Broadband USA Applications Database

**Applicant Name:** RICHMOND, CITY OF

**Project Title:** Richmond Broadband Accessibility Project

**Project Type:** Comprehensive Community Infrastructure

_______________________ Executive Summary _____________________

The central goal of the Richmond Broadband Accessibility Project (RBAP) is to provide high-speed broadband access to community anchor institutions that serve low-income families and small family businesses in the underserved neighborhoods of Richmond, California. The project seeks to bridge the digital divide for families in these neighborhoods that are characterized by extremely high levels of poverty, unemployment, violent crime and school failure. The RBAP will achieve this goal by helping residents gain better access to human services, health care and job opportunities; strengthening residents' involvement in their children's education through the use of technology; and by stimulating economic development and job growth through bringing technology resources to small businesses. The target population for the project is a community of approximately 27,000 people and 8,400 households in central and southeast Richmond, including an area known as the Iron Triangle. The communities include census tracts 3760, 3770, 3790 and 3820. The demographic mix of these neighborhoods, which has changed significantly since the 2000 census, includes approximately 60% Hispanic, 35% African American, and 5% Southeast Asian. The majority of immigrant families in the community are English language learners. The neighborhoods include families characterized by extremely high levels of poverty, unemployment, and educational failure. Unemployment, which stood at 17.1% as of June 2009 for the City of Richmond as a whole, is significantly higher in these neighborhoods. Schools in the area regularly score at the lowest achievement levels in the state. There are high rates of crime and violence, along with gang activity. Almost one-third of the single-family homes have mortgages that are distressed, with many in foreclosure. Through a broad partnership that includes Building Blocks for Kids (BBK), a collaborative of 27 agencies serving the target community; the Richmond Police and Fire Departments; Contra Costa College; the Port of Richmond; City libraries and community centers; and Contra Costa County; the RBAP will create a high-speed in ground fiber network that will connect 45 anchor institutions to broadband service. The project will also install wireless broadcast hubs at each of the anchor sites, providing wireless broadband to residences within a 500 foot radius of each of these hubs. The project service area includes a total of 817 businesses and 70 community anchor institutions, including schools, community centers, medical facilities, churches, and police and fire stations. The partnership with Building Blocks for Kids (BBK) will play a key role in the RBAP. Leveraging a recent grant of $500,000 from the California Emerging Technology Fund for a project called the Emerging Technology Plan for Family Inclusion (ETPFI), BBK will provide outreach, refurbished personal computers, digital technology training, and technical and social support to a total of 1,000 families in the target community. These resources will offer the chance for the most economically deprived families in the community to participate in the RBAP, and will help to increase the adoption and retention rate for
broadband users in the program. The wireless broadband service that will be broadcast to the public from the community anchor sites will be nondiscriminatory, and the public's applications will not be subject to network management. The City will also avoid throttling traffic on the network. Instead, users will be provided with a predetermined speed when they are online. The City also will not employ a content filtering system for the public. Public users will be responsible for their own filtering of website and other content. The City of Richmond will follow the five principles of non-discrimination in providing the subsidized networks. The primary goal will be to deliver unfiltered and open Internet access to those who live or work within a 500 foot radius of those sites. The staff of the City of Richmond Information Technology and Engineering Departments are well-qualified to implement and operate the proposed broadband infrastructure. The Engineering Department has experience in the installation of conduit and pull boxes in a variety of locations, as well as supervising contracted work of this type. In addition to their previous experience with a variety of network systems, in the past year, the Information Technology department designed and implemented an enterprise wireless network for the newly renovated Civic Center campus, and played an important role in the installation of Phase One of the City of Richmond Police Department CCTV surveillance system. That wireless network provides service to the City Hall and adjacent public buildings and open space. The project was designed to be scalable in order to allow for expansion to other City facilities in the Civic Center area in the future. The system gives City staff secure wireless network access to all of the shared resources on the City's network. The City also provides secure guest access, which follows the non-discrimination and network connection obligations described in the NOFA. Limited tech support for users of the wireless hubs will be coordinated through BBK, which will provide youth who have been effectively trained in the system to respond. With a federal request of $4,281,662 and an applicant match of $1,940,000, the total infrastructure cost of the proposed project is $6,221,662. This includes the cost of fiber broadband connections to a total of 45 public safety and community anchor institutions, including police and fire stations, public libraries, and community centers. Limited last mile wireless broadband coverage will also be offered for the four census tracts included in the service area. The City will pay for all operating costs of the system once it is operational. Because the wireless broadband service provided to residents of the target community will be free, users of the network will not be required to take part in a formal subscription process. Calculations based upon the radius of the service area for the nine wireless broadcast hubs located at community anchor institutions shows a total of approximately 2,800 households within the coverage area. A 50% usage rate would result in 1,400 households within the target community making use of wireless service. In order to limit costs, the RBAP will work with the Building Blocks for Kids Broadband effort, and with IT students at local high schools to provide support for wireless users. The RBAP will promote economic recovery in the target community through the ETPFI, whose strategy includes the goal of bringing broadband access, personal computers, and training to a total of 50 owners of small family businesses during the period of the grant. Other successful business owners, identified through the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, will mentor these small business owners in the use of broadband technology. Their learning will enable them to employ the Internet to expand their customer base, do research to identify the lowest cost suppliers, gain skills in accounting and other areas through online learning, an access other tools for increasing the profitability of their businesses. It is estimated that providing this opportunity for small business owners will enable them to create up to four new jobs as a result of access to expanded business opportunities through broadband technology. Based upon the
numbers provided by the government web site used for calculating job creation, it is anticipated that this project will create a total of 67.6 jobs.