Executive Summary Statement of Problem or Need: The diverse population in our metropolitan area does not have equal accessibility to computer technology. Those in our lower socioeconomic areas certainly do not have personal computers and accessibility at work or school is limited. This results in an imbalance between those having computer resources and those not. Our community goal is to broaden the availability to the under and non served population so they have an equal opportunity for education and development of job skills. The connection of our existing fiber optic infrastructure and computer equipment would make our goal a reality. Our community will pull together to put our population back to work today and be educated to obtain employment in the future. By collectively 'pooling' our resources between the city, county, school district, university, libraries, community groups and recreation centers; we can reach those needing public computer accesses the most. The educational and occupational playing fields will be leveled. Children in after school programs at our community recreation centers can work on their home work on line with mentors from the school district. Education courses for teachers and Para-professionals in the K-12 district can be taught by the University College of Education faculty members across the community network. Government courses could be taught on line to K-12 from the county and city. Libraries can produce structured job awareness programs for out of work citizens. Seniors can provide valuable assistance and guidance to the younger community members. A wireless network across Uptown Columbus will revitalize local businesses and serve our university students. Our approach is to improve educational opportunities and achievement and provide our population with the skills necessary to get back to work. This unique approach will use computer technology to tie all of our community resources together and reach the un-served and under served in our community. Area to be Served and Demographics The Muscogee County area in 2008 had an estimated population of 186,984. The community minorities comprise over 50% of the population with black persons accounting for 46.6% which is significantly higher than the state (30%) and national average (12.37%). We also have a higher than normal percentage of persons under 18 years 27.3% versus the national level at 23.9%. Our population has 20.3% having a Bachelors Degree compared to the state level of 23.9%. Home ownership is also very low at 56.4% while the state level is at 67.5%. Our population has a per capita income of only $18,262 versus the state average of $21,154. The bottom line is that our community has a very high percentage of minorities that are under 18 and school age and we have a very low socioeconomic standing with a very small per capita income and home ownership. The stimulus grant will serve to not only improve education rates, but put community members back to work in skilled jobs. The Public Computer Centers stimulus will be a serving a targeted group of young, 18 years or less, minority students in 11 Public Libraries, 8 neighborhood Recreation
Centers, 61 Public Schools and 2 libraries at the university. Educational opportunities will be extended to the teachers requiring certification and upgrading through our University College of Education. The distribution of Public Computer Centers will provide service to approximately 800 students at Recreation Centers, 32,500 students in K-12, 8,200 students at the university and the possibility of over 6,000 teachers and staff requiring additional College of Education training, and the community at whole that will have access in public libraries. (186,984 population) Qualifications of applicant(s) The expertise of the university, school district, library system, city and county recreation centers is extensive. The group has already demonstrated that over 65% of the fiber infrastructure is in place. The remaining development of the fiber optic connectivity to all community members is a skill which is readily available through a joint project team of IT professionals. Jobs to be Saved or Created The entire project design is to provide work related skills training, education for jobs, education for teachers and education for K-12 and college students. This will create better educated and productive citizens in our community ready to get back to work. Also it creates a future for our residents with the new skills they will be acquiring. Overall Cost of the Proposed Project Overall cost as detailed is $5,084,073 Significance of the problem to be addressed The Columbus Georgia community has a larger than average amount of young people (27.3% versus national 23.9%) within a much higher than normal minority population (46.6 % black versus 12.37% national) that come from a very low annual per ca pita income of only $18,262 versus the state average of $21,154. Our circumstance defines the stimulus goal to reach under served and unserved people not having access to technology. Our lack of Public Computer Center access clearly puts our young people and their parents at a significant disadvantage for education to learn skills and/or seek employment. Combining the interconnection of our grant participants' fiber network and augmenting existing public computer access will make a substantial difference in the economic condition of our community. Columbus public schools are only able to spend $5,833 per student while the average school expenditure in the U.S. is $6,058. The unemployment rate in Columbus is 8.70 percent (U.S. avg. is 8.50%). Recent job growth is Negative. Columbus jobs have decreased by 3.10 percent. Our community is in significant need to support the technology shortfalls of our youth, workers and businesses. How the Proposed Solution Addresses the Problem and Replicated by Others Our proposed solution takes advantage of our participants existing fiber infrastructure to build out and connect the city/county, fire department, school district, libraries, university and recreation centers to allow for the sharing of resources to improve education, public safety and job skill preparation and search. The addition of state of the art Public Computer Centers assures that the instruction for after school programs, as an example, can be efficiently sent across to recreation center 'latch key' programs. The concept of a community wide network infrastructure is one that can be replicated by other areas within the country to address the problem of resource delivery. Typically many communities is similar to our in that the school district, cit, county and local higher education institution each have their own separate networks. Joining these institutions together in a common network the communities can share resources, become more efficient and better serve their populations. Degree that Both the Problem and Solution Address the Five BTOP Purpose Due to the fact that our community is in a significantly lower socioeconomic stratum, the problem is that many within our community do not have access to broadband or use of computers and the internet. This fact continues to place students and their parents at a significant disadvantage for education, job skill improvement and job search. By connection of our participants existing fiber network, we can enhance existing Public Computer centers with new
equipment to reach our under served and un-served people through our recreation centers, libraries, schools and university campuses. Our vulnerable population will be educated and guided at our Public Computer Centers how to use of computers and the internet to allow them to acquire the skills necessary to compete in today's world. A very significant side benefit of our project is that sixteen of our community fire stations will be connected as part of the community network. To date they have had to rely on DSL service provided by an outside vendor. As part of the community network they response time to each fire house will be dramatically improved. The demand for broadband will be recognized throughout the community as more members that have never before been exposed to it will now be educated as to its use and have access never before possible. Enhanced Services for Health Care Delivery, Education and Children The focus of our project is education for our community and in particular children. In the world today not having access to computers and the internet is a huge disadvantage to the learning process. Our community has a population of young people under 18 with over 50% being minority. To make matters worse our community has a very low income. This means that unless we can offer these services to our population they will continue to be severely disadvantaged in the job market.