



A NOTE ON THE PUBLIC COMPUTER CENTER FUNDING CATEGORY AND LIBRARY PROPOSALS

July 29, 2009

This note is targeted to members of the library community who have a serious interest in applying to the Public Computer Center (PCC) funding category of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). For an overview of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) or general guidance on BTOP applications from the perspective of the library community, see respectively *Broadband Funding: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* and *Guidance for the Library Community: Preparing a Proposal for the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP)*.¹

This note collects relevant text about the PCC funding category from several National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) documents² and provides some library-specific examples to stimulate the thinking process for applicants from the library community.

Before delving into the PCC funding category, we will briefly review the overall BTOP objectives, as PCC projects must advance at least one of these objectives and preferably more than one.

BTOP Objectives

Section 6001 of the ARRA establishes a national broadband service development and expansion program to promote five core purposes:

- To provide access to broadband service to consumers residing in unserved areas of the country;
- To provide improved access to broadband service to consumers residing in underserved areas of the country;
- To provide broadband access, education, awareness, training, equipment, and support to community anchor institutions (e.g., schools, libraries, medical facilities), or organizations and

¹ Both of these documents may be accessed at <http://www.ala.org/knowyourstimulus>.

² Of course, if there should be any discrepancy between this note and an official NTIA document, it is the latter that provides authoritative information.

agencies serving vulnerable populations (e.g., low-income, unemployed, aged), or job-creating strategic facilities located in state- or federally designated economic development areas;

- To improve access to, and use of, broadband service by public safety agencies; and
- To stimulate the demand for broadband, economic growth, and job creation.

Requirements and Considerations for BTOP Projects

- BTOP will support viable, sustainable, and scalable projects.
- NTIA expects to distribute grants across geographic areas addressing the various public purposes.
- NTIA will issue awards on a technologically neutral basis and expects to support projects employing a range of technologies (e.g., fixed and mobile wireless, fiber, satellite).
- NTIA will also take into consideration whether an applicant is a socially and economically disadvantaged small business concern as defined under section 8(a) of the Small Business Act (SBA) (15 U.S.C. 637(a)(4)).
- Grantees commit to substantial completion of the project within two years and project completion within three years of the award date.
- Applicants must demonstrate that a project could not be completed in the grant period but for federal funding.
- Applicants must explain the significance of the problem to be addressed and the degree to which the proposed solution effectively addresses the problem and could be replicated by other organizations.
- BTOP grantees must provide matching funds of **at least** 20% of the total project cost.

Requirements and Considerations for PCC Projects

Grantees are required to show how project funding would serve the stated purposes of:

- Providing broadband education, awareness, training, access, equipment, and support to community anchor institutions (e.g., schools, libraries, medical and healthcare providers, community colleges and other institutions of higher education, and other community support organizations), organizations and agencies serving vulnerable populations (e.g., low-income, unemployed, aged), or job-creating strategic facilities located in state- or federally designated economic development areas;
- Improving access to, and use of, broadband service by public safety agencies; and
- Stimulating the demand for broadband, economic growth, and job creation.

Sample Library Community PCC Projects

Example 1: Regional Library Consortium

NTIA has publicly recognized the unique power of public libraries working together – as in the case of consortia – to file applications for projects that can be more powerful and implemented in a more efficient and expeditious manner than what a library could do individually. For instance, a regional

library consortium could apply on behalf of its members to upgrade their public computing labs, including the routers, switches and hubs, and workstations that will allow them to increase patron use. This consortium could then apply for E-rate discounts to support the monthly charges for any associated increase in broadband capacity. Matching funds for the BTOP proposal could come from participating municipalities or consortium dues or in-kind through labor at member libraries and the consortium. The application should showcase the innovations or enhanced services enabled by the improved broadband capacity and local area network (LAN) upgrades, especially for purposes highlighted in the ARRA such as promoting employment opportunities and economic competitiveness, providing access to government services and information in times of crisis, and advancing educational and training opportunities with an emphasis on serving vulnerable populations.

Example 2: Library Job Center

A stated purpose of the broadband section of the ARRA is job creation. With the high level of unemployment and the poor condition of the economy, libraries are in prime positions to establish new, or enhance existing, community job centers.

A library can apply to:

- Purchase workstations that are reserved for those seeking jobs or filling out applications;
- Make modest architectural modifications to the library to create a dedicated space for a job center;
- Purchase résumé writing software;
- Purchase high resolution printers for printing résumés, cover letters, and related materials;
- Offer workshops on job skills, résumé writing, tips on how to prepare for interviews, et cetera; and
- Offer job applicants a dedicated space and necessary equipment for conducting online interviews with potential employers, including the capability to hold practice interviews, and to review them.

