

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: State Library of Louisiana

Project Title: Repaving Louisiana Libraries' Information Super Highways

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

Louisiana faces many critical social challenges. Statistics reveal that we have an unhealthy and poorly educated citizenry with a high incarceration rate. Although we have a rich cultural heritage, we lack the culture of literacy needed for our people to be successful. Until we build a literate society and a society with the 21st century skills required in a modern workforce, these problems will continue to plague us. In today's global economy, access to broadband is a necessity for success and should be available to all. In Louisiana, last year we saw over 6,500,000 uses of computers in public libraries, which clearly demonstrates that people do not have broadband or computers in their homes. Public libraries are the computing centers for their communities.

This proposal will offer (1) high end technology training statewide, (2) rebuild the local area network infrastructures of 340 public libraries and (3) establish a system of remote support for all libraries in the state. We seek to eliminate the digital and educational divide that we know exists in Louisiana and that keeps many of our citizens vulnerable and disenfranchised. The service area is all 64 parishes (counties) in the state and complements our PCC proposal #1397 by focusing on the network to support the computer centers.

Philosophically we deeply believe that libraries have both an opportunity and a responsibility to change Louisiana's standings in the most important indicators of success. We are the University of the People. By engaging our citizens from the neediest socioeconomic groups, we can better equip them with the tools they need to be competent, to succeed and to compete for jobs. We believe doing this will bring about the economic development that will allow Louisiana to compete on a global stage.

The 2008 NTIA list of broadband adoption rates shows Louisiana 11th from the bottom. 57.1% of households in Louisiana are without broadband access, either because it is not available or because it is unaffordable. When you tie this factor to our low standing in most indicators of success, our children born into areas of poverty are almost certain to fail and repeat the cycle they were born into. Some of our most telling indicators are:

- As many as 20% of Louisiana's adults are non-literate and not able to read simple instructions.
- More than 18% of our population lives below the poverty level. The national average is 13.6%.
- America's Health Rankings, 2008 ranked Louisiana #50 & in the bottom 2 positions since 1990.
- Louisiana ranks #3 in obesity.
- Louisiana is #1 in the number of cancer deaths per 100,000 population.
- Louisiana ranks 5th highest in the nation in crime rate per 100,000 population.
- In 2008 the labor force participation rate for Louisiana was 59.4%. The national average is 63.4%. This explains Louisiana's relatively low unemployment rate.
- Over 17,000 legally blind and more than 57,000 seriously visually impaired Louisianans cannot read standard print.
- Approximately 26%, or over 1.13 million, of Louisiana's 4.3 million residents are individuals with disabilities or functional limitations, including some 493,660 persons over the age of 64.

Because of lack of funding and a skilled workforce of IT professionals, most of our rural libraries in underserved areas cannot take advantage of faster broadband because their systems cannot handle the increased load. This proposal rebuilds their internal networks to prepare them for speeds of 100 mpbs at every parish (county) headquarters.

A second portion of this proposal establishes a centralized automated network of remote and onsite support that will allow usage of the same resources and functions from small rural as well as large urban libraries. A third area addressed in this proposal is to offer high end technology training in areas of the state where there is little, if any, technology training. This uniform curriculum of training, education and certification for any library staff involved in maintenance of information systems will strengthen public libraries as broadband public access computing centers and vulnerable populations will receive the same level of service as someone entering a large, urban library. The training will also be opened up to IT staff in rural hospitals, health care centers, schools and parish governments. Our overall goal is to provide the same opportunities for advancement to rural and underserved populations that exist in more affluent areas.

This proposal is scalable and replicable. The overall BTOP investment that would bring Louisiana into parity with the rest of the nation is \$ 18,195,085 and will be matched by in kind donations of \$7,536,503 (29.3%). This will directly contribute to the education of the Louisiana workforce, provide greater access to broadband and make Louisianans more employable.

The public libraries in Louisiana are very heavily used, but are funded by dedicated property taxes that, in the rural areas of the state, amount to a very small operating budget. They are routinely in need of more funding, more staffing, and newer equipment. The State Library of Louisiana has worked diligently to build upon and sustain the public library networks but with 340 outlets, this is a challenge. With Louisiana facing the same financial crisis as the rest of the nation, our economic outlook remains bleak for several years. We are fearful that we will lose the momentum we have gained in the past 4 years. A project of the size and scope of our application will not be possible without BTOP funding.

The State Library will work in partnership with libraries, state & local governments, and all news media including Louisiana Public Broadcasting to inform potential users of these training opportunities and the availability of broadband. This media campaign will especially focus on entities that serve the underserved, such as the Louisiana Workforce Commission, to ensure that we reach the unemployed.