

## **Broadband USA Applications Database**

**Applicant Name:** Cambridge Housing Authority

**Project Title:** CHA Community Computer Centers

**Project Type:** Public Computer Center

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### **Executive Summary**

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The Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) houses a particularly vulnerable low-income population. Comprising nearly 10% of the city's population, the CHA's largely minority and largely immigrant households will be the target of BTOP Computer Center funding. Thirty-one percent of residents have less than a high school education. Nearly 60% of family development residents and 84% of the elderly have no Internet access; many likely have dial-up, so it is safe to assume that the percentages without broadband access is even higher. With limited education and economic opportunity, and little access to technology, CHA residents are destined to repeat the cycle of generational poverty that has plagued their predecessors.

To promote resident economic self-sufficiency, the CHA has created a broad range of social service programs for both youth and adults. Three Computer Centers, located strategically to serve over 600 adults, children and teens annually, have formed the nexus of these educational and vocational programs, each emphasizing broadband utilization and the acquisition of literacy skills as keys to economic advancement.

Despite a decade-long history of federal, state, and private funding and a track record of programmatic success – including HUD designation as a Best Practice program – the CHA had to shutter its Computer Centers on July 1, 2009, due to funding cuts. The agency seeks to reinstate its Computer Centers and restore the programming attendant to them.

In the Gateways Program, 135 adult ESOL students annually will learn to use the computer to increase their English language facility and to use broadband as a portal to the world outside public housing. In so doing, they will gain the tools they need to advance educationally and vocationally. Gateways will be operated under contract by the Community Learning Center, which has gained national recognition as one of ten 1999 recipients of the federal Department of Education Secretary's Award for Outstanding Adult Education and Literacy Programs.

As an important complement to Gateways, the Cambridge Employment Program, will serve 65 adults annually under a contract with the CHA, utilizing broadband technology to help students to develop resumes, conduct career interest inventories, undertake job searches, and apply on-line for jobs.

The 110 adults who seek more focused computer training each year will avail themselves of the CHA's Strictly Computers classes and open labs, also under contract with the Community Learning Center. This program will offer instruction in MS Word, Excel and the use of e-mail, search engines, and browser software. In addition, each year 80 residents who lack broadband access at home will utilize "open lab" time to be offered during mornings, evenings and on weekends and staffed by Strictly Computers teachers and aides.

The CHA has also built a reputation for its nationally recognized youth development program, The Work Force. Providing learning opportunities at home, at school, and at work, The Work Force will rely heavily on the Computer Centers to provide 140 teens annually with life skills classes and educational and employability supports that promote personal and professional success. The Work Force will utilize broadband technology to provide students with the tools to research colleges, potential careers, and job opportunities. The Computer Centers will also be central to both Work Force test prep courses and its Summer Literacy Camp, which reinforces reading comprehension skills of rising 7th and 8th graders as they prepare for high school. Winner of the Ford Foundation/ Harvard University Innovations in American Government Award and Best Practice designations by US Depts. of Labor and HUD, The Work Force has achieved impressive results: 100% of participants graduate from high school, over 90% go on to college and, perhaps most importantly, 66% move out of public housing.

Finally, to bolster the long-term prospects of 29 of the CHA's youngest children and 50 of their parents and grandparents, the Parents ROCK (Reading On Computers with Kids)/Pathways to Family Success Program will use technology to work with 4-8 year olds and parents, cultivating competencies which promote literacy at home, success in school, and family stability.

In all of its federal, state and private grants, the CHA has maintained a perfect record of drawing down grant funds and completing its projects in a timely manner consistent with proposed work plans, and the agency has not had an audit finding in more than 20 years.

The program will employ 26 adults, saving the jobs of 15 people previously laid off due, and it will provide employability assistance to over 500 low-income adults who are un- or under-employed.

In so doing, the CHA and its partners will provide a 36% cash and 41% in-kind match on the \$698,924 federal share, for a total match of 77%, nearly four times that required. Serving approximately 600 residents of all ages annually, the federal cost of \$388/user will yield a population of immigrant adults who will develop facility with both the English language and technology; a population of adults who will gain access to jobs and achieve economic mobility; a population of parents whose young children who will enter school at greater parity with their middle income peers; and a population of adolescents who will have the opportunity to graduate from high school, to complete post-secondary education and, ultimately, to move up and out of public housing.

The CHA will also submit a Sustainable Adoption proposal, building on the Computer Centers to provide: 1) instruction, in the Computer Centers, on installation, use, and basic troubleshooting for home broadband users; 2) low-cost computers for home use; 3) broadband access at public housing developments across the city; and 4) training of a cadre of CHA residents to become civic journalists in their communities.