The Governor's accelerateSC task force has launched accelerate.sc.gov, South Carolina's one-stop-shop for COVID-19 response information.

Gov. Henry McMaster Provides $6 Million in GEER Funds for Community Computer Labs

March 30, 2021

Labs Will Provide Internet Access to Communities in Broadband Deserts

COLUMBIA, S.C. – Governor Henry McMaster today awarded $6 million in Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds to the University of South Carolina (UofSC), who, in partnership with Benedict College, will establish eight Apple computer labs statewide. The labs will be strategically located for use by local school districts, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the South Carolina Technical College System and citizens in the community.

"The pandemic has made it abundantly clear that internet access is not a luxury but a necessity for millions of South Carolinians," said Governor Henry McMaster. "The strategic placement of these labs will bolster South Carolina's premier workforce training efforts by giving our communities and people access to resources they need to expand participation in our state's growing economy."

The collaboration will build a new network of learning labs that will feature Apple products and curricula. The network will include hubs in Columbia's BullStreet District and at Benedict College, along with satellite labs at six of UofSC's Palmetto College and regional campuses. UofSC Palmetto College campuses are all located within 15 miles or less of a broadband desert, according to the South Carolina Broadband Map, providing reliable technology and internet access to these communities.

"As the state's flagship institution, the University of South Carolina is committed to enhancing statewide economic and workforce development initiatives," said UofSC President Bob Caslen. "By providing access to Apple's coding curriculum and emphasizing creative learning, this partnership is a game changer for our state. The educational programs and training at these learning centers will give South Carolinians relevant skills that are in high demand in today's economy. We are proud to partner with Governor McMaster, Apple and Benedict College in this mission by investing in underserved communities across the state."

“We are pleased to partner with the University of South Carolina to expand educational technology access to communities around the state. Benedict College remains fully committed to narrowing the digital divide for underserved communities in our state. This is a tremendous step in the right direction,” said Dr. Roslyn Clark Artis, President of Benedict College.

The campuses will provide computer lab space, maintenance, and utilities. Each site will be available for use by faculty, staff, students, and community members regularly at no cost to the user. Availability of lab access will be advertised in each community, including through each local chamber of commerce and economic development board.

The one-time grants are funded by monies received through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump and allocated directly to each governor. Each state received an allocation for a GEER fund. South Carolina’s share of GEER funds was $48 million.

GEER Funds Allocation for Apple computing labs: $6 million total

Operating budget for Columbia hub: $2 million

Operating budget for 7 Campus Labs: $571,429 each

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