**Applicant Name:** PASSAIC PUBLIC LIBRARY TRUSTEES OF (INC)

**Project Title:** Passaic Public Library Technology Reboot Initiative

**Project Type:** Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary_______________________

The Passaic Public Library's (PPL) Technology Reboot Initiative Grant Proposal will allow PPL to improve and enhance broadband access for the 69,000 community members of the City of Passaic, NJ, and the 1,500,000 residents in the service area of our library consortium (Essex and Passaic Counties), all of whom have access to PPL's resources. As a community anchor institution, PPL is the primary source of broadband access for the nearly seven hundred (700) patrons who come through its doors daily. Many are economically disadvantaged and culturally marginalized. The enhanced broadband access made possible by BTOP funds will also greatly augment PPL's efforts towards meeting its patrons' job searching, healthcare, and educational needs. Passaic is home to a vibrant, diverse community in an economically depressed and underprivileged area. As outlined in our application, our community suffers from a high unemployment rate and low household income. Over 69% of our population speaks English as a second language, with over 60% of our population being of Hispanic/Latino origin. An essential component of PPL's mission is to provide to its community the necessary information to improve their lives, be it through the pursuit of new knowledge, cultural enrichment, or the escape afforded by great literature or other forms of entertainment. PPL is also a nexus of communication for its residents, a vital link between its patrons and the resources offered by the outside world. PPL has served its community by actively helping new immigrants integrate into American society, not survive beside it as a marginalized sub-population. We have helped the unemployed find jobs, stimulating and improving the individual's, as well as the larger community's, economy. We have served our senior citizens to ensure they are not forgotten. We have served as the primary information gateway to our community, using printed materials and electronic resources. Nearly 75% of the residents in our community do not have computers at home. We have provided public access computers free of charge for their usage. We have also provided classes in the areas of basic computer skills, career development and training, and English-for-Speakers-of-Another-Language (ESOL). As proud as we are of our service, we recognize that our technology and programs were implemented in a haphazardly organic, piecemeal fashion, which has led to great frustration. We do not have enough public access computers to satisfy the high demand. Our network infrastructure cannot adequately handle our existing computer traffic, resulting in patrons frequently being kicked off their computing session and losing anything they were working on. With limited classroom sizes, computers, and funds, many members of our community have been forced on waiting lists for months before having the opportunity to attend any of the abovementioned classes we provide. In recent years, PPL has been hampered in its attempts to address the patron dissatisfaction due to lack of funding, lack of stable, long-term leadership, and lack of technological expertise. Two of these problems have been addressed. The Board of Trustees has been reconstituted, with renewed
vigor and commitment to the pulse of the community. These dedicated Board members have strong ties in our service community. In PPL’s new Director, Mario M. González, we have an experienced library administrator with over thirty (30) years of experience implementing large-scale programs and administrating large library systems. In his short tenure here, Mr. González has forged stronger relationships with our Board of Trustees and community partners, especially PALS Plus, the regional consortium of libraries that is now providing much of the technological expertise PPL has needed. Mr. Gonzalez has also made strategic hires and empowered existing PPL staff comfortable with the installation and utilization of computer technology. PPL is now ready to address the root causes of patron dissatisfaction with our technology, and the obstacles preventing us from scaling up our program reach. The only piece missing is the funding. In essence, PPL is looking to push the reset button, to reboot its technology offerings to its public, and how it leverages technology internally to provide for its public. In order to regain our community’s confidence, and to attract further development funds from private organizations, PPL needs to implement a wide-ranging, bottom-up strategic vision that will meet and exceed our community’s expectations. The funds requested are necessary, and the results of our reboot will be dramatic. The program changes detailed in this grant proposal are the logical next steps in the development of our offerings to the public. The opportunity granted by BTOP funds represents the ability to make necessary sweeping changes in one, concerted push, with a unified vision and planned organizational commitment. Our proposed program follows a multi-pronged approach: 1) Stabilization of technology infrastructure. PPL’s main branch building requires both electrical rewiring, and a complete computer network rewiring, including new hardware (routers, switches, and hubs). In addition, PPL’s phone system is inadequate to support the amount of incoming calls from the public, sustained outreach, and communication with the hearing impaired. We will also upgrade our wireless router to enhance our wi-fi service to patrons who come to PPL with their own wireless-equipped laptops, and to support our own laptop loan service. 2) Public Access computing expansion. PPL currently provides thirty-one (31) computers for public access, between our two branches. We are looking to triple that number and meet our public’s demand. We will purchase furniture for our workstations, as current furniture is inadequate and non-ergonomic. We will provide color laser printers and scanners for the general public, to better support school projects, career correspondence (e.g., resumes and cover letters), and business presentations. 3) Peripherals for Special Needs. To better reach populations with special needs, PPL will provide: a. Screen readers and headphones for the visually impaired b. ESOL software c. Dedicated workstations with software in the main languages our community speaks (Spanish, Gujarati, Polish, and Russian), as well as keyboards for those languages (Gujarati, Polish, and Russian) that use non-Roman alphabets. 4) Remodeling of Classroom Spaces. PPL has classroom space in our Forstmann Library only, with eight (8) workstations. Current configuration is not conducive to instruction, and restricts class sizes. We will remodel our classroom space and bring capacity to twenty pupils by adding workstations. We will also add a classroom to our Reid branch. Both spaces will have projectors and screen to facilitate instruction and meetings. 5) Expansion of Existing Program Offerings. While we currently offer several educational programs (ESOL, basic computer skills, career development, etc.), we would greatly expand these programs by increasing class size, recruiting instructors in all of the prevalent languages of our service community, and providing materials for free, such as textbooks. 6) Consolidation of information on topics relevant to our public. The most important topics to our community that PPL has identified include: healthcare, career development, paths to
citizenship, housing, parenting, and education. PPL will guide the public towards the highest-quality information on these topics by: a. Providing access to at least ten (10) premium databases with the most up-to-date and reliable information on these topics. b. Creating pathfinders on these topics. Pathfinders are collections of web resources, with summaries and explanations of each. PPL's pathfinders would complement databases by focusing on local resources for each of these topics. c. Upgrading and redesigning PPL’s own website to accommodate Web 2.0 technologies, as well as housing our premium databases and pathfinders. Our website would have versions for each of the languages prevalent in our service community. Our Reboot Initiative will look towards two measurements to gauge success. First, we are looking to more than triple the amount of patron users of our public computers, and classroom programs, from our current weekly number of 5,725 to 19,575. Second, we will see how we stimulate our own local economy through jobs creation. We are creating approximately 25 part-time staff positions to support this program, as well as utilizing our updated technological and programmatic resources to assist our patrons find employment themselves. The total project cost to implement PPL’s vision is $2,133,994. PPL is requesting $1,586,269 from BTOP, and will provide the remaining $547,725.