Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Lonesome Pine Regional Library

Project Title: Broadband Computing for Southwest Virginia at Lonesome Pine Regional Library

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_____Executive Summary_____

Lonesome Pine Regional Library has provided public library service in southwest Virginia since 1964. Today the Library serves 108,092 citizens in the counties of Wise,Dickenson,Lee and Scott and the city of Norton.Lonesome Pine Regional Library has always placed high priority on the provision of free public access computing as a core mission of our public library service. Since 1997, the Library has provided free public access to the Internet and computers to all, including children and adults.The 84 public computers and Internet access workstations are greatly used with 115,155 user sessions logged during FY 2008-09.

This high usage is indicative of the vulnerable populations that make up our southern Appalachian region in which many cannot afford to purchase computers or Internet access at home.The four-county area is characterized by poverty, high unemployment and low educational attainment.Poverty rate data provided by the Appalachian Regional Commission indicates that the poverty rate in Wise County and Norton city is 20.2% which is 163.5% of the U.S. average. Dickenson County has a 21.3% poverty rate which is 172.1% of the national average. Lee County's poverty rate is 23.9% (193.2% of the U.S. average) and Scott County's 16.8% (135.4% of the national average).

Census 2000 data reveals that the percentage of population 25 years and older who are high school graduates in Wise County/Norton is only 62.9% and those who have earned a Bachelor's Degree or higher is 11.1%.The comparable Dickenson County ratio is 58.9% to 6.7%. Lee County is 60.6% to 9.5% and Scott county 64.4% to 8.3%.

The high use of public library computers is also indicative of the lack of broadband infrastructure in our mountain region.A significant number of areas remain unserved by broadband and many are underserved according to a map published by Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) Office of Telework and Broadband Assistance.The map shows the areas of no broadband service and very little fixed broadband service in our region.Lonesome Pine Regional Library is the sole provider of essential Internet access for many in our region.

The VITA map also shows each public library in Virginia along with connectivity status. Sadly, eight of the nine libraries that comprise Lonesome Pine Regional Library are designated "libraries with inadequate connectivity."The Library has struggled to keep up with demand as more and more people want to use computers and the Internet. Increasingly, onsite usage has outstripped the ability of the Library's T1 lines to keep up with demand as computer use and applications have become more bandwidth intensive. For example, standard network speed tests are recording dial-up level speeds with the finding that excessive packet loss is impacting performance; connections are network limited over 99% of the time. Websites and file downloads crawl at dial-up speeds with audio, video and other large files often stalling, unable to load.

With the downturn in the economy, demand for public computing is up while the Library's state and local governmental funding is down.Our regional library system simply does not have the financial resources to upgrade the library network and replace aging computer hardware for the public without federal funding assistance.Significantly this is a time when the public is turning to our libraries in large numbers to access e-government services,job sites,skills-training,distance education,K-12 homework help and personal finances help, just to name a few of the many valuable resources that are freely available through the Internet.As a provider of public library service,we recognize our role in helping to close the digital divide but we must have stable,robust Internet connections and equipment to provide this essential service.

As a community anchor institution with considerable experience in supplying public access computing, we have facilities already in place that are designed for public computers.We are also uniquely positioned to offer programs, training and educational opportunities for the public that can promote broadband technology to enrich people's lives.Our library system can fully fulfill this role with an upgrade to fiber broadband in each library facility that will be robust enough to meet public bandwidth demands and will make possible interactive computer-based training.Several of our libraries already conduct computer-based workshops although they have to routinely shut down many of their computers to reserve enough bandwidth to conduct the classes.Through the promise of increased capacity through broadband connectivity, all of the library computers will be able to remain connected to the Internet at all times and regular workshops for the public can be offered on an ongoing basis.One new job

will be created to expand our training role.

The library stands ready to build upon its aging network infrastructure to meet public computing needs by utilizing fiber-based broadband connectivity that is uncompromised, comparable to that which is

available elsewhere in our nation and scalable to meet future demand.Our 12 year experience in providing public access computing uniquely positions the Library to successfully carry forward this endeavor.

We are proud to join in the combined initiatives of the Powell Mountain Coalition team of organizations that are working together to advance broadband adoption in our region.This Coalition is composed of LENOWISCO,Mountain Empire Older Citizens,Wise County Public Schools, Sunset Digital Communications,CornerPost Software,Lee County Public Schools,University of Virginia's College at Wise,Mountain Empire Community College,Wise County Sheriff's Department, Norton City Schools,Lee County Sheriff's Department,Wellmont Health System and Scott County Telephone Cooperative.

We respectfully submit this funding proposal of $553,287 to upgrade our library computer centers.