Project Brief for AARP Broadband Advocacy – Oklahoma State Office

"Rural Library Digital Navigators"

Description of Proposed Activity: We propose to build off our award-winning Rural Library Hotspot Loan program, which partners with Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) and local libraries to loan out hotspot devices to library patrons in rural Oklahoma. We currently have 20 participating libraries in communities ranging from 800 – 10,000 population. We propose to select our best library partners that are in areas of highest need (i.e. locations with lowest home broadband adoption / computer access rates; or that serve mostly an MCL population) and contracting issue specialists to focus on digital equity issues in the local community. Activities of these specialists would include helping people sign up for the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) and its follow-on program; obtain their own low-cost hotspots (through PCs for People); explore

Figure 1. Rural Library Hotspot Loan Locations across Oklahoma. Winner of 2019 National Innovation & Creativity Award (NACDEP)

options for low-cost service or devices through national programs and local non-profits; partner with local hospitals / clinics to demonstrate telehealth use; and develop partnerships for future digital equity grants. We propose to work with up to 5 libraries who will each contract staff for 10-12 hours per week. Contractors will be expected to travel with OCES / library / AARP personnel to make presentations in the local community and hold regular hours in the library to help people with one-on-one sessions (pending CDC guidelines and AARP regulations.)
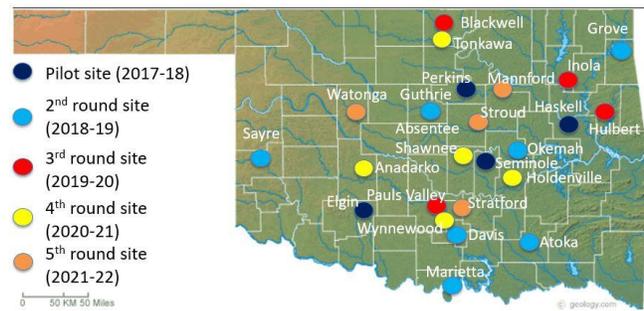
Target Beneficiaries: Our partnership with OCES would help our program establish a foothold with target demographics they regularly work with, including farming and MCL populations. OCES also has strong relationships with local healthcare organizations, who have an interest in explaining telehealth options to the community.

Timeliness of Project: AARP Oklahoma has collaborated with OCES on the Rural Library Hotspot loan program since 2018, and the program is well-known across the state. Oklahoma currently ranks 47th in digital connectivity, demonstrating the continued need to fund broadband programs. Our project will take advantage of recent momentum in the digital equity field, and help communities prepare for future opportunities.

Relation to Prior / Pending Broadband Advocacy Win: This project builds on the recently enacted EBB program (including device vouchers) by helping people to sign up for it. It will also help local communities think about how they might participate in future digital equity funding available to all states as part of the digital equity portion of the pending infrastructure bill, as well as strengthen relationships with local, state, federal and tribal leaders.

Project Cost: We are requesting $20,000 for our project. Most of this cost will be compensation for the contractors hired by the libraries to work on local digital equity issues; funds will also be used for marketing and to hire a consultant for a "train the trainers" virtual session on EBB / low-cost options / telehealth topics. We anticipate paying $20 / hour for our workers, which should attract good applicants. With 5 participating libraries and 16 weeks of activity (10-12 hours per week), our costs would break out as: $18,000 in compensation; $1,500 in training costs, and $500 for marketing (including via social media).

Deliverables: A final report will detail the number of contacts made by library, the number of participants signed up for various programs (EBB, low-cost hotspot), and a description of local contacts made that could prove useful for future digital equity grants.

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