Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: HOLYOKE PUBLIC LIBRARY CORPORATION INC

Project Title: Holyoke Public Library Computer Information Center/Centro de Información & Public PCC Partnership

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary _____________________

A. In 2009, FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski noted that 40% of U.S. residents do not have broadband subscriptions, but, he noted, that number rises to 60% for families that make less than $50,000 a year. According to the 2000 census, there were 10,373 residents living within the four tracts surrounding three of the proposed PCC partners in this proposal. The median family income for these residents was $13,634, and per capita income was a devastating $8,172. As you may imagine, not many of these families, 85% of which (according to the 2000 census) speak Spanish as their primary language, have finances to get broadband service in their homes. Those who are computer literate turn to our library 'the only public facility whose mandate it is to serve everyone, free of charge, from cradle to grave. That our patrons don't have access to broadband at home is underlined by the wait we have for the use of our insufficient 10 public computers. Our public library has wi-fi, yet almost none of the 100,000 visits we get a year are from laptop users and you see no computers in the public park surrounding our facility; they're too expensive. There are four major problems this proposal seeks to address regarding the improvement of broadband service adoption rates. The first, outlined above, is access. Poor people disproportionately lack access to broadband. The second problem is education. Without education in basic computer technology, that population does not know how to use free broadband access, if available to them. The third problem we face is the language barrier. In order to become computer literate users need first to learn in their native language. Whatever language they then use, they will be broadband users. And we know that in our knowledge-based economy, computer literacy is step #1 in breaking the cycle of poverty. The fourth problem we must address is our current public library facility 'the only public library to serve our population of nearly 40,000. We have no dedicated computer training space, no tutoring area, no distance learning capacity, the center is in need of equipment upgrades and the physical facility itself is in grave shape, resulting from decades of long undiscovered water damage resulting in ubiquitous environmental and physical damage. All four of the problems listed above are addressed by our proposed program which centers around the construction of a new 10,000 s.f. PCC. This center, which will be able to open independent from the library, will address all problems through access and bi-lingual education. B. Our approach: HPL, the anchor agency in the partnership, has secured substantial funding from the state and private sources to expand its 107 year old building into a 21st Century Learning Center. Based on similar experiences in neighboring communities, once this new facility comes fully on line in 2012, the number of HPL patrons is expected to double. Use of all PCCs in our partnership will increase five fold and passive broadband access is expected to rise ten-fold from a current 150 a day to 1,500 in our area. Our curriculum is based on what
we know the three partners involved already do best: HPL will work with the schools, with online services and one-on-one instruction, CareerPoint will do all introductory and personalized training and HCC will do upper level computer courses and a limited number of for-credit courses. We will provide expanded access through workstations, laptops and Netbooks, complimented by a curriculum of training and educational opportunities provided by experienced bilingual teachers to provide a continuum of learning for pre-schoolers through seniors, including key programs to participate in the city-wide effort to achieve higher highschool graduation rates, such as 3 hours of computer lab supervision for students with their caregivers. The 2 city-block area of park surrounding the library will be wifi accessible from netbooks that we will provide. The program will be administered and staffed by HPL, Holyoke Community College, and CareerPoint with program participation by the public schools and local service agencies. The program will be composed of the following: introductory and advanced computer program training in English and Spanish, career skills training, GED and test-taking training, ABE and ESOL coursework, incumbent worker training and a limited number of credit courses given by the Holyoke Community College. The hub of the program will be the HPL while the three other computer center locations ' CareerPoint, HCC and the new HAFLC Center (part of HCC) ' will also be heavily utilized. All four centers will have distance-learning capacity to allow classes conducive to this technology to maximize their effectiveness. C. This project will serve all of Holyoke's 40,000 residents, but will focus service delivery on the densely populated (poor) neighborhoods surrounding downtown, where HPL, CareerPoint and HAFLC are all located. Overall, even before the recession, Holyoke had the highest (29.8%) poverty rate in the state (2008 U.S. Census Bureau estimate). Hispanics now make up 48% of the total population, and 51% of the Hispanic community lives in poverty. The city-wide unemployment rate now stands at 13.4% and Holyoke is the state's worst performing K-12. Holyoke's public schools are 76% low-income and have a 49% graduation rate. Incarceration rates are also extremely high. We estimate the potential users to all our centers, including their enhanced wifi capacity to be 4090. D. HPL has served Holyoke with quality services for 130 years with resilience and vision. To our knowledge, our library Director, Maria Pagan, is the only Puerto Rican public library Director outside Puerto Rico. For more than a decade the library has been planning a major expansion/renovation, and in 2008 HPL was awarded a highly competitive $4.4 million state grant for library renovation and construction. Private fund raising has already added another $.5 million of a $2.5 million capital fund drive, and municipal bonding for another $5 million+ will be in place by June, 2010. With guidance from the Mass Board of Library Commissioners, the expanded facility is being designed to meet community library and information needs, including broadband infrastructure, for the next 30 years. Since 1996, CareerPoint has served the workforce and economic development needs of individual job seekers, social service agencies, and the business community throughout Hampden County. Chartered through the Regional Employment Board, CareerPoint transforms the maze of complex, bureaucratic Employment and Training Programs into one seamless service delivery system for job seekers and employers alike. CareerPoint has won two national awards, including the One-Stop Career Center of the Year award from the National Alliance of Business and The Career Center/ Community College Collaboration award from the National Association of Community Colleges. Founded in 1946, Holyoke Community College is housed on a165-acre campus equipped with the latest state-of-the art technology in specialized learning facilities. The school serves over 9,000 mostly local students, who are often the first in their family to attend college. The College's is committed to being a regional leader in workforce development and
training and has a strong track record of partnering with local and regional institutions. HPL is the lead applicant. It has an established and approved reporting and management process; and a strong record of prudent financial management. CP and HCC have proven project and financial management skills. E. Jobs. With respect to construction, this project will create 30 jobs. Programmatically, the project will create 4 new FTE and two PTE positions. The number of jobs retained, and accessed through our training and education services is in the many hundreds, we conservatively estimate that our programs currently facilitate the creation of 50 jobs a year and that that number will triple to 150. Total jobs created: 185 F. Overall cost of the proposed project The total cost of the project is $3,336,946 for construction, equipment and programs. BTOP grant funding request is $1,948,848 with a 41.8% applicant match. In sum, the Holyoke Public Library Computer Information Center/Centro de Informaci'n & Public Computing Center Partnership has the capacity to have a transformative impact on our city and region. Without significantly greater capacity to deliver broadband and computer access, along with training and educational opportunities to Holyoke's most impoverished neighborhoods, prospects for the City will remain bleak. Our collaborative provides a systematic method of providing expanded access to broadband, technology and training, which can move those most in need down a pathway to further education and job readiness.