second 'shared work' position filled by a volunteer or community service student. Since these positions don't exist in the marketplace at present, it is expected that all of the training managers will leave Coalition employment after one year, to be placed in a similar position. We expect that all of the first and second year training managers at the demonstration locations will move into other senior buildings and provide experienced training services to senior buildings not involved in this demonstration. f. The Cost of the Program: The overall cost of the proposed program will be $4,425,760. The breakdown of program components is: Upgrades to network infrastructure & connectivity distribution at 41 training sites: $900,598 (20.3%) (an average of $21,966 per site); Equipment, broadband access, installation and technical support costs for individual subscribers -- $837,393 (18.9%); Training program costs -- $2,355,271 (53.2%); and Project administration and other costs -- $332,498 (7.5%).