Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: CITY OF BROWNSVILLE

Project Title: Connect Brownsville

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

The City of Brownsville has an estimated population of 189,970 with 36% of its residents living at or below the Federal Poverty Level with a median income of $24,468 (US Census 2006-2008 American Community Survey). Brownsville is home to a vulnerable Hispanic population (91.3 percent of the population is Hispanic US Census 2008) where barriers of language and literacy compromise educating residents about the use of broadband services. The poverty level, coupled with social and/or cultural barriers that also serve to isolate residents, results in substantial areas of the city where broadband services are underutilized. Low service usage may be attributed to economic factors, as well as to insufficient technical or literacy skills, or to lack of understanding of the services offered. As a result, a substantial percentage of residents do not have access to information and resources required to obtain and maintain meaningful employment, participate fully in activities designed to further their educational goals, obtain information to improve or maintain their health. The City of Brownsville Public Library System (System) is a Texas State Library and Archives Accredited Public Library. The System has a State approved Technology Plan and has used technology to provide services to the residents of Brownsville since it first opened its doors in 1994. It has been successful in attaining and managing over $7,389,000.00 in Grants since it opened in 1994. The System has been awarded over $5,550,000.00 in Federal Grants from the Universal Services Administrative Company Schools and Library Federal E-rate program. Project: Connect Brownsville Will increase Public Computer Access and Broadband awareness in 6 Ways: Broadband Connection: The City of Brownsville Public Library System has a 190' tower already in place at the Central Blvd. location that will provide a mounting point for the hardware necessary to connect all members of the Connect Brownsville project through the use of Sky Pilot Wireless Networking Hardware to be installed on the tower and at the remote locations. The System will then provide a 70MBPS dedicated fiber connection to the Internet for Broadband access. Expand Central Branch Library Public Computer Center: Currently, public computing resources offered by the two public library locations are insufficient to meet the demand of Brownsville and the surrounding areas that the Library System serves. The Southmost Branch Library has a lab equipped with 42 internet computers and serves 187,393 residents annually (2008 Annual Report for the Public Information Services Department. The Central Branch Library serves nearly twice as many residents and has only 24 computers with internet access. The average internet sessions per week is 3463 with 72% of users having to wait up to one hour to initiate an internet session. An expansion of the Public Computing Center would increase the number of internet sessions by 120%, projecting to 4156 internet sessions per week. An increase in computers would increase the number of users. Often residents are put on a waiting list that can last up to an hour; and, when given access their time is limited to just one hour of usage. Expanding the Central
Branch Library with the purchase of an additional 183 computers would allow more residents internet access at one time. This project will be managed by the Public Information Services Department and the Library Automation Department that has over 43 years of combined experience in maintaining the security, reliability and usability of computer networks. Texas Southmost College Mobile Computer Lab: Texas Southmost College (TSC) is a community college that serves 17,000 students and has over 1,500 staff members. In collaboration with the System, TSC is proposing a mobile lab computing center that will be available to the public. The mobile lab will consist of 30 laptop computers that will operate mainly through the college’s wireless network. In addition, the 30 laptop computers will be available for check-out to campus users as well as other community users with valid identification. The mobile lab will also be used in other locations throughout the region in which the college operates. This is especially true for the International Technology Center for Economics and Commerce, or ITEC Center, which is operated by the University of Texas at Brownsville to improve the economy of the region with economic development and job training activities.

United Way Public Computer Center: United Way of Southern Cameron County works to build stronger communities by empowering people to help one another to mobilize the caring power of our communities. In collaboration with the System, United Way will receive 5 new computers, equipment, and upgraded broadband access to better serve the community by providing easily accessible resources to jobs opportunities, expansive health information, and increasingly accessible government websites, among others.

Brownsville Literacy Center Mobile Computer Lab: The Brownsville Adult Literacy Center (Center) is a non-profit organization committed to expanding adult literacy and furthering the goal of bringing adult education to the public. In the past, the Center has received grant funding that established the Mobile Learning Lab, an outstanding service that has helped many in desperate need of reading and writing skills. In order to improve these efforts, the Center has partnered with the System to replace 12 new computers, and upgrade broadband access. This project will allow community members to benefit from services such as basic math and reading, GED preparation, keyboarding, and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes. The Brownsville Public Library System has partnered with Workforce Solutions-Cameron to create economic growth and enhance the quality of life for the citizens and employers of Cameron County. With the additional Broadband stations, increasing numbers of community patrons will have access to career and training information. The project will create 65 indirect jobs, 50 induced jobs, and save over 100 jobs for staff from the system, Texas Southmost College, United Way of Southern Cameron County, Brownsville Adult Literacy Center, and Workforce Solutions-Cameron. The project will service more than 187,000 residents and visitors of Brownsville and provide them with the necessary resources to obtain job training, literacy skills, improved job skills and college preparation. The overall cost of implementing this project is $1,257,818.00.