Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT, NEW MEXICO

Project Title: Fast Forward New Mexico: Tele-Community Centers Initiative

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary ___________________

The New Mexico Economic Development Department (NM EDD) is applying for an NTIA BTOP Public Computing Centers grant in the amount of $2.86 million to support the statewide 'Fast Forward New Mexico: Tele-Community Centers Initiative'. Total project budget is: $4.38 million. This Initiative will support enhanced broadband connectivity, increased numbers of tele-computing systems, outreach education and training programs, online applications, content, and required support for public access Tele-Community Centers in 42 mostly rural, underserved New Mexico communities. The Initiative's primary objective is coordinated jobs creation, economic vitalization and life-long learning, through enhanced development and public use and understanding of broadband technologies, services and applications, in nurturing public settings. The New Mexico Computing Applications Center (NM CAC) will take a leadership role in coordinating and managing the Initiative. Other primary partners include: NM State Library, NM Department of Information Technology, NM Department of Health, NM Department of Workforce Solutions, NM Small Business Development Centers, IDEAL-NM's Graduate New Mexico program, 1st-Mile Institute, All Indian Pueblo Council and all New Mexico universities and colleges. Many other organizations and companies are 'partnering' with us to do a great deal of the people-centric, on-the-ground work of outreach education and training, content development and on site assistance to communities as 'circuit riders.' These include the Media Literacy Project, Global Center for Cultural Entrepreneurship, National Hispanic Cultural Center, Santa Fe Indian School and Santa Fe Complex. Getting enhanced broadband connectivity at reduced pricing is being worked on with the state's incumbent and competitive telecommunications providers, a number of them now applying for broadband stimulus funding, or having just been successfully awarded NTIA or RUS support. Tele-Community Centers will serve as critical 'first-mile anchor sites,' connecting to existing or newly proposed middle and last-mile broadband infrastructure throughout the state. The aim is to increase subscriber take-rates. This Tele-Community Centers Initiative will build upon the State Library and partners' 'Fast Forward New Mexico' project, which received a first-round NTIA BTOP Sustainable Broadband Adoption grant. It is also being coordinated with all other statewide projects to be realized with ARRA broadband and other stimulus support. This project is a key part of the State of New Mexico 'Integrated Strategic Broadband Initiative'. As a result, all State departments, telecommunication providers, utility companies, communities, nonprofit orgs and individuals are becoming more actively knowledgeable and involved in joining on the path toward 'broadband for all' in New Mexico. Much work needs to be done. Quoting Charlie Ferrell of the New Mexico Exchange Carrier Group (13 rural NM telcos): 'It is about time that we got ahead of the curve, instead of always just trying to catch up.' New Mexico has many problems that are unique to its setting and diverse populations, as well as many
similar to those of the rest of the nation. The Pew Center and FCC reports on 'broadband adoption' hold true for this state, with some statistical variances. The bottom line is that all of us (not just the poor, the rural, the under-educated, or others often cited) are far on the wrong side of the 'digital divide,' and the gap is widening, not narrowing. Equitable and affordable access is an unresolved issue. The proposed Tele-Community Centers Initiative is a critically important piece of a much larger puzzle. Its overarching impact will be to grow the conversation and involvement of people everywhere in New Mexico, beyond problems, to being part of solutions. 'Tele-Community Centers Initiative' key components: 1. Leadership, Partnerships, Coordination and Communication. We have a remarkable team that has come together to make a difference. It is recognized that our aggregate efforts, if well coordinated and implemented, will pay off multi-fold. 2. Top-Down meets Bottom-Up In addition to State leadership, this initiative is giving a leg-up to the selected 42 communities and the 155 participating sites, while reaching beyond via the web, and via other localities joining in the effort during the course of this two year initiative. 3. Upgraded Connectivity Though almost all entities participating in this initiative require greater broadband service and lower rates, only a select few of the most in-need colleges, libraries and other partner sites will be budgeted for network upgrades for this period. We are relying on the telecom companies and communities that will be providing enhanced infrastructure to offer required connectivity to most project sites, as well as to all community subscribers. 4. Tele-Computing Systems Over 400 networked computing systems will be provided to designated Tele-Community Centers. Laptops and mobile devices will be provided to trainers and a few others for use in facilities without computer labs. A few video conferencing systems will also be provided, as well as a host of peripherals, including assistive devices and software, digital media tools, printers and scanners. 5. Outreach Education and Training This and the following component (Content) will be offered to all 155 participating sites in the 42 communities, and beyond. The State government and partners will both provide training and content and will continue to do so with greater capabilities. We will also be contracting with a number of organizations in the state that are already doing the good work that they will now do with greater resources, coordination, and scale. Many are local to the communities that they will serve, and know their constituencies personally; a key to success. 6. Online Applications and Content Development and Provision The State offices which are partners, already have contracted training providers, or suites of courses offering certifications, other tools and courses, focused on workforce and jobs training, health information, GED and basic Internet skills. Many of our local and nonprofit partners have additional curricula, as is the case with the Library and its awarded SBA outreach education partners. We recognize the need for some additional content, to be very people-specific, especially with regard to language and culture. A team of technical, design and content developers will be formed from select partners, to develop a 'Fast Forward New Mexico Initiatives' content management web site with associated programs, tools and applications. Its underlying purpose will be to inspire people for improved lives, livelihoods via networked opportunities. 7. Adaptability, Learning and Replication by Example The 'community technology centers' movement has had many successes, but also many failings over the past 15+ years. There are many lessons learned about how to 'get it right.' This initiative will have defined financial, project implementation and reporting requirements. We know, however, that with over 150 participating entities in 42 communities, some things may need to change, or be reconsidered, or be differently adapted. Small difficulties or failings can be learned from and will be part of a process that will ultimately lead to example-setting results.
Coincidentally, New Mexico is the home to the ‘complexity sciences’. This Initiative will be closely coordinated with the NM Department of Information Technology (DoIT) and its work in gathering, analyzing, evaluating and mapping broadband related data for the next two years, under recently awarded NTIA SBDDP funding. That project will include assessment of the Tele-Community Centers, and their role in affecting improved broadband adoption, pricing, bandwidth provision and more. Additionally, all participating colleges, libraries and other sites will fill out and submit quarterly survey and evaluation forms to the NM CAC, for quarterly assessments, evaluation and reporting. This initiative has high aspirations. In the short term, we expect to reap rapid job increases and economic stimulus, dispersed throughout the state and its communities. The State's broadband initiative is a 5-10 year plan. It can be no less. That commitment, along with hard work and creative intelligence should result in a vital, evolving, long life for Tele-Community Centers in New Mexico.