

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Tincan

Project Title: Spokane Broadband Technology Alliance: Public Computer Centers

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

The City of Spokane has long lagged behind Washington State as a whole in terms of access to resources and prosperity. The city's per capita income is \$18,451, in comparison to the state's \$28,290. Of Spokane's residents, 15.5% live below the federal poverty level, in comparison to 11.8% in the state as a whole. The situation in Spokane's 5 identified low-income neighborhoods is more severe, with per capita incomes significantly below even those of the city as a whole. In these neighborhoods, one-third of the households have no working vehicle, one-fourth of individuals over 25 have not completed high school, and 10% have less than a ninth grade education. Computer and Internet use is also low. While the 2009 Pew broadband report notes home broadband usage at 63%, the lowest income users stood at only 35%. This is confirmed by surveys of the 600 at-risk teens/year who participate in Tincan's programs. More than 80% say their only Internet access is limited to school, and an equal number say that their families do not have a computer at home. Access to public computer centers is critical in this environment. As an increasing number of government services go online, our most vulnerable citizens need access and training in areas that range from filing taxes to researching jobs. They also need a way to organize for activism and communicate in an enriched social environment. Both the libraries and community centers report that their PCCs are full whenever the facilities are open. But Spokane's existing public computer centers cannot meet the needs of its most vulnerable people. The computers are too few and too old to run current software, and connectivity is too slow to meet contemporary Internet usage needs.

Our solution to this problem has been to form a city-wide alliance of community partners and create a web of 17 public computer centers that blanket the low-income neighborhoods and are available to Spokane's most vulnerable people. The Spokane Broadband Technology Alliance (SBTA) will create a web of facilities designed to serve all of the low-income neighborhoods of Spokane by careful geographic distribution and attention to the needs of both the general population of neighborhood residents and those vulnerable populations who need special access points. The innovation in the SBTA project, however, is not solely in the citywide collaboration. It is also in the types of training we will provide to meet the specific needs of our identified population. Certainly, we will provide basic Internet searching training, and links to needed services. But because the Internet is also increasingly a forum for self-expression, civic participation, social interaction, we will provide training in video production, social media, and developing serious video games. Our training has an underlying theme not only of skill-building, but increasing civic engagement. Small businesses, critical to the economic vitality of these

low-income neighborhoods, will have the opportunity to learn how to sell on the Internet and use social media to promote their business.

This project addresses the BTOP goals of 1) providing improved access to broadband service to consumers residing in underserved areas of the country and 2) providing broadband access, education, awareness, training, equipment, and support to community anchor institutions or organizations and agencies serving vulnerable populations. Our related Sustainable Adoption proposal focuses more intensively on the innovative training we will provide, and supports this PCC proposal by encouraging people to use the computer centers in new ways.

The SBTA project stands on a strong foundation of existing partnerships. We did not come together solely for this proposal – we have been working together for over 15 years. Given that strong base, we could start many project activities immediately, offering some training using our laptop lab while new computers are purchased and connectivity enhanced. Tincan also has a long track record of effective project management of projects of similar size, scope, and focus. We have had three TOP grants as well as U.S. Department of Education and National Science Foundation technology grants. We know how to manage them to not only ensure that the programs are implemented, but also ensure that they will grow. The community centers that have joined this project began in 1994 as Tincan's first public access sites, now grown to robust public computer centers. Our second TOP grant focused on business development and led to not only an ongoing program to help small businesses get online, but to our very successful drop out prevention program based on an innovative e-commerce curriculum. The final TOP grant was to start a "virtual teen center" with activities to engage at-risk youth. This project has grown to serving over 600 teens a year, leveraging millions of dollars in public and private funds. We know how to create a strong framework for implementation and how to promote sustainability.

We anticipate that the project will serve 298,906 unduplicated users, defined by calculating 2/3 of the partners proposed users over the two-year project period. Using the OMB rubric of 1 job year created/\$92,000 expenditure, the minimum number of jobs created will be 22. We estimate jobs saved to be 150 due to increased skills of workers.

The overall cost of the project is \$2,036,976, including \$1,283,723 in requested BTOP funds and \$753,253 (37%) match, for a cost of \$6.81 per unduplicated user over the course of the project.