Parkland College – BTOP Summary Document

February 17th, 2010

Introduction:

Parkland College seeks to partner with others in the Champaign-Urbana community to assist in providing technology training at numerous Public Computer Centers in the community's most underserved areas. The training and assistance Parkland will provide is based on successful training models currently used at Parkland's PCC on Mattis Ave. The training will engage participants at multiple levels, from the very basic understanding of computer components and functionality to more advanced topics in design and programming.

Overview:

Parkland's district has a population of roughly 243,184 people and covers a significant geographic area including parts of 12 counties (Champaign, Douglas, Piatt, Ford, McLean, Livingston, Iroquois, Vermilion, Edgar, DeWitt, Coles, and Moultrie). While Parkland College's services and programs extend to all individuals within District 505, the PCC services concentrate on the areas of greatest need within Champaign-Urbana and the surrounding area where underserved populations have very little access to computer technology.

Business and industry in the Champaign-Urbana area demand above-average computer competency and/or IT skills for their workforce. At the same time, more individuals are investigating technology as an alternative to the traditional job placement opportunities for individuals looking to make a fresh start. Parkland College has responded to these trends by assisting individuals in the community seeking or requiring services, training, and job placement.

Community Need:

The computer access and technology needs of our community have remained relatively constant since 2000. In that year, the Urban League of Champaign County along with the University of Illinois' program, Prairienet, implemented the Community Networking Initiative (CNI) to address the expanding gap in Champaign-Urbana's "digital divide." Prairienet, as part of the CNI project, conducted over 500 interviews and held a number of focus groups in low-income communities to get a better understanding of the need and how the CNI program could help.

The resulting information indicated a strong need for a sustained program providing technology support and assistance. During this evaluation, Champaign County had a low-income population of 26,000; in 2008, the U.S Census Bureau estimated that that number had increased to 37,500. Now, as the area deals with the effects of an economic recession, the demand for computer training continues to grow.

Parkland's PCC on Mattis Ave.:

The programs offered at Parkland College's PCC positively impact the community by providing services to numerous individuals each year. The PCC further empowers our community by allowing individuals to quickly strengthen their technical skills to be able to compete in today's technical society. With assistance from Parkland's Department of Adult Education we provide GED training for adjudicated youth, out-of-school youth, and ex-offenders, to allow them timely alternatives to low-wage jobs or community service work. Additionally, we target individuals who are currently employed in low-wage jobs who want to improve their skills to achieve higher paying positions.

The PCC on Mattis is located near Parkland's main campus and lies on a major bus route that provides easy access for participants at multiple locations around the community including middle schools, high schools, and the University of Illinois campus.

Marketing:

Our marketing strategy focuses on attracting individuals who qualify as residents of low-income communities and need access to computers, basic computer skills, GED preparation, after-school literacy programming, and training for job-related computer tasks. Marketing communication and promotional efforts include public service announcement (PSAs) on television and radio broadcasts; PSA posters in the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (MTD) buses; promotional posters, cards, and/or brochures for distribution at agencies and businesses serving or located near our target populations; and community meetings and assemblies. Internet and web communication will also be used to promote the PCC and programs to the community-at-large as well as targeted populations that have access to the Internet.

Training Overview:

Individuals from the community have the option to receive either general support or structured training at participating PCCs.

- **General Support** – This support is provided to any individual who requires assistance with general computer/technology issues such as sending emails, filling out job applications, or registering for online for services.
  - PCC monitors/instructors will work one-on-one with individuals to assist with specific tasks as needed.

Those participants who are interested in receiving structured training (beyond general support) at a PCC are separated into three cohorts based upon their familiarity and skill with computers and general technology (basic, intermediate, and advanced). Participants will be assigned into groups of 10-17 students to enroll in a one-year technology training program implemented by using a range of instruction approaches, appropriate to the population being served, at each of the three skill levels.

- **Basic Level** – Participants who have very little knowledge of computers and technology and simply need a core curriculum in order to bring them up to speed with "everyday" technological functions.
  - The introductory cohort has core training classes over 16 weeks including keyboarding, MS Office applications, knowledge of the Internet, DigitalMedia topics, and PC maintenance at casual user level.

