Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: CONNECTED NATION, INC.

Project Title: East Texas Partnership for Connected Kids & Families

Project Type: Sustainable Broadband Adoption

_______________________ Executive Summary _______________________

A significant number of at-risk households exist in a largely contiguous region in East Texas, consisting of 13 counties: San Augustine County, Marion County, Houston County, Jasper County, Polk County, San Jacinto County, Angelina County, Nacogdoches County, Rusk County, Panola County, Harrison County, Hardin County, and Gregg County. The counties in this region are some of the highest ranking in the state in terms of unemployment; lower than average household income; persons with disabilities; seniors; minority population; and children living in poverty. Research conducted by the East Texas Partnership for Connected Kids & Families shows that these demographic criteria are reliable indicators of a broadband adoption rate that falls below average, that the adoption rate for the region is only 55%, and thus strongly supports a targeted effort to raise adoption rates in this Texas region. An average county in the region is 69% rural and 20% minority; with 41.9% of the households containing at least one person with a disability and with 15% of the population aged 65 or older, and with an unemployment rate of over 9.5%. Also, 26.7% of the households existing at or below poverty level in an average county in the region have children living in the home. Every county in the region has a median household income level below the national average. The East Texas Partnership for Connected Kids & Families proposes over a two-year program period to increase broadband adoption rates in the region through a targeted program aimed at vulnerable populations, particularly children in local Boys and Girls Clubs, unemployed residents, low-income families, minorities, the elderly, and persons with disabilities by combining increased computer access and training with planning, outreach, research, and computer distributions. This public-private partnership, established for the express purpose of working locally in the East Texas area, will be led in partnership by four Boys and Girls Clubs (BGC) in the area (BGC of Deep East Texas; BGC of the Big Pines; BGC of Gregg County; and BGC of Rusk County), and other key community anchor institutions, community leaders, and community volunteers from across east Texas, with technical and administrative support from Connected Texas. The Boys and Girls Clubs will expand and enhance computer labs serving youth in the region, providing training through the Boys and Girls Clubs of America's 'Club Tech' program. Connected Texas will establish the East Texas Broadband Task Force, with representatives from all 13 counties to craft local broadband plans and lead an outreach and awareness campaign in the region targeted to vulnerable populations. Local program staff will facilitate the task force meetings, provide tools and materials, leverage best practices for discussion, and help implement the recommended broadband planning and awareness programs in coordination with participating community anchor institutions in each region. The East Texas Partnership for Connected Kids and Families program will be guided by statistical telephone and web-based survey research conducted within the program’s counties and in a control area of similar counties in Texas to establish a
technology benchmark for the area in order to better understand the local challenges related to broadband and computer use, measure the program's metrics of progress, and guide a local broadband technology strategy and decision-making process. The surveys will measure the rate of home broadband adoption, computer ownership, online application use and frequency of use, barriers to home broadband adoption and computer ownership, prices paid for broadband service, and similar broadband-related questions across demographics in each county. This local research will ensure that the community anchor institutions in each county have access to community-specific data as they work with the task force to build broadband programs and applications to meet specific community needs.

The telephone and web-based surveys will be managed by Connected Texas, and results will be processed and reported for consideration and use by the East Texas Broadband Task Force. The telephone and web-based surveys will be administered on a recurring basis to track progress and provide data on which program elements are effective and which are not. Web-based surveys will continue beyond the federally funded project period to capture subsequent and recurring measurements of broadband adoption and computer ownership. The Partnership will also identify low-income, at-risk rural households (that may not have easy broadband access through a public computing center) to receive computers through a digital inclusion program. The computer distributions will be managed by Connected Texas, in close collaboration with the regional broadband task force and participating community anchor institutions. The operational model and infrastructure used for the computer distributions will be Connected Nation's Computers 4 Kids program, widely identified as a best practice nationwide. The program is expected to serve at least 40,000 Texas residents per year, all of whom will be targeted among the vulnerable populations in East Texas. The program will reach 8,700 youth annually through the local Boys and Girls Clubs. 82% of these youth are minorities and 85% come from a household with income less than $30,000 (62% come from homes with household income lower than $22,000). 39% of the youth served by the Partnership through the BGCs come from single-parent homes and 87% are on the public schools' free lunch program. Through targeted computer distributions to low-income rural households over the two-year program, the Partnership will overcome for 1,697 individuals in East Texas one of the single biggest barriers to broadband adoption: lack of a computer in the home. Through a targeted outreach and awareness campaign organized by the partnership but designed and implemented by the East Texas Broadband Task Force (comprised of grassroots stakeholders from the local communities), a projected 251,776 at-risk households will directly receive information about the importance of broadband. In addition, conservative estimates project direct media and indirect media impressions of the program at over 1 million each year. The East Texas Partnership for Connected Kids & Families combines years of experience in each of the program's elements. Connected Texas and its parent organization have worked in the field of research, outreach, local planning, and digital inclusion since 2001. The Boys and Girls Clubs of the region have been providing a safe place for athletics, the arts, after-school activities, and computer access for youth in the area since 1988. The Partnership is comprised of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Deep East Texas; Boys & Girls Clubs of the Big Pines; Boys & Girls Clubs of Gregg County; Boys & Girls Clubs of Rusk County; Connected Texas; the Memorial Health System of East Texas; the City of San Augustine, TX; the Diboll, TX Police Department; the San Augustine, TX Independent School District; the Audibell Simpson Hearing Centers; the Nacogdoches, TX Independent School District; Coldwell Banker Real Estate of Nacogdoches, TX; InSpiritry; the Henderson, TX Independent School District; and McFarland's Flowers & Gifts of Jasper, TX;
and will seek to add at least 20 additional actively participating partner organizations to the East Texas Broadband Task Force. Collectively, the experience and past success of the Partnership's members ensure that the program's proposed scope of work is not theory, but built upon a successful proof of concept. By including local partners from the public, private, and education sectors as key working members of the East Texas Broadband Task Force, the Partnership acknowledges and will leverage the collective expertise and input of each local community in the region, allowing the Task Force to tailor its outreach, awareness campaign, and planning to the unique needs of the at-risk populations living in the area. The East Texas Partnership for Connected Kids and Families program requests federal grant funding in the amount of $2,398,245 and provides match funding of $859,100 (26.4%), for a total project cost of $3,257,446. The East Texas Partnership for Connected Kids and Families program is proposed for a period of two years, and it is expected to create a minimum of 11 direct jobs.