Example 3: Library Small Business Center

Many small-business owners already rely upon local public libraries to perform basic functions. ARRA is an excellent opportunity to create a dedicated space for these important members of the local community. This can be accomplished by applying for:

- Funding for some costs related to remodeling the library to create a dedicated space;
- Support for the purchase of workstations or other equipment for a dedicated small-business workspace; and
- Purchases of business software for use by small-business owners.

Example 4: Serving Users with Disabilities

The PCC category directly references making library workstations accessible for users with disabilities. To this end, the following are eligible costs:

- Workstations with large screen displays and screen reader software, input devices, headphones, or other accessibility tools;
- Special/modified furniture and modifications to facilities; and

- Staff training costs or using outside trainers to offer classes or more individualized help to the disabled on how to use the Web.

Example 5: Technology Training for Users

The PCC category enables libraries to provide workshops or training opportunities on a wide variety of Web-related topics. These can be conducted by library staff or outside experts. (Note: Applications will be partly evaluated on the expertise of the workshop presenter.) For example, workshops could cover:

- Basic computing skills for special populations such as senior citizens or other vulnerable populations as defined in the Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA);
- Issues on privacy and security in the networked world;
- Basic/advanced searching and how to get the most out Web search engines;
- Enhancing critical thinking skills online;
- A tour of the best sites on a host of topics, such as financial, health care, job search/employment, or travel;
- Local/state/federal government resources available on the Web; and
- Advanced techniques for users interested in learning how to use emergent Web technologies to improve business Web sites

Example 6: Upgrades to Network Hardware

In a PCC grant application, a library may propose a LAN or small wide area network design within the library facility. However, any larger infrastructure projects will need to be submitted to the Broadband Infrastructure funding category (page 76 in the *BTOP Grant Guidelines*). Within the library a variety of hardware network equipment is eligible for a PCC grant. Some examples include:

- Workstations and software;
- Routers, switches, and hubs;
- Other LAN components such as firewalls or networking monitoring tools;
- LAN design and consulting costs; and
- Establishing a wireless access point.

Eligible and Ineligible Costs for PCC Projects

Grantees may use PCC funding to expand computer center capacity by:

- Acquiring broadband-related equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, and digital network technology for broadband services;
 - Eligible costs include the purchase of computer software, such as word processors; computer peripherals, such as mice and printers; and computer maintenance and troubleshooting programs, such as systems guarding against computer viruses.
- Developing and providing training, education, support and awareness programs or Web-based resources;
 - Given the emphasis the ARRA places on job creation, it is reasonable to include job-training programs and job-related instruction as eligible costs under this project category.

- Expenses associated with computer training workshops, digital literacy programs and Web-based resources are also considered eligible costs, as is reasonable compensation for qualified instructors for these types of programs.
- Facilitating access to broadband services, including, but not limited to, making public computer centers accessible to the disabled; and
- Undertaking such other projects and activities as the Assistant Secretary finds to be consistent with the purposes for which the program is established.

BTOP grant funds must be used to fund purchases that are predominantly for the provision of broadband education, awareness, training, access, equipment and support.

As of this writing, there are some noteworthy points about eligible costs that are not formalized in NTIA documents or otherwise referenced on the NTIA Web site:

- We are uncertain about the inclusion of overhead or indirect costs as a percentage of direct costs, as is typical in some other grant programs (e.g., add 23% to the total direct cost). We have not found an official reference that indirect costs calculated via such percentages are “eligible,” but there is certainly emphasis that project expenses must be directly related to broadband activities. If practical, you may want to itemize these expenses (e.g., include an accounting clerk at 0.40 FTE @ \$35,000 to process invoices, expense reports, etc. that are **directly related to the proposed project**). In any event, the addition of a large percentage of your direct expenses to the project budget as indirect costs is likely to be a competitive disadvantage, even if it is permitted.
- We heard reports from the July 24 workshop in Los Angeles that monthly costs for telecommunications services are eligible costs under the PCC funding category. These statements were made by an NTIA official. However, some of our advisers remain cautious as this interpretation is not yet documented, as far as we know.

We will post clarifications of these items on our Web site (www.ala.org/knowyourstimulus) as we obtain them.

Scoring of Applications

The following information on the grant application evaluation process is taken from the NOFA first released by NTIA on July 1, 2009.

Project Purpose (30 Points)

- **Fit with statutory purposes.** Applications will be evaluated with respect to each of BTOP's statutory purposes. Reviewers will consider, relative to each purpose, whether the applicant is addressing a compelling problem of the sort that the statute is intended to resolve, whether the applicant has offered an effective solution to that problem, and whether the proposed solution is of broad significance and includes developments that can be replicated to improve future projects. Additional consideration will be given to projects located in partially or wholly unserved or underserved areas of a state as described by the state submission in the State Broadband Data and Development Grant Program or as otherwise determined by NTIA.

