

Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) Round 2 Executive Summary

Arizona is in economic crisis.

Long reliance on real estate to fuel Arizona's economy resulted in an economic collapse when the housing market plunged. State unemployment jumped to its worst percentage points - 9.2%, in just two years. Joblessness is even worse in rural areas such as Yuma County, where one in four adults cannot find work. Arizona lost 122,100 jobs between December 2008 and December 2009 – fourth most nationwide – as per U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics. AZ's job losses ranked worst or next-to worst nationally in every month of 2009, according to Arizona State University economist Lee McPheters. Just as worrisome, the [University of Arizona Economic Outlook 2010/2011](#) ranked the state 50th in terms of job growth, and its fiscal peril only trails that of California. McPheters does not expect Arizona to rebound to pre-recession employment levels until 2013.

Clearly there is a compelling need to provide support and services to the state's workforce. One-Stop Service Centers (OSSC) have already been established through Workforce Connection to help job-seekers with placement, skills assessment, training, career counseling and resume development. OSSCs also help businesses secure qualified talent, and provide transition strategies and other resources.

But vast areas exist in rural Arizona where these service centers are non-existent. Travel distances are a barrier to vulnerable populations that are geographically widespread, low density and lacking in public transportation. Difficulties for displaced workers are compounded by broadband access that is limited or prohibitively expensive in rural and low-income communities. **Many individuals simply cannot afford a PC or the cost of broadband access. The public library is their only place to turn.**

"Our 18 public access computers are in constant use from the time we open in the morning until closing. ...many businesses insist that applications MUST be submitted online. Job seekers facing economic challenges simply cannot afford a PC or an internet connection", says David Gunkel, Director, Sierra Vista Public Library. "These members of our community want to help themselves and their families. They do not want a handout. They simply have no other place to turn to but the public library in order to even submit an application for employment."

Library resources are being strained more than ever as they are seen as safe, friendly "anchor" institutions that offer knowledgeable staff and electronic resources at no fee. But local budget cuts have sent libraries reeling, and their resources (staff, computers, training) are stretched to the breaking point.

"Everyday we see more individuals turning to our libraries for help in searching for jobs and work-related services," said La Paz County librarian Dale Savage. "Staff is more than willing to

help job-seekers, but the increased demand for our services means we don't have the manpower or resources to meet their needs."

BTOP 1 added PACs to the public library system to alleviate long wait times and replace aging computers. There is still a need for computers dedicated solely to extended use by patrons for the purpose of resume writing, job applications, tutorial classes and job training. To address the critical and urgent need of the community for job-related assistance, the Governor's Office of Economic Recovery, in collaboration with Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records (ASLAPR), will partner with Workforce Connection's One Stop Service Centers (OSSCs), AZ Small Business Development Center (AzSBDC), Arizona Department of Education, the Community Colleges and public libraries to provide:

- **Virtual Workforce Workstations** in 200 public library locations throughout the state
- **Twenty-eight Arizona Job Help Hubs** for training, at least one in each county, at libraries in communities with the greatest need.

Each **Virtual Workforce Workstation (VWW)** will include a dedicated desktop with secure, virtual access to OSSC resources, as well as a printer/fax/scanner for scanning and uploading resumes and other documents. Through this workstation, patrons will be able to access *core services*, such as **job search and placement assistance**, plus *intensive services* that include **targeted help, comprehensive skill assessments**, development of **individual employment plans, one-on-one counseling** and **career planning** through video conferencing. Under the Adult and Dislocated Worker Program, assistance will be provided to help participants locate, re-train and qualify for meaningful employment. Patrons will be matched with individual training programs, and even provided help with scholarships, if needed. The network of Virtual Workforce Workstations will cover the state, ensuring that every Arizonan has access to the online employment resources they need. A state survey conducted in January 2010 documented that 95% of libraries responded positively to hosting a VWW. The 5% that declined did so due to space constraints.

Arizona Job Help Hubs (AJHH) are designed for a more comprehensive job-search experience. Each Hub will be equipped with laptops designated exclusively for training and job-related use, projectors, specialized software and a display unit. Qualified computer instructors will be hired locally and cross-trained by key partners to assist patrons with: **resume writing, online job search, job applications, navigation of government websites, locating information on financial and business planning** and **building a business using the internet**. Patrons will have access to videoconferencing subscribed to through the ASLAPR, and instructors will work with key partners to schedule training, counseling and one-on-one assistance, as needed. The grant will provide 40 hours of face-to-face training per month, scheduled at the Job Help Hubs or in their counties.

One Job Help Hub will be located in each of the state's 13 rural counties, with 3 hubs for Pima County, 10 hubs for Maricopa County and 2 hubs in Tribal libraries. Locations were selected in consultation with county librarians for maximum utilization based on the following criteria:

- Unemployment figures from the Department of Commerce as they relate to underserved populations and individuals most vulnerable and in need of employment
- Travel distance to a fully operational Workforce One-Stop Service Center
- Availability of space and willingness of staff

- Libraries with existing Job Help centers that did not need to be included (but whose experiences can be used as models)

By agreeing to participate, these libraries have pledged to dedicate space and staffing. Each hub will:

- Schedule training at least 40 hours per month, with flexibility based on each community's need. During that time, an instructor will be available to offer group classes or work with patrons one-on-one.
- Have library staff participate in a "train the trainer" session focused on assisting patrons with resources, triage job/employment inquiries and learning about the special issues of working with displaced employees.
- Host a display area for handouts/flyers and a bulletin board of job-related notices.
- Train and connect job-seekers with online educational resources, assisting them with re-training needed for evolving job markets.

This program is open to all Arizonans, but will be focused upon the 260,000 unemployed and vulnerable populations of the state. The estimated number of people that could be trained through the 28 hubs during a year = **98,000** (28 hubs x 10 computers x 10 hrs x 50 weeks, estimated @ 70% capacity). The Virtual Workforce Stations in 200 library locations used for 2 hour slots, during open library hours, could potentially serve **179,400** a year @ 75% average utilization (see PCC Summary). A total of 277,400 potential users per year.

The Governor's Office of Economic Recovery manages all ARRA funding to the state and trains people in grant administration through Stimulus 360 software. The main partner, the Arizona State Library, has considerable expertise raising funds, administering grants and coordinating statewide projects, and is currently implementing a BTOP 1 grant. Additionally, staff has financial expertise managing state and federal grants. **Since 1997, the State Library has administered over \$63 million in grant projects.**

The grant will directly create 8.25 FTE (1 Project Manager, 7 FTE Trainers and 0.25 Accountant) i.e. 24.75 job-years over a three year period. OMB guidelines say that based on the project costs, this project should result in 25 job-years (8 direct + 8 indirect + 9 induced job-years) for a total of 49.75 job-years.

This project will help jobseekers find jobs, acquire new skills for re-careering, and small businesses open new avenues for job creation.

Overall cost of the project is **\$2,352,766**. The amount requested is **\$1,646,936**. The cash match is **\$705,830**.