Executive Summary

a) Public Computer Centers (PCCs) provide broadband access to vulnerable Ohioans. 38% of OH residents have no broadband at home; 40% of OH businesses don’t subscribe. In OH, 10% of those without home service use a PCC for access. PCCs are often housed within Community Anchor Institution facilities that serve a more general purpose, such as libraries, schools, clinics, and senior, job-placement, or latchkey centers. These centers strive to serve their clients, but many fail due to limited resources. 27% of Ohio’s PCCs failed over the last 5 years, often have limited access to curriculum and don’t have adequate technical resources to monitor and update equipment or applications. Most have little or no outreach or public awareness effort. These common problems highlight the need for a system of shared resources and best practices. Increased capacity and greater efficiency for PCCs will allow them to reach more users and to provide a consistent high-quality experience. PCCs provide a solid solution to increase broadband adoption. By coupling a core curriculum with a tailored offer, compelling the user to obtain a computer and/or a subscription, PCCs become a springboard that catapults individuals and small businesses across the digital divide.

b) Connect Ohio will provide a “franchise” system, coordinating key functions, and assuring that each center has access to rich curriculum, well-trained instructors, modern equipment, technical support, and a coordinated approach to eventual adoption by consumers. The program provides a central registration portal, updated equipment, and administrative oversight, all coordinated around a “Life is better with broadband” outreach campaign. This approach relieves PCC administrative burdens, creating efficiency and a sharper focus on client service. A dedicated field team will visit the PCCs regularly, ensuring all resources are deployed to the fullest potential.

c) Serving 38% of Ohioans, the program offers a clear path to individual adoption, working in coordination with Connect Ohio’s overall broadband program, which includes broadband inventory mapping and sustainable adoption activities, as well as Connected Nation’s Every Citizen Online program. The 4,357,000 non-adopters across the state include a disproportionate amount of disadvantaged individuals and households. Minority, jobless, homeless, low-income, elderly and disabled citizens are specifically targeted by the community organizations involved in the project. OH’s public libraries serve each of these groups while Ohio State University and the Ohio Association of Broadcasters are partnering to ensure that a clear, targeted message is delivered. OH’s population includes 16% minorities; 7.8% have a family income below poverty level; 11.1% are unemployed. Many PCC users are jobless; 36% have an annual household income below $25,000. Our partner PCCs serve
125,000 users; the equipment requested will provide new public capacity for 266,000 users. The targeted public outreach campaign will drive 680,000 new users to these centers over 3 years, and adoption is expected to go up by at least 225,000 households over this time.

d) Connect Ohio is a valued statewide broadband resource, with established eCommunity teams in every county. Each team includes leaders from libraries, hospitals, schools, universities and local government. 51% of the teams have completed local technology assessments and identified a PCC as a county “priority project”; 43% have identified a need for awareness and training projects directly related to PCCs. Statewide, Connect Ohio has 2500+ participants providing resources, demonstrating a wide reach and clear local support for this project.

The franchise system offers an innovative, efficient approach; identifying, standardizing and packaging existing resources, and ‘stocking’ those resources in each participating center. Connect Ohio Director Tom Fritz spent 20 years in technology retailing, developing large-scale marketing and management strategies for a nationwide chain of computer stores, each with a computer training center. During his tenure, sales grew from $60 million to almost $1 billion annually and up to 200,000 customers per year received technical knowledge, products and training.

The Ohio Board of Regents, Ohio Library Association, Ohio Dept. of Education and others are involved. Senior-level support from these entities ensures that many proven resources are brought together and offered as a high-quality program available in a variety of accessible locations across OH.

Public awareness and outreach are key, conveying that “Life is better with broadband” to 6.8 million unique Ohioans, inviting them to participate in specific coursework and introducing them to clear benefits that will inspire them to adopt broadband. Over 135,000 media spots will produce millions of impressions statewide.

e) The program will produce jobs, directly and indirectly, across OH. The program creates 5 jobs directly, will likely create demand for 400 trainers and technical support staff statewide, and may help to create as many as 27,000 jobs by providing training, communication, and access to technology. By encouraging individual adoption, the program supports a path to more job creation: a recent Connected Nation study indicates that a 7% increase in broadband adoption in OH may create or retain over 96,000 jobs annually. 3,168 computers will be built in OH.

f) Program cost is $5,939,635, reaching 264 PCCs averaging 473 users each. Coordinated public awareness will drive usage to 800,000 yearly. Sustained by a phased-in membership plan, PCCs will realize the value and benefits before contributing to cost. $1,427,378 in cash and in-kind contributions are provided by the state of Ohio and applicant for a 24.03% match of program funds. Almost $3 million of in-kind contributions are not included in the budget, and Connect Ohio’s request totals $4,512,257 from BTOP’s PCC program.