Additional consideration will also be given to applicants that address more than one statutory purpose and project category.

- **ARRA and other governmental collaboration.** Applicants will be evaluated on their collaboration with ARRA or other federal or state development programs that leverage the impact of the proposed project. Examples include the Department of Energy's Smart Grid Investment Program, the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Public Housing Capital Fund, the Department of Transportation's Capital Assistance for High-Speed Rail Corridors and Intercity Passenger Service program, and other investments where collaboration would lead to greater project efficiencies. In each case, the applicant must convincingly demonstrate that these leveraging efforts are substantive and meaningful.
- **Enhanced service for health care delivery, education, and children.** Reviewers will assess the depth and breadth of the project's ability to enhance broadband service for health care delivery, education, and children as contemplated by the ARRA. Projects would need to demonstrate that they go beyond providing access to broadband to include more robust educational, health care, or related broadband service delivery.
- **Socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses.** Reviewers will grant consideration to applicants that certify they meet the statutory definition of a socially and economically disadvantaged small-business concern, or that have established agreements in principle to contract with socially and economically disadvantaged businesses that meet that definition.

Project Benefits (25 Points)

Reviewers will evaluate the various benefits that the proposed project will provide:

- **Availability to the public.** Applications will be scored on the availability of the computer center to the public. Reviewers will consider the capacity of the computer center, its hours of availability, any membership or usage fees charged, restrictions on usage, the proportionality of the computer center's capacity and hours of availability to the population the applicant proposes to serve, public outreach, and the computer center's accessibility to persons with disabilities, accounting for both the physical accessibility of the facility and the accessibility of the computer equipment and software.
- **Training and educational programs offered.** Applicants will be scored on the availability, accessibility, and quality of training and educational programs offered through the computer center. Reviewers will consider the degree to which the programs meet the relevant needs of the community.
- **Availability and qualifications of consulting and teaching staff.** Applications will be evaluated on the strength of the consulting and teaching staff at the computer center. Reviewers will consider the qualifications and training required of such staff as well as whether the number of available staff is sufficient for the capacity of the computer center.

Project Viability (25 Points)

- **The technical feasibility of the proposed project.** Applications will be scored on the comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the technical solution and the clarity, level of detail, and coherence of the system designs. In order to receive a full score, applicants must demonstrate that the project includes developments that will be feasible in other situations.

- **Applicant's organizational capability.** Reviewers will assess whether the applicant has the organizational capability necessary to undertake and complete the project. Reviewers will consider the years of experience and expertise of the project management team and the past track record of the organization with projects of a similar size and scope, as well as the organization's capacity and readiness.
- **The level of community involvement in the project.** Reviewers will evaluate linkages to unaffiliated organizations in the project area (from the public, non-profit, and private sectors), particularly community anchor institutions and public safety organizations, as an ongoing and integral part of the project planning and operation. In order to receive the full score for this criterion, at least one partner should meet the definition of a socially and economically disadvantaged small-business concern under section 8(a) of the SBA – these partners must be distinct from any contractor or related entity specified for the purposes of the socially disadvantaged small businesses criterion in Project Purpose. Applicants should demonstrate that each linkage is substantial and meaningful.
- **Ability to promptly start project.** Projects will be evaluated on whether they will be able to start promptly and be completed in an appropriate timeframe for the size and scope of the project. Reviewers will consider the planned start date of the project; the reasonableness of the project timeline and associated milestones; whether the applicant has secured all licenses, franchises, and regulatory approvals required to complete the project; and whether the required contractors and vendors necessary to implement the project are prepared to enter into contracts as soon as the funds are made available.

Project Budget and Sustainability (20 Points)

- **Reasonableness of the budget.** Reviewers will evaluate the reasonableness of the budget based on its clarity, level of detail, comprehensiveness, appropriateness to the proposed technical and programmatic solutions, the reasonableness of its costs, and whether the allocation of funds is sufficient to complete the tasks outlined in the project plan.
- **Sustainability of the project.** Applicants must convincingly demonstrate the ability of the project to be sustained beyond the funding period. Reviewers will consider business plans, market projections, third-party funding commitments, and other data as may be appropriate to the nature of the applicant and the proposed project.
- **Leverage of outside resources.** The applicant must demonstrate the ability to provide, from non-federal sources, funds required to meet or exceed the 20 percent matching funds requirement unless a waiver of that requirement has been requested. Reviewers will give additional consideration to proposals that exceed the minimum matching requirement, provide cash matches, or receive matching funds from acceptable federal sources as described in section V.C.4.b of the NOFA. For purposes of this evaluation, applicants that have received a full or partial waiver of the cost-matching requirement will be treated as having provided a 20 percent non-cash match.