

October 5, 2005

To: Technical Panel Members

From: Anne Byers

Subject: Technical Review of TIGER applications

At your last meeting, the Technical Panel approved a slate of reviewers for the Community Council's TIGER grant applications. Community Council members have completed their reviews of the applications. Their reviews are summarized in the attached document.

I am asking the Technical Panel to complete the technical review. Please look over the review summaries. If you would also like to view the applications themselves, they are available at

<http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/cc/grants/TIGER2005/TIGER2005applicants.htm> .

If you have any technical concerns about the projects reviewed, please share them with Steve Henderson. I will be at a conference in Kentucky and will not be able to attend the Technical Panel meeting. If you have any questions for me, I will be happy to respond via e-mail when I return.

Information from the technical review will be included in the review information shared with the Community Council at their Oct. 24 meeting and with the NITC at their Nov. 8 meeting.

TIGER 2005 Review Summaries

Applicant	Project	Review Scores					Amount Requested
		Budget	1	2	3	Average	
Hartington Public Library	Expanding Technology Horizons	5	73	87	86	87	\$2,119.04
Atkinson Public Library	Hometown Competitiveness: Entrepreneurial Training	4	78	81	89	87	\$3,598.00
Wayne Public Library	Computer Course Development	5	76	92	75	86	\$1,680.00
City of Aurora	IT Businesses: Assessment, Marketing, Recruitment	5	89	73	81	86	\$5,000.00
UNL Extension in Burt Co.	Oakland Business Portal	4	78	86	77	84	\$5,000.00
Kearney Visitors Bureau, Buffalo Co.	Implementation of InfoTrac Software	4	79	69	85	82	\$5,000.00
Nemaha County Development Alliance	IT Training Modules for EDGE Program	3	84	75	76	81	\$2,312.50
Lied Imperial Public Library	ETA (Entrepreneur Technology Access)	5	59	76	80	77	\$2,200.00
Village of Hyannis	Village of Hyannis Web Site	4.5	74	56	72	72	\$4,888.00
City of Holdrege	Technology to Market Business Opportunities	0	73	89	51	71	\$3,000.00
City of Valentine	Community Technology Program	5	62	78	55	70	\$5,000.00
TOTAL							\$39,797.54

Project Title: Expanding Technology Horizons

Submitting Entity: Hartington Public Library

Grant Amount Requested: \$2,119.04

Evaluation Score: 87

Executive Summary: The Hartington Public Library serves in providing computer classes and workshops to expand educational and business opportunities in our area. The goal of our project is to replace one half of the aging computers in our public library's technology lab in order to continue to meet with the needs of our current patrons, as well as to serve new patrons. We have established a replacement schedule for our hardware and software in the tech lab, this grant would help us fund the first phase of our update, by purchasing four new computers with Pentium 4 processors with CD-RW drives.

Reviewer Comments: This is a good project. The partnerships between the library, University of Nebraska Extension, and Hartington Economic Development are one of the project's strengths. One reviewer expressed concerns about sustainability. The application states that the library board has included a line item in the annual budget to address technology replacement needs. However, details are missing on exactly how many PCs will be replaced each year. The evaluation plan could also be strengthened.

Technology Requested: 4 computers

Technical Concerns: none

Project Title: Hometown Competitiveness: Entrepreneurial Training Program

Submitting Entity: Atkinson Public Library

Grant Amount Requested: \$3,598

Evaluation Score: 87

Executive Summary: With small rural communities losing businesses and families, local economic development leaders and the Atkinson Public Library are working together to offer business development classes to anyone within Holt County and the surrounding area to encourage the starting, expansions, and management of small businesses. Computer classes would include business feasibility, developing a solid business plan, efficient business management, effective marketing through Web site development, creating brochures, fliers, etc., and marketing strategies for the small business. The students would in turn use this information to establish a business, or increase their present business viability, using the computer and Web. In order to operate a successful business in the 21st Century, owners must be skilled in applicable computer technology.

Working in conjunction with economic development this project is designed to bring jobs and residents to this rural area. With a new library facility ready for use in January, these classes could be a reality at the Atkinson Public Library. In order to accommodate the number of students expected, the information technology needed includes two new computers with Microsoft Office, as well as, salaries for library staff who will serve as instructors.

Reviewer Comments: It is great to see a library involved in economic development. A little more detail could have been provided in the application especially about how the classes are being designed and how the project will be sustained. The application states that the program will result in 10 new jobs being brought to the community. This is perhaps overly optimistic. The evaluation plan is very strong.

