Together Kansas City Public Library (KCPL) and Mid-Continent Public Library (MCPL), the lead partners in this proposal, have set a pace for innovation which reflects their commitment to bringing library materials to the residents of Kansas City, MO. With multiple partners in the education, workforce, technology and housing sectors, the Libraries have formed the Kansas City Digital Communities (KCDC) coalition to bring broadband access and adoption to those yet to embrace it, yet most likely derive the highest benefit from this resource. Today, resources have diminished as need has grown, in some cases exponentially. In 2009 the Kansas City Public Libraries computer centers had over 839,000 usages, while the Library’s virtual offerings had over 2 million usages. The technology to support this usage was state-of-the-art in 2004, but is now overburdened by traffic. Library-to-Go computer stations located in two community centers are so busy that usage time is limited to 45 minutes; the same is true of the computers located in five additional community centers, all of which connect through DSL. KCDC primary partner Metropolitan Community College’s Pioneer Center was serving the highest number of disadvantaged residents in the city but is now closed due to a lack of funding, and MCC’s other four centers are using outdated computers with limited programming. The public housing sites get their internet services through cable TV. Like other communities Kansas City has suffered in the economic downturn. The current budget deficit of the City of Kansas City is $60 million. The schools chief recently announced plans to cut one-quarter of the staff, including 285 teaching positions. (The Associated Press, Kansas City wants to close half its public schools, March 7, 2010) Unfortunately, without additional resources a vicious cycle of underfunding and underperformance will continue as residents fall into the widening chasm of technology haves and have-nots. The unemployment rate in the City is over 10% with some census tracts over 14%. And this does not account for the hidden unemployment and underemployment that is pervasive in the local area. According to the March 2010 report, Broadband Adoption in Low Income Communities , ‘Finding and applying for jobs, maintaining contact with employers, training to find better jobs, and other basic aspects of employment are increasingly Internet based’leaving those without access or only intermittent access at a serious disadvantage’. Income and education are directly related to access to broadband technology. A national study showed the following rates of home subscription: Income of less than $30,000/year 42% Less than a high school diploma 24% High school diploma 46% Pew Internet and American Life Project, Internet, broadband, and cell phone statistics by Lee Rainie, Jan 5, 2010) While almost 40 percent of 22-35 year olds have earned a BA or better, a closer examination of the numbers reveals vast education inequality. A sixth of the Black population in this age range and almost two-fifths of the Hispanic population has failed to even graduate from high school. Among males, only 13.7 percent of black males and 10.8 percent of Hispanic males
have BAs. This correlates to income: Attaining a college education produces earning gains of more than $10,000 a year over a high school degree for every group. (2000 Census Public Use Microdata Sample, Kansas City Metropolitan Area, Persons in Households, from Time to Get it Right: A Strategy for Higher Education in Kansas City, p. 13. Greater Kansas City Community Foundation). That said, at Metropolitan Community College nearly 70% of first-time degree seeking students require some developmental education to prepare for college level courses. This proposal offers a broad community-based solution to increase public computing capacity and stimulate broadband adoption among low income and predominantly urban neighborhoods through the Public Libraries, Metropolitan Community College, Parks & Recreation Community Centers and Public Housing Neighborhood Network sites. These are logical centers for public computing and broadband access as well as adoption. Taken together, these institutions weave a mosaic of hope through these distressed areas of the city by offering: 'Creation of physical digital access points to increase capacity' 'Strategic placement of digital access points throughout the city for ease of access and on bus routes, given that this might be the only means of transportation for the individuals needing services.' 'Aggregation of content to provide one-stop shop access. 'Coordination of efforts to eliminate duplication and take advantage of each others' strengths.' 'Increased capacity in libraries to meet the demand.' 'Expanded broadband access to the home and the knowledge to fully use it. As part of Kansas City Digital Communities (KCDC), these partners will lead a carefully integrated community-based strategy which will increase public computing access while promoting understanding and usage of high-speed broadband services. An aggressive outreach effort will go beyond existing users of community centers, public libraries, and residents of public housing units to reach a larger segment of the vulnerable communities targeted by BTOP. This public center-based project will include existing Library facilities at 9 KCPL branches and 2 MCPL branches; 10 Community Centers/5 Library to Go sites; 3 Housing Authority sites and 5 MCC centers with one mobile lab. The work at these sites will be closely coordinated with KCDC partner One Economy, which is implementing 2 years free, home-based Broadband access and adoption program at 9 affordable or low-income multi-family housing properties with a total of 2025 units. The KCDC believes that access is only a means to an end; it is less relevant if people cannot connect to content that they can use to raise their standard of living. Kansas City, MO is part of a unique bi-state, 11 county, urban and suburban area consisting of more than 200 municipalities. It is the intent of the KCDC to set an example for public computing access and sustainable adoption that can then be replicated in the surrounding jurisdictions. The service area includes the Kansas City Metropolitan area. In 2008 16.4% of the population lived in poverty. Among African Americans the rate was 26.8 % and Hispanics were even higher at 29.3%, (http://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.mo_kansascity_msa.htm). It is estimated that implementation of this program will result annually in 400,000 unduplicated public computer center users, many of whom live in the historically underserved urban core. One of the areas served will be Bluford, a 99 % African American neighborhood which has one of the highest poverty rates in the entire city and state, at one third of the population. In the Irene H. Ruiz branch service area, 64% Hispanic, the median household income in 2000 was $25,481, leaving 32% of households living below the poverty level. With funding, MCC will restore the popular center at its Pioneer Campus in this area. While all of the proposed public computing centers will increase capacity toward meeting need, in no other neighborhoods is the quite need as drastic. Much of the curriculum will be modeled on KCPL's successful public-private initiative, the Block Business and Career Center. Located at the Central Library, the Center works with individuals
to become successful entrepreneurs, find jobs and develop careers, and organize personal finances. The Housing Authority of Kansas City (HAKC) also has extensive experience in providing relevant curriculum and training to users of its three Neighborhood Network sites. The centers have provided computer-based learning programs for over 15 years and have increased the utilization rate of the centers in the past five years. Metropolitan Community College (MCC) brings to the partnership established online content, as well as its Institute for Workforce Innovations, which delivers short-term training for high demand jobs. Through five public-access computer centers, MCC delivers non-credit courses in career development, IT certificate training, healthcare, and credit programs which will serve as a natural extension of Library and HAKC programming. In addition, MCC has compiled a portfolio of Kansas City companies, which are connected to job seekers who utilize the computer centers. This service will be of crucial importance as KCDC moves to connect trained workers with available jobs. Jobs saved or created: 53 Overall cost of the proposed project: