Broadband USA Applications Database

**Applicant Name:** RESEARCH FOUNDATION OF STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, THE

**Project Title:** SUNYIT Community College Technology Network

**Project Type:** Sustainable Broadband Adoption

_______________________ Executive Summary _______________________

About 48% of New Yorkers live outside the state's cities. These residents are served by town and village governments, which have responsibility for quality of life issues like public safety, recreation, local history, road maintenance, planning, zoning, and economic development. However, they are usually staffed by part-time officials who serve their communities for little or no remuneration; often these officials are retirees often older than the general population. Technology offers solutions for meeting the challenges faced by these governments. Yet, often these same people who volunteer to serve in small and rural governments are also less technologically knowledgeable than the general population. At the State University of New York Institute of Technology (SUNYIT) the Digital Towpath Project (DTP) was conceived to meet the challenges of providing technology's tools to small local governments. Designed through a collaborative effort of local officials to meet their specific needs, DTP's website content management system allows those with little technical skill to establish and maintain a highly functional municipal website and other project functionality allows them to use electronic communications and to manage electronic documents efficiently and transparently. Membership in DTP includes unlimited access to all tools and the support to use them for a small annual fee. For over ten years DTP has provided small and rural local governments with web-based tools they can use to assist in delivery of services, to manage development, to promote open and transparent government, and to involve their constituents in the democratic process. The program's success is largely due to the methodology developed at SUNYIT which builds community and employs a cooperative approach to the use and development of the project's tools. Digital Towpath has grown from ten small towns and villages in the region near SUNYIT to nearly 150 local governments across the state, largely through word of mouth. The greatest concentration of members remains near the support hub at SUNYIT. The proposed project will establish six regional training centers at community colleges that serve rural areas of the state as well as small towns and villages near urban centers. Building on the lessons learned at SUNYIT, this Community College Technology Network will not only support existing members more fully than they can be served by the central staff at SUNYIT but also build membership to a level where DTP can be truly self-sufficient. The Network will also establish awareness programs to help citizens become e-citizens, fully utilizing the new online services that will be available to them from new DTP members. These awareness programs will target students at the colleges, who are the community leaders of the future, as well as the general public in the colleges' service areas, a population that is both older than average and of lower income. According to a Department of Commerce issue of Economic Development America: 'Small and rural communities in particular can benefit from the Internet because it provides a better opportunity for them to show up on the radar of expanding and relocating businesses.' Through
DTP, New York’s small and rural towns and villages can maximize their exposure to new development as well as improve services for their residents. Greater options for development will mean more jobs and better incomes for the people in the 22 county area served by Network partners — a total of over 2.4 million people. Community colleges are experienced in outreach and adult education through their divisions of continuing education. The partners in this project will use their expertise to develop long-lasting relationships with community leaders through the awareness programs and the recruitment of DTP members and will also solidify those relationships by offering technology training like word processing, presentations, spreadsheets and the like specifically tailored to local officials. In addition, they will help to establish and coordinate a committee of local officials at each community college who will offer workshops on matters related to the business of small local governments like zoning law development or accounting principles. By expanding the collaboration that built Digital Towpath, the Community College Technology Network will increase demand for broadband services as it builds stronger communities and supports more fully-informed and engaged citizens.