Executive Summary

Our mission is to put rural small businesses and entrepreneurial motivation to work using broadband services and internet technologies. Reaching the underserved areas where there’s limited opportunities to launch new internet-based businesses, our program creates a 'bright spot' of hope by providing a bundle of technical, business and marketing services to get rural businesses up and running on the internet. This activity will inspire others in their community to adopt broadband services and extend their personal and business reach in today’s global economy.

The enthusiasm a successful new business venture generates in any community is contagious. All too often these new businesses emerge from the major metropolitan areas, where access to broadband, technical and marketing resources is competitive and easy to come by. Not so for the business-minded person living far outside these centers. Picture a man or woman in a small rural town with a business idea for a new type of product or service that will help boost farmland productivity. They’ve tested it locally and all works perfectly. How can they expand their reach regionally and globally with the few local resources they have available – while on dial-up? Where can they turn to to get web-centric technical, business and online marketing assistance in their region?

Having access to broadband services is one thing; using it to generate positive economic activity in underserved rural areas of the country is where the excitement is. This intersection of new commerce and connectivity is where our organization does its best work.

Our ten-year-old non-profit organization – The Society for Internet Advancement Orange County (SIAOC) – has been serving the Southern California business community in adopting the use of the internet as a way for businesses to expand their online presence and global reach. Our management team has a combined 53 years of experience in internet technology and marketing. Our group is comprised of specialists in entrepreneurship, high profile website production and programming, ecommerce, search engine marketing and online marketing. Our mission is to put entrepreneurial stimulus to work using new broadband services.
We provide a unique, effective internet-focused program called ‘Project BrightSpotUSA’ that combines the skills of technical, business and marketing professionals to assist rural small businesses who are eager to use the internet for business expansion. Our Project BrightSpotUSA program encompasses everything they need to establish and grow their internet-based business using broadband services. From our extensive knowledge of using the web for business efficiency, we first consult with them on their business offer. Our internal team of experts develops an implementation plan with the selected participants. We use free, open source programming code and web design templates to keep their website development costs down while providing them with a way to manage their own site content. We establish their service or product catalog online and set up their ecommerce site for global ordering. While optimizing their site for maximum visibility with the major search engines we educate them on the importance of search engine, email and online marketing. We help them craft their marketing messages and online marketing plans. We get them going within six weeks so that their new internet-based business generates local heat and economic growth in their community. In adopting broadband services to launch their internet-based business, these small business owners are the drivers of sustainable broadband adoption.

Our target market of rural, underserved entrepreneurs and small businesses are located in the Western U.S., in particular eastern Oregon and northwestern New Mexico. These two areas are highlighted in the latest USDA Economic Research Report (#78) as underserved for broadband. The population of our target service areas is 37,743 in Oregon and 8,658 in New Mexico.

We reach our target market by contacting local chambers of commerce, informing them of our project and asking for their assistance to get the word out to their business membership through their newsletters and monthly meetings.

Our approach to sustainable broadband adoption is to plant the seeds of excitement and motivation within the unserved and underserved communities. The benefits of this approach are two-fold: new internet-based businesses have the opportunity to generate local economic activity, increasing job creation; and viral discussions within the community about the new business activity promotes further broadband adoption.

Over the two year lifespan of our project our estimated number of potential institutional broadband customers is a small but potent group of 125 rural business entities. These are important businesses that will help drive economic and job growth in the region.
The overall cost of the proposed project is $4,782,000 over two years. The price of services provided by our organization are in keeping with other high technology agencies. The value of each program is $20,000, which will be provided at no cost to the selected participants. Program costs will be paid for in part by the grant and our 50% in-kind service contribution. We have negotiated with the team and are able to provide these services at reduced fees. We are seeking a grant for the remaining 50%, $2,291,000.

Success is measured by the increase in economic activity surrounding the new internet presence, its effect on the local economy and sustained broadband adoption within the region. We believe the number of jobs to be created from our program will exceed 1,000 in the two year period of program activity. New-found profits and job creation are powerful motivators for our participants to continue using their broadband and internet-based businesses for years to come.