Applicant Name: PASSAIC PUBLIC LIBRARY TRUSTEES OF (INC)

Project Title: Passaic Public Library Technology Reboot Initiative

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary _______________________

The Passaic Public Library's (PPL) Technology Reboot Initiative Grant Proposal will allow PPL to improve and enhance broadband access for the 69,000 community members of the City of Passaic, NJ, and its surrounding communities. As a community anchor institution, PPL is the primary source of broadband access for the nearly seven hundred (700) patrons who come through its doors daily. Many are economically disadvantaged and culturally marginalized. The enhanced broadband access made possible by BTOP funds will also greatly enhance PPL's efforts towards its patrons' job searching, healthcare, and educational needs. As these needs are met, the local economy will be stimulated and lives will be improved, a winning combination for our larger American community. Passaic is home to a vibrant, diverse community in an economically depressed and underprivileged area. As outlined in our application, our community suffers from a high unemployment rate and low household income. Over 65% of our population speaks English as a second language, with over 60% of our population being of Hispanic/Latino origin. An essential component of the mission of the PPL is to provide to its community the necessary information to improve their lives, be it through the pursuit of new knowledge, cultural enrichment, or the escape afforded by great literature or other forms of entertainment. PPL is also a nexus of communication for its residents, a vital link between its patrons and the resources offered by the outside world. PPL has sought to serve its community by actively helping new immigrants integrate into American society, not survive beside it as a marginalized sub-population. We have aided the unemployed find jobs, and those seeking to develop their careers and explore new opportunities, so as to stimulate and improve the individual's, as well as the larger community's, economy. We have served our senior citizens to ensure they are not forgotten. We have provided help to these populations by serving as the primary information gateway to our community, using printed materials and electronic resources. Nearly 70% of the residents in our community do not have computers. We have provided public access computers free of charge for their usage. We have also provided classes in the areas of basic computer skills, career development and training, and English-for-Speakers-of-Another-Language (ESOL). As proud as we are of our service, we recognize that our technology and programs were implemented in a haphazardly organic, piecemeal fashion, which has led to great frustration. We do not have enough public access computers to satisfy the high demand. Our network infrastructure cannot adequately handle our existing computer traffic, resulting in patrons frequently being kicked off their computing session and losing anything they were working on. With limited classroom sizes, computers, and funds, many members of our community have been forced to wait on waiting lists for months before having the opportunity to attend any of the abovementioned classes we have provided. In recent years, PPL has been hampered in its attempts to address the patron dissatisfaction due to lack of
funding, lack of stable, long-term leadership, and lack of technological expertise. Two of these problems
have been addressed. The Board of Trustees has been reconstituted, with renewed vigor and
commitment to the pulse of the community. These dedicated Board members have strong ties in our
service community. In PPL's new Director, Mario M. Gonzalez, we have an experienced library
administrator with over thirty (30) years of experience implementing large-scale programs and
administrating large library systems. In his short tenure here, Mr. Gonzalez has forged stronger
relationships with our Board of Trustees and community partners, especially PALS Plus, the regional
consortium of libraries that is now providing much of the technological expertise PPL has needed. Mr.
Gonzalez has also made strategic hires and empowered existing PPL staff comfortable with the
installation and utilization of computer technology. PPL is now ready to address the root causes of
patron dissatisfaction with our technology, and the obstacles preventing us from scaling up our program
reach. The only piece missing is the funding. In essence, PPL is looking to push the reset button, to
reboot its technology offerings to its public, and how it leverages technology internally to provide for its
public. In order to regain our community's confidence, and to attract further development funds from
private organizations, PPL needs to implement a wide-ranging, bottom-up strategic vision that will meet
and exceed our community's expectations. The funds requested are necessary, and the results of our
reboot will be dramatic. The program changes detailed in this grant proposal are the logical next steps in
the development of our offerings to the public. The opportunity granted by BTOP funds represents the
ability to make necessary sweeping changes in one, concerted push, with a unified vision and planned
organizational commitment. Our proposed program follows a multi-pronged approach: 1) Stabilization
of technology infrastructure. PPL's main branch building requires both electrical rewiring, and a
complete computer network rewiring, including new hardware (routers, switches, and hubs). In
addition, PPL's phone system is inadequate to support the amount of incoming calls from the public, and
any sort of sustained outreach efforts by PPL. We will also upgrade our wireless router so as to be able
to provide wi-fi service to a greater number of patrons who come in to PPL with wireless-equipped
laptops. 2) Public Access computing expansion. PPL currently provides thirty-one (31) computers for
public access. We are looking to at least double that number. With a stable network and double the
amount of computers available, public demand should be met for the foreseeable future. We will also
purchase furniture for current and new computers, as current furniture is inadequate and non-
ergonomic. We will also provide color laser printers and scanners for the general public, to better
support school projects, career correspondence (e.g., resumes and cover letters), and business
presentations. 3) Peripherals for Special Needs. To better reach populations with special needs, PPL will
provide peripherals for our public access computers that will accommodate these needs. These
peripherals will include: a. Screen readers and headphones for the visually impaired b. TTY (Telephone
Typewriter) c. Magnifying reading device d. ESOL software e. Resume-writing software f. Dedicated
workstations with software in the main languages our community speaks (Spanish, Gujarati, and
Russian), as well as keyboards for those languages (Gujarati and Russian) that use non-Roman alphabets.
4) Retrofitting/Refurbishing of PPL's Technology Training Center (TTC). PPL has had classroom space with
eight (8) workstations available for instructional purposes. To increase class sizes, PPL would like to add
at least seven (7) computers, and rechristen the space the TTC. To do so, the room currently housing the
TTC needs to be refurbished and retrofitted to support fifteen (15) workstations. 5) Expansion of Existing
Program Offerings. While we currently offer several educational programs (ESOL, basic computer skills,
career development, etc.), we would greatly expand these programs by increasing class size, recruiting certified instructors as needed, and providing materials for free, such as text books and workbooks. 6) Consolidation of information on topics relevant to our public. The most important topics to our community that PPL has identified include: healthcare, career development, paths to citizenship, housing, parenting, and education. PPL will guide the public towards the highest-quality information on these topics by: a. Providing access to at least ten (10) premium databases with the most up-to-date and reliable information on these topics b. Creating pathfinders on these topics. Pathfinders are collections of web resources, with summaries and explanations of each resource. PPL's pathfinders would complement databases by focusing on local resources on each of these topics. c. Upgrading and redesigning PPL's own website to accommodate Web 2.0 technologies, as well as housing our premium databases and pathfinders.