Applicant Name: UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Project Title: Broadband Training Expansion at the University of Illinois Fire Service Institute.

Project Type: Comprehensive Community Infrastructure

Executive Summary

a) For more than 85 years, the Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI) has been successfully training the men and women who are responsible for the safety of the people of Illinois. The focus of our training continues to be first responders in Illinois, but we have also expanded our training offerings to a national and international scope. In fiscal year 2009, IFSI reached over 59,000 first responders and elected officials in communities in every Illinois county and throughout the nation. IFSI has continually been on the leading edge of training firefighters. Today, being on the leading edge means delivering meaningful training over the Internet to first responders. To do this, IFSI must invest heavily in technology necessary to deliver online learning. This includes equipment needed to deliver high speed video, audio, graphics, and other media that students now expect as part of online learning. This grant will build upon 2 programs that have seeded computers, provided broadband access and connectivity to rural and underserved fire departments and fire protection districts throughout Illinois. Illinois State Fire Marshal which has provided computers and broadband and Internet access to enable these organizations to support online reporting to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). The Illinois Terrorism Task Force and Illinois Emergency Management Agency have enhanced the state emergency network system (EmNet system) to reach rural communities and public safety response organizations using broadband connectivity. These programs have been instrumental in putting nearly 1,100 computers and providing satellite access to the Internet for underserved departments across Illinois. This grant will utilize this enhanced access to fire departments and communities throughout Illinois to provide high-quality training, library services, research and access to national training and education programs. IFSI is the the primary training arm of the Illinois Terrorism Task Force and has developed numerous online courses in the National Incident Management System, hazardous materials and rescue response and basic firefighting that will be made available to fire departments and public safety organizations throughout Illinois and the national via the Internet. This grant will enable IFSI to provide the same quality training, education, research and information services to all fire departments and communities in Illinois regardless of their size and remoteness. An additional benefit to this is the fact that because the training will be delivered over the Internet, it is no longer limited to Illinois. Fire departments from all over the country and the world can have access to it. The online training offered by IFSI currently is focused on fire fighting and awareness level courses. Our expanded offerings will include not only fire fighting, but also incident command, emergency operations, fire officer training, and other classes. The grant will also enable IFSI to provide real-time and archived webcasting and video conferencing-based training and provide information and support departments during actual response emergencies. Currently, we can only deliver these courses in person. This limits our ability to reach all of the
population we wish to serve. By adding Internet based training, we will open our offerings to thousands and thousands more first responders. b) When IFSI implements its enhanced distance learning system utilizing its new high speed broadband capability, it will be the only state fire academy in the nation that is able to deliver high volume online learning opportunities to first responders. One of the great features of this program is that other state fire academies will be able to access this information also. Distance education will be the keystone of this project. By offering expanded distance education, more firefighters and first responders from any region of the state and the nation will have the chance to join any class offered in our distance learning program. This means that everyone with computer access will have the chance to learn modern firefighting techniques for no to low cost from IFSI. This philosophy fits well with the programs the OSFM has already begun. This approach is being put into place in conjunction with the EmNet program implemented by the Emergency Management Agency in Illinois (IEMA). The EmNet program allows fire departments in the state to connect to the Internet via satellite access. In addition, the OSFM created a program whereby nearly 1,100 computers have been distributed to fire departments. These departments now have access to the Internet, but not necessarily to training that is vitally important to the safety of the public. By having the ability to take training online, fire departments will have access to training never before available; plus they are going to save a tremendous amount of money in their annual training budgets, but unless IFSI expands it technological capabilities and bandwidth availability, IFSI will not be able to meet the demands of its users. Time is the number one barrier to training volunteer firefighter, who comprise 70% of the Illinois fire service. Currently, almost all of our class offerings require physical presence either in Champaign, or at a training facility somewhere in Illinois. This requires time away from either home or work and travel expense which may be burdensome for many rural fire departments. By having Internet access to our distance program, they will not have to pay travel expense and time lost due to being away from the fire station will be reduced substantially. More importantly, they can access training, information and research programs at IFSI when they are available, often on weekends and after normal working hours. This will result in greatly reduced cost and greater access to training for small, under-funded rural departments. With increased technology available, IFSI will provide a variety of online learning opportunities it cannot deliver now. Currently, online learning is made up of singular learning without much interaction between teacher and student. In the new delivery system, IFSI plans to incorporate such tools as integrated white boards, live video feeds of teachers and materials, and other innovative methodology. IFSI has gained the support of many Illinois Fire Fighter groups including the Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts, the Office of the State Fire Marshal, the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association, Mutual Aid Box Alarm System, the Illinois Emergency Management Association, and the Illinois Fire Fighters Association. These groups represent almost every firefighter in Illinois. By garnering their support, the project will succeed if we can get the funds required to implement the technology at IFSI. c) The Broadband Training Expansion at the University of Illinois Fire Service Institute project is intended to allow access to IFSI programs to all firefighters and first responders who have an Internet connection. The training will be provided at little to no cost to these people. As noted earlier, the OSFM has already implemented a program to give under-served departments in Illinois computers and access to satellite broadband. These departments are typically made up of volunteer firefighters serving small, rural communities in Illinois. Many of these departments have no training budget, but yet are expected to be well versed in rescue techniques. By combining the access to the Internet provided by the OSFM and by
IFS I implementing the technology required to deliver quality training at high speed, departments that have traditionally had little training will have access to world class training available now to only well funded organizations. d) To outline the skills and experience of the IFSI leadership assigned to this project, resumes have been attached as part of Section 17. In addition, this project has the support of the University of Illinois, which has been a leader in developing innovative technology, especially computer-related technology. e) It is likely that this project will add some part-time instructor positions to the IFSI staff. The ability to instruct in a distance learning environment is a unique skill. Currently, we have 11 part-time instructors in the program. We anticipate that we will more than double the offerings within the program. That would mean adding an additional 11 part-time instructors which translates to approximately 4 full time employees. As time goes on, this number could increase significantly. In addition, the grant will enable fire departments to better protect their communities, and since businesses rarely recover from catastrophic fires, by enhancing fire protection; the grant will help protect existing jobs in communities throughout Illinois.