Current Program Description

The Urbana Free Library provides free public computers and Internet access. These resources are primarily serving vulnerable populations. Those who come to the library typically have no computers or no Internet access at home. Statistics for Urbana School District indicate that 60% [check %] of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

o   The library's PCC is heavily used. Since a building expansion—completed in spring 2005—doubled the library size to 50,000 square feet, public computer use has been between 100,000 and 118,000 sessions per year.

o   The PCC is available to anyone, with no restrictions by address or by balance owed to a library. Statistics for July-December 2009 attribute 60% of use to Urbana residents, 22% to Urbana computer-use-only cards (either outside City/library taxing limits or owe large balances), and 18% to people from other communities.

o   The two largest PCC user populations are unskilled adults trying to re-enter the workforce and teens. The heavy teen use, that often outnumbers available computers in the after-school hours, began in fall 2006. The huge influx of adults needing technology skills began with the 2008 economic downturn. By visual perception, the teen population is mostly African American; the adult population is about 60% African American and 40% Caucasian.

The Urbana Free Library offers a recently expanded and accessible location. The library is open 70 hours per week, is handicap accessible, and is on all MTD bus routes. The library's budget show extensive commitment to PCC resources.

o   Approximately 60 public computers (on a 4/5-year replacement cycle) and all accompanying software, PC maintenance, furniture, and facility operations overhead.

o   High-speed wired Internet access across a fiber path and wireless hotspot access throughout the entire building.

o   Staffing during all library hours provided by librarians at adjacent reference desks. Librarians have masters degrees in library and information science.

o   Reliable online databases and online tutoring available to anyone using the PCC and available to Urbana residents 24/7 via the website.

To address the dramatic increases in need, The Urbana Free Library has made program changes over the recent years.

o   Reduced the reference books/shelving to add more computers for diversified use. The library has created separate small areas reserved for seniors and the disabled, for adults

who need a quieter location in the after-school hours, for parents who need to work in the children's department while their children play, and for team use when two or three people work together to help each other.

o Sought volunteer assistance. In 2009, Community Informatics students from the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science began volunteering to provide more individualized attention in the PCC. They also ran two series of Teen Film Crew programs in which teens filmed, edited, and premiered their own productions. The GSLIS students have committed to a schedule of 12 hours/week for spring 2010 so that we can publicize the availability of extra help in the lab.

o Increased time allowed on the computers. Because the public demand exceeds the supply of computers, users are limited to two sessions per day. In 2006, the sessions were 30 minutes each, for a maximum of one hour per day. Because so many users now work on job-related applications and activities that might be lost when a session ends, we have reconfigured the two sessions so that each one will automatically extend to up to 1.5 hours, for a maximum of 3 hours per day. And, as long as the lab has at least a few open seats, staff will extend the sessions indefinitely.

Apart from PCC services, the library cooperates extensively with local service agencies to meet needs of our community through combined efforts rather than duplication of services. A few examples include Fit Families, Success by Six, and the Youth Media Workshop.

Program Expansion under BTOP Grant Proposal

With the BTOP grant, the library would expand its PCC from providing primarily technology resources to providing technology services including more individual tech assistance in the lab, classroom instruction with paths to education and employment, and outreach programming to attract target populations.

o **Lab assistance.** Many of the library's PCC adult users are very crisis-oriented. They need to fill out online applications for jobs and government programs, and they need to function online now—even though they have no tech skills. At the outset, these users are best served by additional dedicated lab assistance to get them past the sense of impossibility.

o **Technology classes and pathways.** For users who can forge a more long-range plan, the library will offer a set of basic technology training classes onsite. We recommend coordination with Parkland College. This arrangement would allow the library to take advantage of their already developed Digital Divide curriculum and their established paths to further education and employment services.

- o **Outreach and programming.** With grant funding for additional equipment and staffing, the library can engage in more outreach programming for community-building among target populations. Possibilities include media production programs to attract teens, family research programs to attract senior African Americans, and joint programming with the nearby elementary school that serves the school district's Latino population.

- o **Equipment.** The library is requesting funds for 30 laptops, equipped with office suite.

Fifteen laptops will extend the daily capacity of the PCC. Laptops will be used when all computers are in use, when adults want to find a quieter space (when the teens over-run the lab after school), when small groups want to work together in a study room, or when more parents want to work in the children's department while their children play.

Fifteen laptops will be used for classroom instruction and programming. Since the public computers are in constant use, the library will use laptops to hold tech training classes in the conference room. These laptops should also be equipped with media production software to increase their usefulness for targeted programming. When classes or programs are not in session, these additional laptops also will be used to extend daily capacity within the library.

- o **Broadband capacity.** **[Need some feedback on whether to include this?]** Although the library currently has adequate fiber and wireless access, the capacity may need to expand as public use expands. Current library use is within the 8Mbps free limit supplied by ICN to public libraries. Wireless access is purchased through VOLO and is separate from our network.