

## **Broadband USA Applications Database**

**Applicant Name:** Broadband for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

**Project Title:** Broadband for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

**Project Type:** Sustainable Adoption

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### **Executive Summary**

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#### **BROADBAND FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**

Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing face significant barriers. Providing broadband to these Americans who do not have access will enrich their lives by affording tangible opportunities for jobs, education, and training. It will allow these individuals to be part of the economic and social fabric that broadband propels. Dr. Robert Davila, Dr. Vint Cerf, and Dr. John S. Schuchman have formed the Broadband for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Corporation (“Applicant” or “BDHH”) to bring broadband Internet access to the vulnerable and underserved low-income deaf and hard-of-hearing population. They have launched this project because it has the power to transform the lives of deaf individuals (hereinafter including the deaf and hard of hearing) who are frequently excluded from the benefits of the high-tech broadband economy and community life.

The Applicant will provide broadband Internet access for two years to a target of 66,000 low-income households that include a deaf individual and provide outreach, access, and support services to facilitate greater use of broadband Internet access by this vulnerable population. The project will provide a “jump start” that will stimulate demand for broadband, economic growth, and job creation.

Professionals with years of experience in the deaf and hard of hearing communities will lead the Broadband for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Corporation. These renowned professionals are proven leaders with experience in technology and education, and with a deep understanding of the deaf community. The expected overall cost of the project is \$70 million.

#### **THE NEED**

A disproportionate number of the one million Americans who are unable to hear a conversation are unemployed, receive Social Security, live in poverty, or have household income below \$20,000. (See Erika Steinmetz, Current Population Reports in Americans With Disabilities: 2002, Household Economic Studies, U.S. Census Bureau (issued May 2006), available at: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p70-107.pdf>.) These economic factors, combined with persistent cultural barriers such as discrimination and bias, have often isolated and marginalized deaf people. (See The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ("ADA"), 42 U.S.C. 12101(a) (discrimination against individuals with disabilities continues to be a serious and pervasive social problem).) Deaf Americans are much more likely than their hearing counterparts to have inadequate access to healthcare, education, government agencies or services, or support networks. (See Position Statement on Mental Health Services for People who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, National Association of the Deaf, 2003, available at: <http://www.nad.org/issues/health-care/mental-health-services/position-statement>.) Deaf Americans' access to the nation's communications system has been particularly limited, and only began to improve with the mandate of the ADA to provide deaf individuals with "functionally equivalent" communications services.

Many deaf individuals remain outside the high-tech, broadband economy and community because they cannot afford broadband Internet access. Applicant seeks to introduce more deaf to broadband, providing them the opportunity to participate more fully in the economic and social world around them.

#### UNIQUE, SIGNIFICANT, AND SUSTAINABLE BENEFITS FOR THE DEAF - AN UNDERSERVED VULNERABLE POPULATION

Broadband has enormous potential to lower or eliminate the barriers that historically have caused deaf Americans to be isolated or marginalized. Empowered with broadband, deaf persons can search for jobs and submit resumes; have access to training and educational materials; and communicate with businesses, friends, and colleagues. For example, users of IP Relay can place calls over the Internet by connecting instantly to a relay operator at the touch of a button. With broadband access, deaf Americans who use American Sign Language ("ASL") can communicate across distance quickly and naturally in their primary language by using Video Relay Service ("VRS"). For many ASL users – such as senior citizens and children who are unable to type – video communication is the only means of communicating with another person over distance.

Providing deaf Americans with broadband access is an innovative approach to improving their daily lives, education, and job prospects. Although the idea has been proposed in the past, there has been no financial support for such a program and no large-scale project has been attempted. (See Petition for

Rulemaking, Coalition of Organizations for Accessible Technology, WC Docket No. 03-109 (Oct. 30, 2008) (recommending that the Commission allow deaf individuals who use existing telephone-related low income programs to use this funding for broadband Internet service).)

A large-scale, national strategy will best serve the vulnerable, often rural, deaf population because deaf individuals who lack broadband Internet access are dispersed geographically. (See Letter from Doris O. Matsui, et al., U.S. Congress, to Michael Copps, FCC, Bernadette McGuire-Rivera, NTIA, and James R. Newby, RUS, at 1-2 (Apr. 29, 2009) (requesting that low-income urban populations be considered potential “underserved” populations as the agencies develop grant programs and finalize requirements).) The proposed project will bring sustainable benefits to this underserved and vulnerable population by introducing low-income deaf individuals to the opportunities broadband access provides. The knowledge that deaf Americans gain about the benefits of broadband will provide lasting improvements to their daily lives. The project will also create sustainable increases in broadband adoption rates beyond the grant period by providing deaf users the opportunity to continue receiving broadband service at substantially discounted rates after the funding period.