- **Intermediate Level** – Participants who already have some skills but are interested in expanding their knowledge and learning more advanced, or new, skills. Individuals who successfully complete the core curriculum would be included in this category.

    - For those students completing the core training classes, or students entering with intermediate skills, special topics are offered in multiple IT tracks: hardware/A+ certification, digital media/game design/animation or another specified field that fits within the PCC's capabilities. Additionally, we provide a combination of official lecture/lab sessions as well as demonstrations of certain technological topics through our guest speakers.

- **Advanced Level** – Participants who have already developed specific computer skills and are now looking to use these skills in a pragmatic fashion by entering the workforce or an institution of higher education. Participants who successfully complete training at the intermediate level would be in included in this category.
    - At the advanced level participants are provided further group training in specified fields of their choice which fit within the PCCs capabilities. The result of this training may lead to A+ certification, job-shadowing opportunities, or Parkland College credit through proficiency exams.

Our experience from past years indicates that there is a large underserved population in the Champaign-Urbana area which has a very limited understanding of computer technology (more than 50% of last year's participants were at this level) and thus demand the basic level of training. Therefore, our core instruction is the primary focus of our training efforts and will contain many introductory topics focused on brining each group up to speed concerning the basics of computer technology.

Classes will be instructor led as well as classroom delivered, and will include hands-on activities, individual and group projects, workbooks, online materials, and Internet-based projects. Some distance learning methods, including online workshops through ANGEL (Parkland's online course delivery system), are considered for participants which are not physically able to attend classes at PCC locations. Additionally, all participants who take part in organized training sessions may be eligible to receive free software through Microsoft's Academic Alliance program.

The planned result of this training is to provide a path for each participant to take once they have completed their training at a PCC. One path is to use the knowledge that has been gained through the training programs to apply for a job and enter the workforce. The other major pathway involves entering an institution of higher education, whether at Parkland or any other institution of their choice.

Training Personnel:

Staffing at the PCCs will fall into three categories:

- Instructors – Lead formalized group training at all levels.
    - Hired on hourly rate.

- Assistants – Assistants will provide support to the lead instructor during formalized training sessions and will also work one-on-one with participants during open lab hours.

    - Hired on hourly rate.

- Monitors – Provide one-on-one assistance with general support and core curriculum material during open lab hours.
    - Non-paid tech-savvy volunteers from across the community.

Training Locations:

The PCCs involved in this project offering some level of training fall into three categories:

- **Light Training**– These PCCs do not provide formalized training for large groups but they do provide general support and one-on-one assistance with core curriculum issues.
    - Personnel: Each of these sites will be staffed by at least one lab monitor/assistant
    - Training: General support and one-on-one or small group training will be provided at these locations.

- Partial Training – Theses PCCs provide instructor led group training for just the core curriculum (basic level) and also offer one-on-one assistance to participants.
    - Personnel: All classes will be taught by one instructor and one assistant. Additionally monitors will be available during open hours to offer assistance.
    - Training: Formal group training in the core curriculum will be offered at these sites.

- Complete Training– These PCCs provide instructor led group training for all levels of training and also offer one-on-one assistance to participants
    - Personnel: All classes will be taught by one instructor and one assistant. Additionally monitors will be available during open hours to offer assistance.
    - Training: Formal group training at all levels will be offered at these sites.

Training Materials:

All computer instruction and training utilizes curriculum, software, and/or textbooks developed and/or currently used by faculty of the CSIT department at Parkland College. Participants receive instruction and training in the following areas:

- **Keyboarding** – Keyboarding Pro 4 software will help students develop fundamental skills in the use of a computer keyboard.
    - Textbook: College Keyboarding Lessons 1-25 (Van Huss).

