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Fast Facts

Public Computer Center (PCC) and Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) Proposals being prepared for Round Two submission (March 15 deadline) to Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP)
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Overview:

Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband (UC2B) is an intergovernmental consortium of Champaign, Urbana and the University of Illinois formed during Round One of the stimulus Notice of Fund Availability (NOFA). The deadlines for Rounds One and Two have been extremely tight, with results from Round One not available until well into the Round Two cycle. Therefore, the ad hoc group writing Round Two proposals is submitting under UC2B, with the university as the lead agency for financial processing. The infrastructure funds have now been offered to UC2B; while the Round Two proposals would certainly benefit from the successful completion of the fiber-optic infrastructure, they are not entirely dependent upon that project. The infrastructure proposal might be viewed as providing a vehicle; the PCC and SBA proposals then aim to support effective leverage and optimal use of that vehicle for community uplift. The PCC and SBA submissions propose to put everyone in the digital driver's seat with the knowledge and tools needed to get where they want to go in the context of shared well-being.

PCC Main Features

The public computer centers (PCCs) will enhance or enlarge existing efforts in Champaign and Urbana while also providing two hubs for multi-faceted community use. Public computer centers are the first exposure for many people to computing, and are central to bridging the digital divide in our community. We know that roughly 2,000 children in our schools do not have access to a computer at home, and that broadband adoption is below 40% in our target neighborhoods. Parkland College is a lead training partner and equipment coordinator in this effort. The two hubs are located in north Champaign (the public health department, for now), and east Urbana (an expansion of the Urbana Neighborhood Connections Center.) There are another ten PCCs located in the tracts identified in Round One as under-served. These include what are usually seen as "anchor institutions"—the workforce development center, the libraries, schools, and several religious institutions, as well as a community center in Shadowwood mobile home park. Other "targeted access" sites (there are 14) include the Don Moyer's Boys and Girls Club, the Frances Nelson Health Clinic and the free health clinics at Dental Circle, as well as Dorsey Homes, the C-U Area Project and the Independent Media Center, for example. Parkland will offer a tiered curriculum that allows people to move from the basic to advanced skills (including workforce prep certificates and supports an educational pipeline through Parkland and UI). Parkland will also provide trained staff at various locations open to the public, or a subset of the public (such as youth). The proposal is committed to financially supporting and professionally strengthening community members who have long been engaged in grassroots health, education, and justice issues.

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SBA Main Features

Central to the sustainable adoption of broadband is a creative and energetic promotional campaign to help potential users experience the benefits of digital literacy. This proposal is an on-the-ground effort to close the digital divide through face-to-face activities, in the form of classes, marketing, group productions, and one-on-one interactions. We anticipate youth media workshops, entrepreneurial efforts, business incubation sessions, tutoring, support in the form of childcare and translation, and other appropriate techniques. Supervised and trained “cybernavigators”—a concept developed in Chicago’s public library system—will be the faces of this campaign, backed up by coordinators with specialties in education, entrepreneurship, health, and new digital application development. A number of these cybernavigators will be community members, trained (if necessary) and then hired to organize in their neighborhoods. They will be joined by volunteers, including students looking for hands-on experiences. In all participating organizations, broadband will be “embedded” into existing programs in a way that includes cultural relevance, digitization of the community’s own materials, entrepreneurship, professional development, and connections within existing social, religious, and community organizations. By embedding broadband into the existing community infrastructure, people’s families and friends will naturally move online and the adoption of broadband will have relevance in people’s lives.

What these proposals are not:

While PCC and SBA proposals would benefit from the infrastructure provided by the Round One award, they are not dependent upon it. Further, these proposals do not address the many other urgent needs of this community—affordable housing, preventive health care, quality education, effective justice—but they may well contribute in a variety of ways to mechanisms and groups that seek to address those issues.

Groups involved in round two

Champaign Public Library and Douglass Branch, Urbana Free Library, City of Urbana, Champaign and Urbana public school districts, Champaign County Public Health District, Frances Nelson Health Clinic, 3 co-located free health clinics at Dental Circle, Champaign County, Economic Development Corporation, University of Illinois (CITES, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, and Illinois Informatics Institute), Black Chamber of Commerce, CCNet, C-U Area Project, CUWin, Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club, Independent Media Center, Mezolink, Muslim American Center, New Hope Church, Salem Baptist Church, Motherlands Culture Club, Orpheum Children’s Science Museum, SisterNet, and Volo.