Applicant Name: LONGWOOD UNIVERSITY

Project Title: Southern Virginia Rural Public Computing Centers

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary _________________________

The Southside Virginia Regional Technology Consortium (SVRTC) in partnership with The Institute for Teaching through Technology and Innovative Practices (ITTIP) and Longwood University (LWU) proposes the establishment of 17 public computer centers for the advancement of education and economic development in Southern Virginia counties. Located in the heart of Southern Virginia, these counties have traditionally been characterized as rural, extremely impoverished and relatively isolated from the rest of the state. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that Southside Virginia has unemployment rates far above those of the state's average of 6.9%. The Danville area had the highest unemployment rate in a Virginia metro area (11.9%). Among Virginia's individual jurisdictions, Martinsville city unemployment was the highest at 20.3%. Further, 24 Virginia jurisdictions, primarily along the North Carolina border, had double-digit unemployment in December 2009. Most of these areas are within the project service region. Since January 2008, thousands of jobs have been lost through regional industry closings. Economic development is related to human development, thus an educated and well-trained workforce is key. To alleviate the barriers that many of the region's residents face in attaining economic prosperity, targeted education and training for an estimated 1100 individuals per week, will be accessible through 17 proposed public computer centers. This training, provided via broadband-driven technologies, will be offered to achieve the following: ' Increase in digital literacy levels among those with little or no computer skills. ' Expansion of opportunities for specialized learning resulting in an increase in the number of Virginians that have an understanding of the Internet, as well as common software packages and other web 2.0 features thus increasing the proportion of technically knowledgeable workforce. ' Increase in levels of educational attainment among target audiences through participation in certificate and college credit programs, thus the possibility of individuals acquiring new jobs or promotions. ' Provision of advanced support to those seeking to participate in Virginia's economic recovery as a small business owner and/or to those who wish to maintain or expand their professional credentials to ensure competitiveness in the workforce. For viable PCC accessibility, all centers will be located in schools, libraries or community centers. By positioning these centers in key community locations, the availability of broadband connections is ensured, existing technological infrastructures can be capitalized on, and a familiarity of location and setting already exists for most individuals within the target group. This also allows SVRTC to apply its resources, expertise and collaborative elements quickly to existing members of the consortium, thus facilitating successful project implementation. It must also be noted that the strategically positioned PCCs will leverage the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program funds awarded to the Mid-Atlantic Broadband Cooperative (MBC).The PCCs build-out will be scheduled to coincide with MBC’s build-out and will
positively affect many of the program's sites. Specifically, each proposed or expanded site is selected using the following criteria: unemployment rates, the percentage of the population in each geographic region living in poverty, and educational attainment of the area's residents — all of these factors are worse than state averages in the communities where PCCs will be established. In short, this strategic approach will afford SVRTC with the opportunity to establish public computer centers where the greatest numbers of poor, unemployed and limited educational attainment Virginians have access to them. The project team estimates that 1,100 individuals will access PCCs each week, for a total of over 165,000 users during the three-year project period. Target populations will include those that are low-income and/or unemployed, as well as other vulnerable populations, including African Americans (approximately one-third of the region's population), those that are disabled and the small percentage of individuals in the area that are Hispanic/Latino. ITTIP of Longwood University has a strong record for managing large-scale projects that will undoubtedly support the implementation of this effort. For example, the organizations have just completed a three-year National Science Foundation (NSF) grant entitled Digispired: Developing Interactive Game Design and Programming Skills. Based on positive results, the NSF has awarded a three-year expansion, Digispired ii: Workforce Inspiration Investigation for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. ITTIP, an official Outreach Program of Longwood University, will serve as the project's coordinating entity. Given the support of both Longwood University and ITTIP, SVRTC has access to the resources and expertise necessary to effectively carry out the proposed project. Further, SVRTC is poised to carry out all implementation plans quickly, thus ensuring that at least 75 percent of project work is completed within the first 18 months of funding. Key partners of the project include the following organizations, all of which will host PCC sites: Patrick County Public Schools, Lake Country Distance Education Center, Martinsville City Public Schools - Community Learning Center, Amelia County Public Schools, Dinwiddie County Public School, Southampton County Public Schools, Prince Edward Public Schools, Cumberland County Public Schools, Prince George County Public Schools, Charlotte County Public Schools, Buckingham County Public Schools, Henry County Public Schools, Radford Public Library, Washington Coleman Community Center (Town of South Boston), Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (Danville City), Cardinal Homes Incorporated (Wylliesburg), Hopewell City Public Schools. Each of these partners has agreed to dedicate at least one representative to serve on the Southern Virginia Rural Computer Centers collaborative oversight group to ensure appropriate and consistent cross-site programming and operations. This group, which will meet at least 10 times per year for one-day meetings, will have responsibility for the following: Carrying out implementation plans, Developing policies/procedures for each individual site, Overseeing individual PCC operations, in coordination with the Southern Virginia Rural Computer Center's project management team, Developing/implementing comprehensive evaluation plans that include process assessments specific to numbers of PCC users, classes, and educational offerings, as well as outcome assessments, including those related to actual participant learning outcomes and impact of classes/certificates/degrees, Creating and implementing PCC user and partner satisfaction surveys to ensure that all key stakeholders, including participants, are highly satisfied with services provided, Carrying out site-specific public outreach plans to ensure that messages of PCC availability and specific educational offerings are widely disseminated, Monitoring in-kind support and other necessary measures for the purposes of project reporting, Assessing project results at regular intervals, and modifying project implementation plans as necessary based on these
Contributing to PCC sustainability by seeking external funding and/or budgeting for PCC operational funding beyond the grant project period. Assessing the rural needs of each area and identifying content to meet those needs. In addition to those Southern Virginia Rural Computer Centers project partners that will contribute to the success of the effort through the hosting of PCCs, several additional partners will play a key role in the project, including:

- The Southern Virginia Higher Education Center: this entity will provide educational content to all PCCs through the use of distance education technology. The Southern Virginia Higher Education Center represents Averette University, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), Southside Virginia Community College, Danville Community College, and others.
- The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research, which is affiliated with Virginia Tech, will also provide courses to all PCCs. These courses will include, at minimum, Microsoft Office and International Computer Driving License (ICDL) to support computer literacy, as well as courses focused on biofuels, residential energy efficiency and the like. In total, the proposed project will result in the creation of 19 direct jobs. Specifically, facilitators and other PCC support staff will be added. $7,131,972 in federal funding is requested, and an additional $3,857,098 will be provided in-kind, bringing the total project budget to $10,989,070.