- **MS Office Applications –** Introduction to computer operation and software use, computer terminology, and hardware and software fundamentals; introduction to word processing, electronic spreadsheets, databases, Internet, and other practical applications. Students operate microcomputer and software packages.
    - Textbook: Go! With Microsoft Office 2007 Introductory, Third Edition by Gaskin, Ferrett, Vargass, McLellan (Pearson) and Technology In Action (custom edition for Parkland College).

- **Basic PC Maintenance/Operating Systems** – Maran Illustrated Windows XP Operating Systems Introduction to microcomputer operating systems, file management, disk organization, memory resource management, system configuration, and disk maintenance. Objectives include preparing students for some of the topics in CompTIA A+ certification exam.
    - Textbooks: Illustrated Windows XP and Vista (Maran), Maran Illustrated MS Windows XP 101 Hot Tips (Maran),

- **Emerging Technology:** New pc form factor, wireless tech, cloud computing, display technology, fiber, 3d optical drives, and nano-technology.

- **Digital Media Applications –** Students will develop skills in one or more digital media applications, including but not limited to, CSS coding, HTML, Dreamweaver, Game Maker, Flash, and AfterEffects.

- **A+ Certification practice and drilling –** This will prepare students for the CompTIA A+ Certification exam. A+ Certification offers a competitive advantage when applying for entry-level employment in computer support. Students who pass the A+ Certification exam are also eligible to earn 6 hours of Parkland College credit (CIS 137, CSC 133).

- **Information Technology (IT) Job-Shadow** – Successful completers of advanced curriculum may participate in a 40-hour, IT-related job-shadow experience with a local business or organization which has partnered with Parkland through this grant.

- **Proficiency Exams –** Qualified students will have the option to take proficiency exams that could result in up to 8 hours of Parkland College credit (PCC 130, 132, and CIS 101, 137).

Training Schedule:

The curriculum is taught three times a week, four hours a day, in two sixteen-week and one four-week semesters over a period of one year. The first sixteen weeks of core training are strongly focused on the very basic aspects of computer technology as the majority of our participants are lacking in this area. This training consists of work with keyboarding, operating systems, MS Office applications, using the Internet effectively, emailing, and emerging technologies. The second sixteen weeks focus on PC maintenance and A+ Certification and Digital Medic applications. The final four weeks focus on A+ Certification preparation, proficiency exams, and IT job shadowing.

The first sixteen weeks is considered core curriculum for all new participants. Each individual then has the option of pursuing hardware or digital media /gaming / animation tracks through the advanced program, depending on their interest and skill level. The final four weeks includes job shadowing for all students who have gone through the advanced program. Proficiency tests and the A+ certification preparation are available to students based on the track each individual has chosen.

Training Cost:

Since the majority of our target market is at or below the poverty level, we will not charge a fee for the training program or establish a fee structure. For those students who wish to take Parkland College proficiency exams in order to receive college credit, there is a very affordable $10/credit hour charge.

Gauging Success:

All participants take part in pre-assessment activities to assess their technology knowledge prior to enrollment in the program. These methods include keyboarding pre-assessment and special topics pre-assessment. After completing training, students will then take part in a post-assessment process to gauge their technical knowledge. This process includes keyboarding post-assessment, special topics post-assessment, and, for those students who have gone through the higher level training courses, proficiency exams for PCC 130, PCC 132, CIS 101, and CIS 137 (which could result in seven hours of Parkland College credit) as well as a CompTIA A+ Certification exam (which could result in four hours of Parkland College credit).

Successful participants have the option to transition into higher education with a solid IT background which will enable them to start career programs without the need for remedial technology courses. These students will then perform English and math assessment to get placed in general education courses.

Participants who successfully complete the advanced program will have the opportunity to earn college credit, pass the A+ certification test, transition into higher education, and obtain IT introductory jobs in the community. Participants who have completed their training and post-assessment exams may have an opportunity to job-shadow with a business partner. Job shadows will involve 40 hours of observation and/or hands-on IT experience.

The criterion for determining successful completion of the program will include a comparison of the pre- and post-assessment tests, number of proficiency college credit hours earned, and passing of the A+ certification test (for the more advanced participants).