Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL) respectfully submits this request for proposal for funding provided under the Recovery Act – Broadband Technology Opportunities program in the amount of $317,639 to support our Technology Access Centers. The total cost of this project is $482,966.

CCPL is an institution of significant importance in Cuyahoga County. Founded in 1922, it is the largest library system in the County and was the first county library established in the state of Ohio. Since its inception, the library has grown to include 28 branches and a website which provides access to a virtual library of online resources. Further, the library draws upon the expertise and collective strength of more than 15 community partners to create innovative programming that meets the broad based interests and needs of the community.

CCPL’s impact on the community goes far beyond a collection of books and reference materials. We are a key agency in supporting the educational and learning needs of EVERY person in the community. As an anchor institution in Cuyahoga County, CCPL is chartered to serve 47 County communities, a population of approximately 600,000, and has an average annual visitor count of 7.4 million. CCPL is consistently ranked as one of the ten busiest libraries in the nation. In 2009, CCPL achieved the distinguished Hennen’s American Public Library Rating of No. 1 Public Library in the nation serving populations over 500,000.

CCPL offers vital resources for early literacy development, homework help, continuing education and lifelong learning. Further, we are a technology hub that the community relies upon for Internet access. While more than 60% of U.S. households report using the Internet in the home, many families still lack home access. Only about half of households with family incomes less than $35,000 have home Internet access. And, as more people lose their jobs and look at ways to decrease their household expenses, more families are living without Internet access at home. For this reason, 73% of U.S. public libraries
report they are the only source of free Internet access in their community according to the American Library Association.

Recently, the Library has seen increased usage of our Technology Access Centers, especially for job search and computer training needs. According to business leaders, companies are having difficulty finding individuals with the skills needed for the jobs they are bringing to Ohio. Therefore, CCPL is serving an increased number of jobseekers looking to enhance their computer/vocational skills to broaden access to job opportunities.

To address Cuyahoga County’s joblessness issue, CCPL provides career counseling and computer training to maximizes the potential of Cuyahoga County residents looking for work. Our Career Center offers free and confidential career services to assist un/underemployed Cuyahoga County residents. Based at the Library's Maple Heights Branch, the Career Center is a nationally recognized Adult Career Planning Resource Center. Operating since 1976, its services are on the cutting edge of meeting the needs of adults in career transition or job search in a turbulent time. We provide guidance in career decision-making, constructing effective resumes, job searching strategies, interview preparation, and computer education/training. The Library is uniquely positioned to provide these services, as it is a familiar community gathering place and trusted source of information in Cuyahoga County where training is available at NO COST.

Currently, CCPL employs one technology trainer to support the Library’s computer training needs; however, because of the drastic increase in joblessness, this is insufficient to serve community demand. From 2007 to 2008, the number of individuals participating in basic computer and Microsoft Office training has increased 37%, and demand continues to rise. Therefore, CCPL would like to enhance the capacity and speed of our Technology Access Centers at our Maple Heights, Warrenville Heights, Brook Park and Brooklyn branches. These four communities have a combined population of 69,000 residents, but the Technology Access Centers, as part of the public library system, can be used by any person visiting CCPL no matter where they reside, which means access goes well beyond 69,000 individuals.

We are proposing to increase the number of computers available to the public by 72, and to create three new positions – one full-time technology trainer and two new part-time lab assistants – to support these Centers and provide additional computer training. The trainer will primarily support the educational needs of jobseekers who require additional computer skills to become competitive job candidates. However, the Technology Access Centers will also be available to the public for personal use during non-training hours, and the lab assistants will be available for support, questions and one-on-one training during non-programming hours. Because in addition to providing computer skills training and
support for Internet job search, the Library is capable of providing career counseling to assist customers in their vocational needs, the potential the Library has in helping individuals find employment with the addition of these 72 new workstations is limitless. To support increased usage, CCPL will increase broadband width from 10MBp to 20MBp.

CCPL’s qualifications to implement this project are unique. In addition to being an anchor institution with foot traffic in the millions, our Information Technology Department manages and supports all Library System software in-house. Further, over the last several years, the Library has grown from a system supporting 'dumb VT terminals', to a large, wide area network supporting 800+ networked devices and high-speed connections to the central servers and the Internet.