Applicant Name: PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Project Title: Learner Web Partnership: A Multi-State Support System for Broadband Adoption by Vulnerable Adults

Project Type: Sustainable Broadband Adoption

Executive Summary

Problem/need addressed: The Learner Web Partnership addresses the primary barriers to broadband access and use among adults in the United States: affordability, lack of digital literacy skills, and a perceived lack of content relevant to their daily lives, needs, and future aspirations. These barriers are exacerbated among populations that have the lowest levels of broadband access: primarily low-income adults who lack a high school education. This includes a growing and increasingly diverse population of adults from immigrant and language-minority communities. Approach: The Learner Web Partnership proposed by Portland State University (PSU) involves coalitions in two states (Minnesota, New York), two regions (Central and South Texas), and two cities (New Orleans, Louisiana and Richmond, California). The project will increase broadband use among low-income, low-literate, ESOL, and other vulnerable populations by implementing Learner Web, an innovative online system of self-paced Learning Plans. Over 30 months, the project will develop and implement Learning Plans focused on digital literacy (at home, at work, and in the community), education on how to be an informed consumer of broadband technology, and orientation to career pathways. These Learning Plans will also be available in Spanish. Two additional Learning Plans will be developed to train volunteer and paid tutors and computer lab assistants to support new broadband users. A Learning Plan Design Team comprising the Minnesota Literacy Council, ProLiteracy Worldwide, and experts in adult learning, computer-delivered education, and strategies for language-minority and other populations will oversee work on these new Learning Plans. An important hallmark of the Learner Web system is its emphasis on providing self-paced online learning and the face-to-face support of trained tutors and computer assistants. Another important feature is its potential for sustainability: it is built on an open-source software platform and its Learning Plans will be distributed to interested organizations before, during, and following the federal grant period. Sixty-three community anchor institutions in the six national partner areas will collaborate to identify and recruit potential new broadband users. The Learner Web Partnership comprises a broad range of community anchor institutions: adult basic education (ABE) and employment/training programs, colleges and community colleges (including a federally designated Hispanic-serving institution), K-12 schools, public libraries, social services agencies, public safety and public housing agencies, and nonprofit community-based organizations dedicated to improving adult literacy, employability, and related skills. A lead sub-recipient organization for each of the six national sites will coordinate Learner Web Partnership activities among the local community anchors (and will serve on a National Leadership Team to coordinate activities). Areas/populations served: The Learner Web Partnership will allow 23,538 vulnerable adults to move from being 'new-to-broadband' users to
‘broadband-ready’ users. Participants will receive an average of 15 hours potential new broadband users over the six participating national sites, and will receive an average of four hours of volunteer tutoring assistance. It is estimated that the project will create 23 jobs and demonstrate a sustainable model for increasing broadband use among highly diverse and vulnerable adult populations. Overall project cost: The total cost of implementing the Learner Web Partnership over 30 months of SBA support is $5,870,589. The federal request totals $3,318,031; matching costs, primarily in-kind, total $2,552,558. Matching contributions comprise 43.5% of the total projects.