Technology Requested: 2 computers

Technical Concerns: none

Project Title: Computer Course Development

Submitting Entity: Wayne Public Library

Grant Amount Requested: \$1,680.00

Evaluation Score: 86

Executive Summary: As a public library providing service to the entire Wayne County we are a central provider of life-long learning for our residents. In response to patron requests, we intend to develop computer coursework to aid in improving office skills and on-line job searching techniques . Through the grant we will create four 2-hour courses (excel, powerpoint, internet searching, e-mail). The project will also include teaching each course twice to work out any kinks. After the project is complete, the developed courses will fold into our current computer offerings, and will continue to be taught by city staff or qualified volunteers. As with all the library programs, these classes will be free and open to the public.

Comments: This is a well-written application. The proposed project is sound and has a high probability of success. However, the project probably won't generate a big economic development impact.

Technology Requested: none

Technical Concerns: none

Project Title:

Information Technology Businesses: Assessment, Marketing and Recruitment

Submitting Entity: City of Aurora

Grant Amount Requested: \$5,000

Evaluation Score: 86

Executive Summary: The City of Aurora has a unique opportunity to enhance economic development in Aurora and the area surrounding Hamilton County through the Aurora Technology Center. The Aurora Technology Center, operated under the direction of the Hamilton County Information Technology Corporation (HCITC), serves as a focal point for the incubation of information technology related companies. What has been missing for a number of years is a comprehensive analysis of the information technology needs of area businesses. Once needs are determined, targeted recruitment of companies providing specific services utilized by area business can help to bring new information technology companies to the area creating a symbiotic benefit to all businesses and economic development to the area.

This project proposes to develop and administer an assessment instrument to determine the information technology needs of area businesses and begin a recruitment process to bring those businesses that provide those needs to the local area. This project has gathered the interest of the Aurora Area Chamber & Development Corporation with verbal commitment to provide sustainability following completion of the TIGER grant funding. In order to augment the recruitment process, the project proposes to revamp the marketing material of the Aurora Technology Center. Currently the Center's website is sorely out of date and needs restructuring along with the brochures used for marketing. The TIGER grant will help to launch a long-term sustainable approach to the recruitment of information technology based companies to central Nebraska.

Comments: This is a very well written application and the proposed project is sound. The proposed project has the potential for significant economic development benefits. One reviewer expressed concern about spending money to "develop" another survey instrument. A reviewer also suggested that they have an outside resource evaluate their marketing and Web site efforts as part of the project evaluation. No funding is included for training. The coordinator might need some economic development sessions.

Technology Requested: Web development services

Technical Concerns: none

Project Title: Oakland Business Portal

Submitting Entity: UN-L Extension in Burt County

Grant Amount Requested: \$5,000

Evaluation Score: 84

Executive Summary: This project entails building a business portal for home-based and small businesses to use for advertising and marketing good and services produced in the Oakland (NE) area. The goal is to initially offer a free Web presence to spur growth in local businesses. As these businesses grow and their needs change, so will their Web sites. The business portal will be sustained by having businesses owners pay for modifications, upgrades and more sophisticated back-end applications as needed.

The business portal will include a user-friendly content management system, so that business owners can update and add content to their own Web sites. Training will be provided to help business owners understand the need for a Web presence and how it can benefit them. They will also get help in developing content and graphics for their Web sites. The grant funds the development of the business portal including the content management system, databases and Web page templates.

Reviewer Comments: The proposed project seems like a good, innovative idea and addresses one of the issues with small businesses and Web sites—making web site development and e-commerce easy for businesses. The sustainability of this type of project is always problematic. The individuals who maintain the system will be critical to ongoing success. Any drop-off in enthusiasm, or staff turnover, could paralyze the program. It won't be easy to keep the program running at a high level, but probably worth the try. The budget requests grant funding for 24 months of Web hosting. The award period is for one-year only. The budget will have to be revised.

Technology Requested: Macromedia Dreamweaver Studio MX, Web hosting, contractual services for Web design and programming

Technical Concerns: none

Project Title: Implementation of InfoTrac Software

Submitting Entity: Kearney Visitors Bureau, c/o Buffalo County

Grant Amount Requested: \$5,000

Evaluation Score: 82

Executive Summary: The Buffalo County special events and convention business is currently tracked through a very limited account management database which was custom-made in 2001 by a Kearney computer consulting firm. Account management and tracking software is an integral part of the Kearney Visitors Bureau's daily operation and is necessary to keep accurate and current records of the conventions and special events that bring significant revenue to Buffalo County. The database in use at this time currently houses more than 1,100 accounts. It was not designed to grow as quickly as Buffalo County's special events, convention business, and tourism draw has in the last four years. We have outgrown the original program and need to update it in order to fuel the growth this industry has created in Buffalo County.

