Applicant Name: NORTHERN OZAUKEE SCH DISTRICT

Project Title: Fredonia Technology Works

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

Northern Ozaukee County Wisconsin is a rural area, where a bookmobile takes the place of a library and the necessary skills for employment in a technologically advancing world are scarce. In 2008-2009 the county's unemployment rate jumped 4.6%. Job loss was significant in the construction, farm and industrial sectors. Jobs opened up in information and technology but most local unemployed are not equipped with the necessary skills. (Ozaukee County Workforce Profile 2009) The grant project is a collaborative effort between the Northern Ozaukee School District (NOSD), the University of Wisconsin-Washington County (UW-WC), Workforce Development, and SCORE, resulting in a new 501c3 non-profit corporation known as the Fredonia Technology Works (FTW). Additional community support is being solicited from local governmental offices, social service agencies, local businesses, and business entities. FTW will be the first interconnected computer/technology center that will connect community members, the educational system, local business, and community services. Public Computer Center offering classes, employment support, a coffee house environment for community members, software sales, and an interactive Helpdesk staffed by class graduates. It will stand as a self-sustaining nonprofit and bring computer/broadband literacy and employability to rural Northern Ozaukee, neighboring counties and beyond through the World Wide Web. Curriculum and instruction will be provided by the UW-WC, with additional adjunct instruction to be provided by teachers from the NOSD. As FTW grows new staff and instructors will be added. FTW will offer a multi-step curriculum to create skilled, computer savvy, employable graduates. Participants may enter in at any stage depending upon their initial skill level. They may choose classes to enhance their skills or follow the program through its entirety resulting in a certificate of completion. The unemployed and underemployed will form cohort groups and receive varying levels of job training in computer technology skill development and general life skills management, all for a very modest fee of $20 per course. Several agencies offer scholarship funding for those that can not afford this fee. A skills assessment and a survey of personal need/employment goals will be given pre and post instruction. (The Technology Skills Assessment: Standards and Rubrics) The application of broadband technologies to this process will include the usage of distance education modules as well. Both asynchronous (online learning through self paced instruction) and synchronous (online learning through real time interaction with an instructor) instructor led distance education sessions are planned. Face to face course offerings will take place during the evening or weekends with class sizes of 15-20 students per course sequence. This is to ensure that hands-on assistance and mentoring are available. New groups would initially begin every month for a projected total of 200-250 participants in the classroom portion of instruction during the first year. The development of this program recognizes the need for both basic desktop competencies amongst this
adult rural population as well as the development of skills that will allow the participants to become more employable within the community. Low income, those under and unemployed along with seniors, and youth will be the targeted vulnerable groups. Local residents come from a variety of cultural backgrounds: the majorities are Northern European; there are also significant numbers of residents of color. (attached demographics & poverty report) Every effort will be made to serve and reach out to the disabled and minorities, including migrant workers. Ozaukee County has an increasing number of Senior Citizens who will be offered programs to enhance their skills, as well as employment support if they wish. Youth will have an opportunity to learn new career goals and skills. But our strongest target population will be the unemployed and underemployed. Striving to see that they have the skills and resources needed to better their lives and for many to break the cycles of poverty. FTW will be located in the northern part of Ozaukee County with the greatest density of low income groups. The Public Computing Center will be located NOSD’s K4-12 building which serves as the local school for several towns surrounding Fredonia and houses the Wisconsin Virtual Learning Charter School. Federal funding will be used to install new wiring, network switches, wireless access point technology, and notebook computers. NOSD will provide the highest level of access to computers for technology training cohort participants. This may include the physical checkout of machines, or the use of computers at NOSD. Federal funding will determine the number of available computers and scope of the project. A wifi enabled coffee shop to be used by all community members will create unobtrusive outreach. Those stopping by will see the classes and available information. Depending on need, community members will have access to the hardware and software lending library housed within the FTW facility. Those in the employment skills cohort will have priority for borrowing equipment. A Helpdesk will be a fee based service supporting local business or individual community members. Eventually services would be expanded through the internet. The Internet Helpdesk will - for a low fee - remotely fix problems with computers. One of the problems with most help desks is that they attempt to explain how to fix computer problems, whereas the FTW employees will actually take internet control of the customers' computer and complete the fix while the customer watches. FTW would also employ people to work at the coffee shop. An additional resource and source of employment will be the sales of Virtual pre-k -12 Curriculum offered by National Network of Digital Schools. FTW has been asked to represent this quality curriculum. Employment Skills Graduates will be asked to staff FTW as paid work experience. They may work the Helpdesk, assist as mentors or receptionists in the PCC/Coffee House. A unique addition to FTW will be the employment opportunities overseen by two agencies Workforce Development and SCORE. The Work Force Development Center is Wisconsin's One Stop employment center. SCORE is America’s largest volunteer business counseling service. It is a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration and sponsored, in part, by the SBA. The skill sets developed by participants will increase their value for employment in the local market. Workforce Development matches employers with job seekers. Participants under the guidance of SCORE may choose to explore the establishment of small businesses of their own. NOSD has a stellar reputation in serving not only the preschool through High School students but their families as well. They serve as a hub and resource center for families in need. For the past 7 years NOSD has run both the traditional education but also the Wisconsin Virtual Learning. The Virtual School offers internet, home based education to rural families across Wisconsin. Michael Skurek serves as the Technology Director and will be the lead in establishing FTW. Dan Anhalt, Continuing Education Director at UW-WC has joined the FTW team. This collaboration ensures that the
unique aspects of adult learning will be included in curriculum development. Wisconsin does not have a traditional Community College System instead the University of Wisconsin offers two year degrees, certifications and training in satellite campuses across the state. FTW is a unique program that anticipates 5% of graduates will become self employed, 85% of those coming for skill enhancement will use their new skills in their current positions, 50% will seek better paying jobs or promotions. And 70% of those graduating, who are still unemployed will find work utilizing their new technology skills within 6 months of graduation. Local businesses are excited about the opportunities to solidify skills in their workforce, receive technological support and to have a growing stream of potential employees as the area begins to see economic recovery. The FTW is slated to be a 501c3, which will employ graduates of FTW learning cohorts described above. FTW will provide a variety of diversified services, in the spirit of non-profits like Goodwill. The goal will be to promote and diversify the business, taking advantage of the large customer base the Internet provides The total cost estimate is $1,000,000; with 20% matching fund promises, additional in-kind matching funds and interested foundations such as ACUITY. Ultimately, FTW will be income producing and create lasting sustainability. This project will have limited reach and broadband enhancing potential without federal funding.