

## **Broadband USA Applications Database**

**Applicant Name:** Durham County

**Project Title:** Durham County Library's Public Computer Centers - Access your world at high speed

**Project Type:** Public Computer Center

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### **Executive Summary**

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The County of Durham, North Carolina, and Durham County Library are proposing to expand access to broadband for all Durham County residents, especially the most vulnerable people who are unemployed, without a computer or internet service at home, and are most likely to fall behind as the digital divide widens. The overall approach in the proposed project is to create public computer centers that are free to general public at eight convenient library locations, including low-income areas near downtown Durham. The centers will offer high-speed access to the Internet, as well as training and on-demand assistance to help people use the technology.

Durham County Library's public computer center project will make it possible to serve an additional 7,522 residents per week with optimal access to broadband, along with supports to maximize its use. The library currently serves 6,252 people per week on 164 public access computers at seven locations across the County. During the 2-year grant period, the number of public access computers will increase by nearly 50 percent, while the bandwidth will be dramatically increased to accommodate the additional internet traffic. When this project is completed, the library estimates it will be serving close to 14,000 people per week.

The eight public computer center locations will include four 25,000 sq. ft. regional libraries at four corners of the county. Other locations are an historic branch library, which began as the "Durham Colored Library" and continues to serve a predominantly African American and low-income community, and two smaller libraries with limited hours that serve a low-income population. McDougald Terrace is located in a housing community in the poorest neighborhood in South Central Durham, while Bragtown is located in the low-income area of North East Durham and serves a growing Hispanic population. This project will create a multiuse public computer center at the Main Library, located in downtown Durham, to comfortably accommodate one-on-one job search assistance, small group workshops for beginners or for customers learning English for work, and larger groups in a computer lab.

Outreach, training and on-site support from knowledgeable librarians will maximize the use of the technology by the vulnerable populations served by the library. Open to all 262,715 county residents,

Durham County Library's public computers are most used by the 28,557 people who live below the federal poverty level and do not have a computer at home. Their numbers and needs are increasing. According to US Dept. of Labor statistics, Durham's unemployment rate, which for the past decade has fluctuated between 2.1 and 5.6 percent, has increased dramatically and in June, 2009 was 8.4 percent. The needs of the unemployed have exploded since January of 2009. At Main Library, wait times reach one hour every day of the week and exceed two hours on the busiest days. This situation is made worse by the narrow bandwidth currently serving the libraries. Library customers experience slow internet service at all locations, even brief shut-downs that create longer waits.

An investment in this project will ensure the results called for in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Working together, Durham County and Durham County Library have the qualifications and capacity to implement successfully all components of this project. Durham County's Information Technology Dept. plans, manages, and supports the library's information resources. Its Network Services Division develops, maintains, and secures a highly reliable network infrastructure that is the backbone of the county network, and provides and maintains network servers and their application services supporting Durham County Library and its functions.

Durham County Library has served county residents for more than 100 years with free access to books, services, and other resources that inform, inspire learning, cultivate understanding and excite the imagination. With trained librarians, online databases and other research tools, the library provides up-to-date resources to help meet the information and technology needs of the general public. The library is a leader in providing Durham's residents with information technology resources needed for academic and business success and for social networking and leisure activities. The Main Library provides specialized job search assistance, as well as a variety of computer skills trainings. Other library locations offer computer trainings using a mobile computer lab of laptops. In the last quarter, 60 computer and job skills classes were offered at 4 library locations.

This project will provide stipends to five underemployed people who will serve as computer coaches to the unemployed, while gaining contact with local employers, resume-building experience and further training in the technology-rich environment of the library. The Corporate Job Days proposed for this project will result in 600 job applications, a portion of which will win jobs at major local employers. Also, this project will generate work equivalent to .36 FTE (720 hours) for IT staff members, who will coordinate the installation of enhancements at the library's public computer centers.

The overall cost of this proposed project is \$226,133, with \$179,533 requested from the BTOP program and a match of \$46,600 in cash and in kind services. Overall, this project will cost \$0.29 per additional person served over the two-year project period.

Durham County Library's Public Computer Center project will begin December 1, 2009, or as soon as the award is made, and will be completed in two years.