To maintain the economic growth Buffalo County has seen in the last few years, and to stay at the forefront of the evolving convention business while capitalizing on tourism in Nebraska and our region, an account management database designed specifically for the Convention & Visitors Bureau industry is a necessity. The TIGER grant will fund the purchase of the InfoTrac software which will allow us to move forward by providing more efficient tracking of the tourism, convention, and special events business Kearney receives. At this time, we are unable to provide any estimated historical revenue which a particular event or convention brings to Kearney and Buffalo County. With the information from InfoTrac at our fingertips we can anticipate, prepare, and adjust to deliver the best services possible and take advantage of opportunities we might otherwise have missed.

Comments: The project is well-defined and the application is well-written. The software would probably be used regularly and would benefit the applicants. One reviewer expressed concerns that the potential benefits from this project are marginal, as this is only a measurement tool which may help but only incrementally. The reviewer also expressed concern that the applicant likely has funding available from its own sources.

Technology Requested: InfoTrac Software

Technical Concerns: Reviewers did not express any technical concerns. However, this type of software installation carries some risk. The Technical Panel expressed concerns about whether the organization has a disaster recovery and business resumption plan.

Project Title: IT Training Modules for EDGE program

Submitting Entity: Nemaha County Development Alliance

Grant Amount Requested: \$2,312.50

Evaluation Score: 81

Executive Summary: The Nemaha County Development Alliance (NCDA) has been a leader in small business development and support for entrepreneurship in Southeastern Nebraska for the past eight years. The centerpiece of our support system is the EDGE (Educating, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs) Program, a training course sponsored by the University of Nebraska's Center for Applied Rural Innovation. The curriculum for the 14-week EDGE course addresses practically every aspect of small business development, including initial market research, product marketing, financial management, and legal structures. One important element of small business development that is limited in the EDGE curriculum, however, is how information technologies can be used to enhance all phases of business operations and reach new markets beyond local and regional borders. With Nemaha County's universal wireless Internet system becoming operational in early 2006, all businesses, regardless of location, will have broadband access. This technology and accompanying training in its use presents a great opportunity for new and existing businesses to extend their capabilities and participate in the global commercial community. In addition, our progress in reaching these goals might serve as a model for other rural Nebraska communities.

The purpose of the proposed project is to develop training modules on the use of information technology to use with the existing EDGE program that is now taught in 5 Southeast Nebraska counties. Rather than developing a specific course that would duplicate Electronic Main Street or other e-commerce courses, these modules could be used in all aspects of the EDGE curriculum but would also stand alone as a business training tool. The result will be business plans that take maximum advantage of all of the benefits and resources offered through information technologies from initial product and market research to daily operations, tailored to the specific characteristics of each individual business. Adding this dimension to our rural businesses environment should have the dual economic impacts of stimulating new Internet-based businesses and making southeast Nebraska's overall business community more robust and competitive.

Reviewer Comments: While the grant doesn't use technology directly, it could result in an increase in technology usage in the county as a result of the education provided. The benefits of this application are potentially significant. Certainly the project should be sustainable once completed. One reviewer felt that the EDGE program is a very successful program and liked the idea of developing a course module on the use of technology for the program. Another reviewer expressed concerns that the project could be duplicative of existing programs.

Technology Requested: none

Technical Concerns: none

Project Title: ETA (Entrepreneur Technology Access)

Submitting Entity: Lied Imperial Public Library

Grant Amount Requested: \$2200.00

Evaluation Score: 77

Executive Summary: Library will purchase and install the digital networkable copier/scanner/fax, the staff will learn to operate the equipment and then train patrons to use the equipment. Training workshops will be offered to patrons/entrepreneurs as well as one on one assistance during regular business hours.

Reviewer Comments: This project demonstrates local support through the cash match provided through the city budget. The connection between the purchase of this piece of equipment and the economic impact is a bit vague. Several questions on the application are not addressed at all or only minimally addressed. One reviewer expressed concerns that although businesses and individuals do occasionally need to scan, scanning is a pretty low-level technology. The reviewer would rather see the grant funds support projects employing a high level of technology.

