Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name:  GREATER PHILADELPHIA URBAN AFFAIRS COALITION, THE

Project Title:  Freedom Rings: Sustainable Broadband Adoption

Project Type:  Sustainable Broadband Adoption

_______________________ Executive Summary ______________________

Statement of the Problem: Philadelphia is a city challenged by high poverty rates and dependence on public benefits. According to the U.S. Census, nearly 25% of individuals and more than 33% of children in Philadelphia live below the poverty level; in the most underserved neighborhoods targeted by this project, 38.6% of individuals and 41% of children live below the poverty level. The City's Office of Emergency Shelter and Services serves nearly 15,000 annually. 52.5% of households in these sections of the city report that they do not have access to the Internet at home compared with 41% of residents in the city as a whole. In a city of 1.5 million people, nearly 50% of Philadelphia residents cannot afford broadband Internet access in their own homes. According to the Pew Internet and American Life project, African-Americans, Hispanics and those earning under $30,000 a year continue to lag in Internet adoption rates, with broadband in the home at or under 50%. These statistics mirror the demographics of those left behind in the digital divide in Philadelphia; 36% of Philadelphians make at or under $25,000, 54% of those living below the poverty line in Philadelphia are African-American, and 18% are Latino. Together, they make up 72% of Philadelphians living below the poverty line. A study recently released by Econsult Corporation reinforces the direct correlation between poverty and broadband access and use. In an age when broadband is essential for people to learn about and apply for job opportunities, apply for public benefits, find lifesaving health information, complete schoolwork, gain needed social support, etc., it is unacceptable that so many people are not connected. Overall Approach: To address this problem in a lasting way, Philadelphia has developed the Philadelphia Freedom Rings SBA Initiative. This project employs a community-based approach to provide strategic outreach, broadband education, awareness, training, access, equipment and support to underserved populations in low-income communities throughout Philadelphia. Partners stand ready to integrate the Freedom Rings SBA into their existing programs upon notification of funding award. The initiative will be managed by the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition (GPUAC), an organization that provides financial and administrative oversight to more than 90 community-based service providers. GPUAC's Freedom Rings partners serve a cross-section of the city's low-income neighborhoods and provide services to target populations, including at-risk youth, ex-offenders, and people living with HIV/AIDS. The organizations in this initiative already promote broadband adoption among their clients and stand ready to expand their programs to provide a total of 210,630 training hours to 14,960 clients at community sites throughout the city over the next two years. The Freedom Rings partners have a deep understanding of the housing, employment, mental health, healthcare, education and cultural needs of low-income populations and already know how to tailor broadband outreach, access, education, training and support so it is immediately relevant to people's life circumstances. People served through this
initiative will learn from the start how they can use the resources that broadband makes possible to help meet their most immediate needs and open up new opportunities. Each partners' existing ability to adapt their training to suit the most pertinent needs of their users is at the heart of the Freedom Rings innovative approach. The Initiative will address the BTOP's statutory purpose to provide broadband education, awareness, training and access to community organizations in order to facilitate greater use of broadband services by: -Providing 210,630 total hours of training to 14,960 Philadelphia residents. Participants will learn basic computer skills and become familiar with popular applications, e.g., connecting to the internet, email, and use of MS Office software. They will gain hands-on assistance with finding and utilizing online resources that are most relevant to their needs, e.g., on-line bill paying tools, financial literacy skills development, job search sites and application development assistance, etc. The initiative will include more advanced trainings for those who are interested. -Distributing 5,000 computers to public housing residents. Training will be provided by Community College and Drexel University faculty and graduate teaching fellows. Computers will be distributed upon completion of training. -Developing an educational portal that is updated regularly with new content and provides vulnerable populations with new resources and opportunities that will help them meet their needs. -Implementing a viral social marketing campaign, estimated to reach at least 75,000. This will include a mix of electronic media, events and a grassroots, word-of-mouth approach that includes training people to recruit peers to participate in broadband trainings and providing them with the support needed to complete these programs successfully. Program participants will be asked to share information with their families, neighbors, friends, etc. about the trainings and about the immediate and positive impact broadband resources have had on their lives. On its own and in combination with the Freedom Rings' CCI and PCC applications, Freedom Rings SBA is a collaborative, citywide effort that will maximize broadband adoption in Philadelphia. Philadelphia is united in its efforts to secure funds from BTOP for infrastructure, public computing centers and sustainable broadband adoption, with many organizations contributing to more than one of these efforts. This 'overlap' will ensure that all are coordinating their efforts in a way that taps all resources and assures programmatic synergies. While the synergies between the three BTOP efforts are clear, it is also the case that the Freedom Rings SBA initiative can stand on its own if it is the case that the other two applications are not funded. Areas to be served: Freedom Rings SBA will serve vulnerable residents throughout the city of Philadelphia, including public housing residents, at-risk youth, ex-offenders, people living with HIV, people in recovery, etc. By the end of the two year project period, the initiative will serve 14,960 people directly and will reach a minimum of 75,000 through the viral social marketing campaign. Qualifications of applicant: Philadelphia's Freedom Rings SBA initiative will be managed by the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition (GPUAC) and implemented by a strong network of partners that have experience with digital adoption strategies and deep roots in the communities they serve. GPUAC was founded more than 40 years ago to unite government, business, neighborhoods, and individuals to improve quality of life in the region, build wealth in urban communities and solve emerging issues. Today it is one of Philadelphia's largest nonprofit organizations, with an annual operating budget of $34 million. It manages the finances and provides administrative and technical support to 90 program partners that serve nearly 85,000 children, adults and families each year. GPUAC is adept at managing a wide array of government contracts and has a track record of managing large-scale, collaborative initiatives. Key partners also bring programmatic and management strength. Larger partners (Drexel University, PEC and Philadelphia
FIGHT) regularly manage large grants and contracts. Smaller, community-based partners currently have financial and administrative oversight from GPUAC. All are accustomed to working in partnership to maximize resources and extend their reach. GPUAC and its partners stand ready to implement this initiative upon award of funding. GPUAC will hire a full-time Project Director to coordinate cross-collaborative project management and a full-time Senior Program Accountant to manage all funds. GPUAC will also hire a part-time data analyst and a full-time administrative support person. Jobs to be saved or created: The initiative will create or save 88 direct jobs. Overall cost of proposed project: $17,685,430