Application Title: 1. WSU Tech – TechConnect Kansas: Pathways to Digital Literacy for a ConnectED Community

Organization Name: Wichita State University Campus of Applied Sciences and Technology

Project Executive Summary

Goals of the proposed project:

The proposed project aims to address critical digital literacy needs within economically distressed areas, targeting underserved populations that face barriers to technology access and skill development. The primary goals are:

- **Enhance Digital Literacy Among Targeted Populations**: Deliver non-credit digital literacy courses to underserved residents in 24 counties, focusing on skills such as navigating digital tools, online safety, and effective communication. This foundational training will empower individuals, including low-income, first-generation, and minority populations, to participate fully in the digital world.

- **Provide Access to Technology in Economically Distressed Areas**: Equip select public library locations in targeted regions with a Windows tablet device, wireless WiFi routers trainers, and access to Cisco Networking Academy. By providing these resources in economically distressed areas, the project addresses a compelling need for accessible technology that is essential for digital engagement and skill-building.

- **Create a Sustainable Network of Digital Navigators**: Train community-based digital navigators who can continue supporting digital literacy efforts within their communities. By building local capacity through a train-the-trainer model, this initiative ensures that digital literacy support will persist within these communities long after the project ends.

- **Support Economic Mobility and Job Readiness**: Equip targeted populations with digital skills crucial for the modern workforce, enabling access to job opportunities, wage growth, and economic self-sufficiency. This focus on workforce readiness addresses a compelling community need for economic empowerment and skill development.

Needs addressed by the proposed project:

The proposed project addresses critical access for digital literacy, equitable access to technology, and workforce readiness within the community. Many residents, especially those in underserved areas, lack essential digital skills needed to navigate today's increasingly online world. According to a 2023 study, Broadband in Kansas: The Challenges of Digital Access and Affordability by the University of Kansas, indicated with their partnerships with public libraries identified why many community members utilize their access to internet related resources because they lack not only access to reliable internet, but lack beneficial social relationships they can use to improve their own digital literacy skills. This digital literacy gap limits their access to job opportunities, online services, and vital resources, creating barriers to economic mobility and full community participation.

The project will directly address these gaps by partnering with select public libraries by establishing a Cisco Networking Academy (NetAcad) to provide accessible, non-credit digital literacy courses that cover fundamental skills, such as safely navigating digital environments, managing digital content, and using essential online tools. These skills are crucial for employment in a modern economy and for basic daily tasks, from accessing healthcare information to managing personal finances online.

Furthermore, the project addresses the need for a sustainable digital support network by training community-based digital navigators. These navigators will provide ongoing guidance, ensuring residents have support to continuously improve their digital skills, seek employment, and participate in digital society. Collectively, the project meets pressing community needs for digital inclusion, economic opportunity, and equitable access to technology.

Service partners involved in the proposed project:
Wichita State University's (WSU) Cisco Networking Academy Support Center (ASC) serves as the primary service partner for WSU Tech's DOCK 2.0 project, offering essential technical support to establishing and maintaining a NetAcad and digital learning access services to facilitate the program's digital literacy goals. As a key partner, the ASC will assist in providing infrastructure support, ensuring that community partners and participants have reliable access to the necessary digital platforms and tools. This support is crucial for maintaining continuous access to online resources and technical assistance, which are foundational to the project's success.

In collaboration with the ASC, WSU Tech's NetAcad will deliver the direct training components of the program. The NetAcad will provide structured digital literacy and skills courses, covering topics such as internet navigation, basic software use, online safety, and many more. This training is tailored to the needs of underserved community members and aligns with DOCK 2.0 objectives by empowering participants with essential digital competencies.

Together, WSU's ASC and WSU Tech's NetAcad will form a cohesive support system, combining technical infrastructure with practical training to bridge digital literacy gaps and foster sustainable digital skills within the community.

Community and/or stakeholders involved in the proposed project:
The DOCK 2.0 project leverages key partnerships with Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), Kansas Fiber Network (KFN), and Wichita State University (WSU), alongside collaboration with public library systems across the state, to foster digital equity and inclusion across 24 counties.
Kansas Leadership Center (KLC) brings expertise in adaptive leadership and community engagement. KLC will provide advisory services and leadership development training, enhancing the capacity of project teams and stakeholders to address challenges and achieve project goals. KLC will also organize community forums in partnership with libraries to gather feedback, celebrate milestones, and amplify project impact in underserved counties within Central and South Central Kansas
Kansas Fiber Network (KFN) will play a critical role in enhancing connectivity for participating communities. With its extensive 4,200+ mile fiber network, KFN will ensure reliable, high-speed internet access to public library partners, enabling them to host digital literacy training and provide essential online services. This collaboration directly supports DOCK 2.0's mission of bridging the digital divide
Wichita State University (WSU), through its Cisco Networking Academy Support Center, will assist in technical support, infrastructure setup, and access to NetAcad resources. These services will ensure that participating libraries and community members have the tools necessary to develop critical digital skills
By aligning the strengths of these partners with DOCK 2.0's objectives, the project will create sustainable pathways for digital literacy, workforce readiness, and economic resilience in underserved Kansas communities.

Intended impact of the proposed project:
The proposed project aims to achieve lasting digital equity by equipping residents with skills essential for today's digital economy. Through non-credit digital literacy courses, participants will gain foundational competencies in navigating digital environments, online safety, and using essential tools.

A cornerstone of the project is the train-the-trainer model, which will develop a network of 24 community-based digital navigators. These navigators will serve as ongoing resources, supporting residents in accessing digital tools and fostering a culture of continuous learning. This approach ensures that digital literacy extends beyond individual participants, benefiting entire communities, particularly underserved and marginalized populations.

The project's impact also includes strengthening local organizations by equipping them with computer workstations and sustainable access to WSU's ASC. This infrastructure will provide a foundation for long-term digital skill development, enabling organizations to offer ongoing support and training to their communities.

By empowering residents with digital competencies, the project will enhance workforce readiness, economic mobility, and community engagement. Participants will gain the skills to secure employment, advance in their careers, and actively participate in the digital world. The project will not only address immediate digital literacy needs but also establish a foundation for sustained digital equity and inclusive growth.

Total amount requested in DOCK 2.0 funding:
$240,597.78 USD