Applicant Name: Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc.

Project Title: Rural Connection Alternatives - An Environmentally Friendly Approach to Serving The Elderly

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

_______________________Executive Summary_______________________

A. Statement of Problem or Need:

The Proposal of Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. is composed of four segments when taken together represent a considerable adoption of broadband technology within a rural area. MEOC would be unable to implement any portion of this project in the foreseeable future without the availability of ARRA, BTOP funding and the valuable partnership of the LENOWISCO Last Mile Va. Project.

Segments are:

• Establishment of a Telepresence or Telework program for Agency staff through the purchase of equipment and establishment of a VPN.

• Establishment of an in-home, realtime monitoring system for frail elderly persons that allows them to live at home and yet have access to medical care around the clock.

• Maintenance of a caregiver support network via the use of broadband technology that allows for the support of families that are in a 24/7 caregiving role.

• Establishment of an advanced Telemedicine network that allows specialty medical care to be delivered to a remote area and the acquisition and installation of electronic medical records for Mountain Empire PACE. MEOC has one of the first PACE (Program of All Inclusive Care for the Elderly) organizations to be implemented in a rural area. All PACE organizations in the United States are in urban areas except for a set of rural startups that began in 2007 and 2008.
The implementation of all the aspects of this project will increase and amplify resources presently in place through the efficient use of technology. The project will also generate a positive environmental impact through the use of remote monitoring, realtime support group meetings, and telemedicine, which alone eliminates multiple four to six hour trips by frail elderly persons to access specialty care. Given access to these technologies, as much as 15000 miles of driving per week will be eliminated within MEOC.

MEOC’s application addresses the fact that while rural areas are an ideal example of where telecommuting and TelePresence should be implemented, employers and employees are often reluctant to do so. Additionally, an agency like MEOC who is in the business of serving many homebound clients, clients whose age, disability or poverty often make travel difficult can utilize the same technological infrastructure to bring telemedicine, case management and other services to these citizens and their families.

Over all Approach to Project

MEOC plans to purchase and install broadband access equipment, servers, VPN software, electronic whiteboards, notebook, and desktop systems and related equipment in order to initiate Telepresence and training. Through purchasing and providing to employees laptops with built in camera & microphone and high end desktop systems, a threefold goal can be accomplished. (1) Management and field staff are able to telecommute to work, (an activity that is strongly supported by the Governor of Virginia) accessing the office location through the installation of a VPN, thus saving expenses and enhancing retention. (2) Field staff in client homes can link through VPN to MEOC offices, connecting to a set of specialty services that includes case management and care coordination, information and referral, nutritional counseling, visiting nurse services, Pharmacy Connect, primary medical care, and other professional services. (3) Mountain Empire PACE enrolls frail elderly persons in a program of comprehensive health and social services that enables them to live in their own homes. The VPN will enable PACE participants to be monitored from their homes in several ways. Personal care aides can take and enter vital signs and other health information directly into the PACE electronic medical record or communicate live via audio and video connections with clinicians in the PACE Center. Program participants in especially fragile situations can be monitored via realtime telemetry on a full time basis. PACE will initially deploy twenty monitoring units with plans to add more as enrollments in the program increases. This use of technology in a rural area utilizing a fiberoptic broadband backbone is innovative and a highend use of available technology.

MEOC has served southwest Virginia for the last thirty-five years and during that time, has developed, with the help of the community, thirty-seven different services to assist our area’s older citizens and their families who care for them. MEOC puts major emphasis on assisting families in caring for their older relatives. Toward this end, MEOC has conducted a nationally recognized, award winning program of using high school students to teach older caregivers to use computers and the internet (Tech World). This program has allowed high school students to learn of the specific problems the elderly face each
day, especially those with Alzheimer’s or other related dementias. By the same token, caregivers in full-time care giving situations are able to use the internet to access current medical information, use chat to communicate and share information with other caregivers, or simply use the technology for recreation. Plans are to use the VPN installed under this program to conduct periodic support group meetings without the caregiver having to drive as much as 100 miles to attend such meetings. The other component of this Project is Community Education. This project can easily be expanded to reach more Seniors, low income residents and children, including the development of web content and use of the Electronic Whiteboard to continue the education of staff and broadband users about broadband and safe internet use after the initial training. MEOC will fund continuing operation of these activities from ongoing funding.

Area Served: Mountain Empire Older Citizens serves the Virginia Counties of Lee, Wise, Scott, and the City of Norton. The area has a population of 91,000. Approximately 25% of the population is over the age of 60 and 34% of the popula