Technology Requested: Konica Minolta di 2010f copier with scan kit

Technical Concerns: none

Project Title: Village of Hyannis Web Site

Submitting Entity: Village of Hyannis

Grant Amount Requested: \$4888.00

Evaluation Score: 72

Executive Summary: The project is intended to build and execute an outstanding functional web site for the Village of Hyannis. The site is intended to coordinate with village signage to provide visible web presence and raise awareness for municipal and civic activity, all village and area businesses, entrepreneurs, organizations, churches, and activities. The grant will fund purchase of hardware, software and minimal labor to implement the site. The project will also be sponsored by the Village of Hyannis and volunteers and be coordinated with Nebraska Public Power District, Nebraska Economic Development, and Consolidated Telephone Company.

Reviewer Comments: This is a pretty good application. There should probably be a stronger emphasis on training residents and businesses. It is good to have NPPD and telephone company on board. Village maintenance is also positive.

Technology Requested: laptop computer, color printer, projection unit and screen, Microsoft Windows XP Professional, Adobe Acrobat Reader 6.0, Macromedia Dreamweaver Studio MX with Flash Professional, Norton Antivirus

Technical Concerns: none

Project Title: Technology to Market Business Opportunities and Quality of Life in the South Platte

Submitting Entity: City of Holdrege

Grant Amount Requested: \$3,000

Evaluation Score: 71

Executive Summary: Web-based technology provides a self-help opportunity for South Platte communities to attract economic development. The ***Business Beyond the Farm*** website sends the message that small towns in the South Platte thrive, entrepreneurial businesses prosper, schools educate, and rural Nebraska communities offer attractive amenities and quality of life. TIGER will provide training materials, mileage dollars and equipment to train designated contacts in twenty-three (23) South Platte communities how to use web-based technology to market the assets of their community on the ***Business Beyond the Farm*** website and to build small world networks.

The City of Holdrege and ***Business Beyond the Farm*** request \$3,000 from TIGER grant to purchase a mobile presentation projector and develop and deliver training to designated contacts in twenty-three (23) communities in the South Platte.

Comments:

The concept of the Business Beyond the Farm project and the information presented on the Web site is good. The Web site and project have generated publicity in national media. The project is regional in scope and reasonable to implement and continue. The application doesn't do a very good job describing some of the larger benefits of the overall program—like attracting new residents to the South Platte region of Nebraska. This is a better project than the score indicates. Some questions raised by reviewers include: Who will own the projector? Will the City of Holdrege own the project or will Business Beyond the Farm own it? Who will fund ongoing support?

Technology Requested: projection unit

Technical Concerns: none

Project Title: Community Technology Program

Submitting Entity: City of Valentine

Grant Amount Requested: \$5,000

Evaluation Score: 70

Executive Summary: The Cherry County Economic Development Board is the product of a new, Inter-local agreement between the City of Valentine and Cherry County. This Board, formed on Monday, August 29, 2005, is the first of its kind in Cherry County or Valentine, and is poised to pursue opportunities that will enhance economic development within Valentine and the County. The Board will depend on the work of a director, who will execute, explore, report, and network to achieve the mission, goals, and objectives of the Board. This director will require computer hardware and internet connectivity to conduct these activities. The purchase of this hardware, related software, and internet access, forms the basis of this funding request. Expected outcomes include: completion of a community survey by September 30, 2005; production and city council approval of the resulting economic and strategic plan by October 30, 2005; conduct public education regarding economic development and LB 840 specifically by January 30, 2006; and, passage of a city sales tax ballot initiative including LB 840 authority of using a portion of city sales tax funds for economic development (by March 1, 2006). This project will provide the critical impetus for launching the city and county into an era of unprecedented economic prosperity.

Reviewer Comments: It is really impressive that an organization formed in August 29 was able to submit an application by Sept. 1. The application is well written. The applicant asks for funding for computer equipment for the economic development board. The activities proposed are worthwhile. However, the proposed projects have little to do with technology-related development. One reviewer commented that it was hard to imagine anything that would help more in terms of economic development than assisting in the establishment of the economic development board for a region. Other reviewers commented that a computer is a normal operating expense, and there's nothing innovative about what is being proposed. This should be a normal operational expense. One reviewer expressed concerns that this application should be disqualified for not meeting the cash match requirement. The application lists \$38,921 in matching funds that have nothing to do with the purchase of the computer. The reviewer calculated the actual matching funds as 0.5% of the requested amount.

Technology Requested: laptop computer, 2 desktop computers, LCD projector, color inkjet printer/fax, B/W laser jet printer/scanner/fax/copier, wireless firewall router

Technical Concerns: none