Applicant Name:  STATE LIBRARY & ARCHIVES, TENNESSEE

Project Title:  Bridging the Gap: Bringing Broadband Technology to Tennessee's Impoverished and Unemployed

Project Type:  Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary ______________________

The State of Tennessee (population 6,214,888) quite accurately holds the nickname 'The Volunteer State,' displays the only monument in the United States honoring both Union and Confederate armies (in Greeneville), presents a beautifully varied geography, and contains such landmarks as the Grand Ole Opry and the National Civil Rights Museum. Yet, Tennessee also holds a population of individuals plagued by poverty (15.5% living below the poverty level) and unemployment (10.9% unemployed) both at rates higher than the national rates. Only 19.6% of our population have college degrees, and more than half (53%) of the adult population operates within the two lowest levels of the five levels of literacy. To recover, we must create new opportunities for our citizens, and education will be the keystone of that effort. Reaching vulnerable populations and the unemployed and underemployed 'those left behind because they lack the tools to retrain for and adapt to a rapidly changing economy' requires engaging them in broadband education. Students and working adults need access at home and at work. Older adults and economically distressed or vulnerable people need help with their first steps toward digital literacy and guidance on their giant leap across the Digital Divide. 91% of Tennesseans have access to broadband internet, while only 54% actually subscribe. The impact access to the internet can have on an individual's life and livelihood is astounding. A true story from one Tennessean says it all: Jonathan grew up in a home in East Tennessee with a single mother struggling to make ends meet. His mother sometimes barely managed to pay the electric and water bills, so she failed to see the value in purchasing a computer and paying for internet access. Jonathan began going to his public library to access the internet in order to complete school projects. He learned about educational opportunities available to him through internet research. He applied for and received financial assistance to attend a local university following his high school graduation. He earned a degree in physical therapy and went on to attend a graduate program in the same field. His mother, a high school graduate working as the manager of a discount store, could never have imagined that her son would achieve such success. Jonathan could never have learned about the opportunities available to him had he not visited his local library and gained skills in internet use. Jonathan has since purchased a computer and broadband internet access for his mother. With this BTOP grant, the State Library and Archives hopes to give other 'Jonathans' the skills and Broadband access they need for better lives. The Bridging the Gap project will be administered by the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA), a division of the Department of State, which promotes library development throughout Tennessee. The public libraries that we serve are well positioned on the front line of public service to new users/adopters and new students/learners. For many years these libraries have been the primary and
often the sole source of free public access to information and digital literacy training. Despite chronic local funding shortfalls, the TSLA and many local libraries have excelled in applying for technology grants; training citizens in digital literacy and information; and helping communities solve diverse problems. We seek funding through the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program's Public Computer Center (PCC) Projects Grants Fund to create and expand PCCs in our state's mid-sized to large libraries' those serving large areas of vulnerable populations but unable to meet the needs of their underserved populations with current local and state funding. Participating libraries include: - Memphis Public Library; - Johnson City Public Library; - Washington County Library System; - Wilson County-Harvey Freeman Public Library; - Wilson County Public Library; - Putnam County Library; - Blount County Public Library; - Kingsport Public Library and Archives; - Linebaugh Public Library System; - Morristown-Hamblen Library System; - Chattanooga-Hamilton County Bicentennial Library; - Sullivan County Public Library System. Of the full population of 1,337,383 represented by these library service areas, 65% are registered library users. Funds will allow the TSLA to oversee the development of PCCs intended to serve our vulnerable populations: African-American, Disabled, Low Income, Unemployed, Senior Citizen and Youth. Many of these individuals may come to the library for the first time as a result of hearing of the BTOP project. Interaction with what the internet has to offer in a safe, known environment can and will lead to increased internet adoption in homes. Specifically, grant funds will allow the Blount County Public Library in Maryville, Tennessee to offer instructional digital resources in computing skills, productive and safe use of internet resources, and information on internet job-searching. Funds will also allow Maryville to create a fully interactive web site with links and feeds to extensive online training in using digital resources. In addition to allowing for new hardware, software and training capabilities, this pilot program will take what the library has to offer into the homes of patrons. Much as in the story of Jonathan, use of the internet in the library will lead to an understanding of the need for broadband internet in the home. The Linebaugh Public Library System will use grant funds to hire a full-time technical instructor, thereby adding personal interaction to the internet experience of patrons (and creating a job that will be sustained beyond the grant period). All of the other participating libraries will use funds to purchase hardware and software and cover internet connectivity expenses for expanded or brand new PCCs. Johnson City will create an entirely new center within the library, which patrons will be able to access during and after regular library hours (thereby increasing the potential usage of the PCC to include those that work within non-traditional schedules or those that have childcare concerns). Memphis is one of the participating libraries in this grant application, and they struggle to meet the internet connectivity needs of their large population base as a result of lack of equipment. If funded, they will be able to purchase an additional 240 laptops to better serve their users, and more stories like this one about 'Sue' will be made possible: 'Sue' was laid off from her job as a secretary. She had no college degree and was not sure what to do. She went to the Memphis Public Library and, with the assistance of library staff, used online resources to order textbooks related to becoming a certified pharmacy technician. She took practice exams online at the library and studied. She eventually passed the real test with flying colors and now has the opportunity for a whole new career. A few of Tennessee's libraries (not participating in this grant process) have already established Job Training Centers that utilize broadband internet technology. At one of these centers, Rodney began using the Job Training Center in the Fall of 2009. He visited the library two or three times each week. He used their services to learn basic computer skills, create resumes, search for jobs, learn how to use e-mail, learn
how to send e-mails with attachments, and apply for jobs online by completing online job applications. After two months of seeking a job as a Diesel Mechanic, Rodney decided to try looking for work in another field. He used the Tennessee Electronic Library to prepare for a CDL license. In December, he passed his testing and received his CDL license. At the end of December, he received a job offer as a driver for a company. Grant funds provided by the BTOP for PCCs will allow more Tennesseans to have success stories like 'Sue,' Rodney, and Jonathan. In addition to the four part-time and two full-time positions that will be created by the project, the potential for Tennesseans to use the technology to seek out new jobs is enormous. The total cost of the project is $795,743, and we are pleased to be able to offer a 30% cash match along with our proposal for funding. Tennessee public libraries rank 48th out of fifty states and the District of Columbia in local tax support for public libraries. The national average for local library appropriations per capita is $31.68. The public libraries in this grant are funded at levels ranging from a low of $7.65 per capita (Mt. Juliet and Morristown) to a high of $24.38 (Kingsport Public Library). They all struggle each year just to maintain budgets at their current levels. None of these libraries have available revenue to fund a project of this caliber without federal grant assistance.