

Portland State University

Learner Web Partnership:

A Multi-State Support System for Broadband Adoption by Vulnerable Adults

2010 Broadband Technologies Opportunities Program—Sustainable Broadband Adoption

Executive Summary

Problem/need addressed: The Learner Web Partnership addresses the primary barriers to broadband access and use among adults in the United States: affordability, lack of digital literacy skills, and a perceived lack of content relevant to their daily lives, needs, and future aspirations.

These barriers are exacerbated among populations that have the lowest levels of broadband access: primarily low-income adults who lack a high school education. This includes a growing—and increasingly diverse—population of adults from immigrant and language-minority communities.

Approach: The Learner Web Partnership proposed by Portland State University (PSU) involves coalitions in two states (Minnesota, New York), two regions (Central and South Texas), and two cities (New Orleans, Louisiana and Richmond, California). The project will increase broadband use among low-income, low-literate, ESOL, and other vulnerable populations by implementing Learner Web, an innovative online system of self-paced Learning Plans. Over 30 months, the project will develop and implement Learning Plans focused on digital literacy (at home, at work, and in the community), education on how to be an informed consumer of broadband technology, and orientation to career pathways. These Learning Plans will also be available in Spanish. An important hallmark of the Learner Web system is its emphasis on providing self-paced online learning and the face-to-face support of trained tutors and computer assistants. Two additional Learning Plans will be developed to train volunteer and paid tutors and computer lab assistants to support new broadband users.

In Richmond, California: The Richmond Public Library and its' literacy program, LEAP, will be the anchor institution and partner with the West Contra Costa County Adult School, the California Housing Development Corporation, the Richmond Housing Authority and the Building Blocks for Kids (BBK) collaborative to reach residents in the next 30 months. The Library and community partners will launch public awareness campaigns using the city's KCRT cable station, technology fairs at the public housing sites, and offer department-wide teacher training of ESL teachers to reach non-users. Local partners will identify early adopters of digital technology from public housing sites, and provide a stipend to them in exchange for their outreach to neighbors. In the Iron Triangle community, the BTOP grant will be leveraged with another collaborative that recently garnered 1000 new computers for individual families; the Learner Web will provide the training for the new broadband users. At the adult schools, mobile computer labs will be situated at public school sites to allow family members digital literacy training while their young children are in class. During school hours at the Richmond Public Library, the Young Adult area

will transform into the Learner Web digital literacy center to maximize use of space and computers. In total, Richmond expects to train 4,000 new Broadband users.

Nationally: The Learner Web Partnership will allow 23,538 vulnerable adults to move from being “new-to-broadband” users to “broadband-ready” users. Participants will complete at least two of the three Learning Plans (on digital literacy and broadband consumer education), requiring an average of 15 hours of self-paced learning per user, and will receive an average of four hours of face-to-face tutoring and assistance. Using the Council of Economic Advisors methodology, it is estimated that the project will create 64 direct jobs-years, 41 indirect jobs, and 23 induced jobs. The Learner Web Partnership will also demonstrate a sustainable model for increasing broadband use among highly diverse and vulnerable adult populations.

For more information about the Learner Web, please visit the website:

www.learnerweb.org



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