Applicant Name: The Coordinating and Development Corporation

Project Title: Connect North Louisiana SAP Initiative

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

During mid-2008, under contract with DOC’s Economic Development Administration (EDA), The Coordinating and Development (CDC) prepared a five year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report for the 10 Parishes CDC serves in Northwest Louisiana. The lack of broadband access ranked among the top concerns expressed by the feedback received by CDC, resulting in the following statement relating to broadband being included in the CEDS report:

“According to a report entitled “A Nation Online: Broadband Age,” released by the National Telecommunication and Information Administration in September 2004, Louisiana joined Arkansas as the state’s with the lowest “Internet Use by Population, Age 3 or Older.” Louisiana and Arkansas shared a “Lower Bound” ranking of 47.1; with an “Upper Bound” ranking of 52.8 for Louisiana. Several factors account for this low ranking in the use of the Internet: lack of high speed access in the rural areas, low income and high poverty rates throughout the region, and an unwillingness by cable and phone providers to offer broadband access in low population areas.

The lack of broadband access in most of the rural sections of Northwest Louisiana is a deterrent to the ability of these areas to attract, and in some cases, keep businesses. An additional problem is that students in areas without broadband are handicapped when it comes to using the Internet for research projects and better learning opportunities. Distant learning opportunities for all ages also are handicapped due to the lack of broadband in so many sections of the region, as are rural medical facilities, which could use broadband to facilitate diagnostic and treatment procedures.”

As a direct result of the input obtained for the CEDS from local governments, businesses, civic and community organizations of the urgent need to address the lack of broadband access in the region’s rural areas, CDC formed the Louisiana Partnership for Rural Broadband Connectivity (LPRBC), reaching out to other organizations in 29 Parishes in Central and North Louisiana are now represented in the LPRBC.
The proposed innovative solution is a multi-faceted education, outreach, and public relations campaign designed to inform, remove fear, and encourage productive use of broadband communications. This approach involves four initiatives designed to work with other ARRA and governmental agencies to maximize effectiveness, and may easily be adopted in other regions. The initiatives are:

1. **Public Relations Campaign**: The expertise of members of the LPRBC will be used to undertake an on-going series of news releases and interviews to announce the initiative and begin to inform residents of the importance broadband use can play in their daily lives.

2. **Advertising/PSA Initiative**: Utilizing newspapers, television, and radio, public service announcements, and purchased advertising time/space, LPRBC will develop a series of messages to underscore the importance of broadband connectivity.

3. **Town Hall Meetings**: Working with mayors and elected officials throughout the region, LPRBC will host a series of town hall meetings to identify and address questions and concerns, and show people how broadband connectivity can help them in their daily lives. This initiative will tie-in with CDC’s Intelligent Communities Initiative, which is based on the Intelligent Community Forum’s certification criteria.

4. **Social and Business Network Development**: Social and business networks are a powerful demand creator. They provide people, institutions, and businesses with new ways to innovate and collaborate together. A series of workshops will show how networking via broadband both within the region and with other people, businesses, and institutions worldwide can bring social and economic prosperity.

The primary goal of this sustainable adoption program is to increase broadband demand of those previously not connected to the Internet by a margin of 50% over current levels within two years. The activities will be lead by CDC affiliate, Connect the Ark-La-Tex, Inc., Team leaders from the various groups involved in this program together have more than 150 years of combined experience in economic development, community development, workforce development, education, health care, and development finance. The team leader, M.D. Lecomte, has built CDC into a multi-faceted organization serving the entire region.
Population in the area totals 1,181,724 people, of which some 32% are African-Americans. Latinos are a small but growing population. 71% of the population of high school age or older have graduated from high school. The Families Poverty Level per parish ranges from 10.2% to 29.7%. As of June 2009, the area’s labor force totalled 550,368, with a parish unemployment rate that ranges from 6.8% to 16.9%.

CDC was originally chartered in 1954, as a private, nonprofit, membership-supported corporation that serves the economic, workforce, community, and business development and financial needs of communities and businesses in Northwest Louisiana, eight counties in Northeast Texas, and four counties in Southwest Arkansas. CDC’s clientele include parishes/counties; municipalities; industrial/economic development groups; businesses and industries; special purpose governmental bodies; and universities, colleges and technical colleges.

The State of Louisiana recognizes CDC as one of the State’s eight regional planning and development districts. In this capacity, CDC works with governmental agencies, businesses, civic groups, and citizens to develop programs and services that enable the orderly economic and community development of Northwest Louisiana.

Jobs to be saved or created over the two years of this project are estimated to be 75.

Overall cost of the proposed project is $1.5 million.