Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name:  W & W COMMUNICATIONS INC.

Project Title:  Technological Centers Initiative for Puerto Rico

Project Type:  Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary _____________________

The Public Computer Centers (PPCs) initiative aims to provide technology enabled facilities that will make available state of the art technology, broadband Internet and skills development training to constituents of rural and disadvantaged communities. Due to economic factors, constituents of these communities have little or no access to services, educational opportunities, and community services now available on-line, or opportunities to develop technological and entrepreneurial skills that could make them more competitive in the job market or help them to develop leadership skills to contribute to the community. The PCC networks will allow for video conferencing capabilities with other entities for educational and other community development purposes such as town hall meetings or community outreach programs. The centers will also provide computers for internet use and software development training as well as workshops to promote an entrepreneurial spirit in younger generations and develop understanding and positive attitudes towards innovation and their role in the sustainable economic growth of the country. PPCs will develop future leaders, innovators, and trainers, who will eventually use these facilities as part of their own further program development. These training are geared to promote a paradigm change from communities used to dependence upon outside assistance to an empowered self renewing community. The PCCs will be the seeding ground of a network of sustainable, renewable learning communities empowered to manage their own infrastructure and to decide upon the offerings the centers will provide over time based on the needs of their own community. Community leadership structures will be established for overseeing and managing the facilities to promote their appropriate use while generating the funds to cover their expenses. This can mean, for example, the development of fundraising programs, charging usage fees, and charging training fees. With their broad community outreach, these Public Computer Centers are geared toward opening the door to increased community opportunities in a number of areas such as: Adult Basic Education (ABE), Computer and technology training, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), personal and professional enrichment courses, professional development for K-12 educators, after school programs, testing and test preparation, career development activities, among others. For instance, the centers would be able to provide robotics training for young people where they can have firsthand experience in learning and understanding the process of innovation, creation and development of technological products. Other professional enrichment workshops will help develop competencies in the areas of text editing, working with spreadsheets, basic accounting, and presentation skills. These facilities open a broad range of other training possibilities such as motivational training and other outreach activities that can significantly improve the lifestyles of community members. The PCCs project targets three municipalities: Ceiba, Aguas Buenas and Vega Baja, which have already committed to participate by signing MOUs and
commitment letters, impacting a total population of 108,965 constituents. Based on figures provided by the Bureau of the Census for year 2000, an average of 49% of the population of these Municipalities live under the poverty level as established by the Federal Government Poverty Criteria, 30% have declared some kind of disability, 40% have less than a high school diploma, and their general unemployment rate fluctuates between 15% to 20%. A total of ten centers are proposed with the following breakdown: 5 center for the municipality of Ceiba, 2 center for the Aguas Buenas municipality and 3 for the Vega Baja Municipality. This breakdown has been determined by the availability of feasible municipal structures located in those communities in need. Nonetheless, the situation of the municipality of Ceiba merits additional attention. The economy of this municipality has been severely struck by the closing of the Roosevelt Roads Naval Station, eliminating the largest source of direct and indirect income for this municipality, thus statistics pertaining this particular case are probably much more alarming than the ones we just provided. Alternative sources of income are being proposed for this area, however it will take a longer time for them to mature and be productive. Thus, the particular importance of PPCs for this community given the fast training opportunities they are able to provide. W and W Communications has designed and developed a comprehensive self healing wireless network with a vision towards serving low income population. This network already serves similar municipal initiatives in the island. The network has also been designed to target hard to reach rural underserved areas. The company has over 20 years of combined of experience developing such networks and working with social economic development projects. In the “escuela de los Duros” in the Municipality of Carolina, W and W communications was able to provide 4.5 Mb of internet band width and over 10 Mb of backbone bandwidth between three schools in Carolina, which translated into broader educational opportunities for that student community. W and W communications was directly involved in the process of planning and implementing the facilities in those locations as well. Company members have been directly responsible for the development of various economic development programs such as "Centros Pymes" for the Puerto Rico Trade Company, a government entity. In this project three separate government companies and departments were integrated to achieve the goal of a centralized permit system, geared toward serving small businesses in order to allow faster processing. In this particular effort, applications, facilities planning, equipment procurement and connectivity were provided or designed. This type of system was not previously available in Puerto Rico. One PPC Director, one PPC Assistant Director, a Compliance Officer position, ten Center Coordinators, and four Technical Support positions are expected to be created as direct jobs, full-time positions, along with ten part-time coordinator assistant jobs for weekend operations. Also part-time tutoring jobs will be generated as communities begin to utilize these centers as after school facilities. Ten part-time tutoring positions, one tutor per facility, are initially expected to be created, with a maximum of three tutors per facility once this initiative reaches its maturity. Unemployed teachers will be primarily considered to fill such positions in order to attenuate the current situation of government layoffs recently impacting the local economy. As these centers are facilities so far non-existent in the proposed locations, the jobs they create will provide a net increase in direct job opportunities with a positive impact on these municipalities. Indirect job opportunities will also be created for additional trainers and workshop facilitators. The overall cost for the implementation of these facilities is