Executive Summary

a. Problem Statement The 'Free2 Connect 4 Success' project addresses the critical need to expand public Internet access facilities in the state's public libraries by providing equipment, information resources, and training for 136 public libraries throughout the state. Nearly all public libraries in California provide public Internet access in some form, and over 60% of public libraries in California are the only sources of free Internet access in their communities. However, they are struggling to provide adequate access to their users. Many have obsolescent or inadequate numbers of computers. In a 2009 survey, fewer than 15% reported that they have sufficient numbers of computer workstations available for users. Fewer than half reported adequate connectivity speeds (which we define as higher than 1.5 mbps). It is vital to expand the public library computer access centers and assist the libraries in serving these critical needs. Making the problem even more urgent, demand for public access at libraries is growing exponentially. California residents need computer and Internet access more than ever to seek jobs, apply for government benefits, and take advantage of on-line educational opportunities. California faces a statewide unemployment rate reported at 12.4% in 2009. It ranges even higher in many of the areas served by the libraries participating in this project. Prose literacy is a problem that goes hand-in-hand with unemployment and economic development in communities. In California, according to 2003 federal statistics, 23% of the adult population lack basic literacy skills. There is a critical need to expand and update public library computing facilities and services in order to accommodate this increased demand. Most libraries have no more physical space available for increasing the number of workstations and are turning to wireless service to expand user access. Furthermore, keeping their wireless service operational around the clock allows libraries to extend Internet access outside their doors and beyond the hours they are open. However, unless the library has laptops to loan, either in house or to circulate, users need to use their own wireless enabled laptops or net books to make use of the service. Users who do not own or have access to laptops, often those in the neediest populations to be served, cannot take advantage of this extended service. Finally, libraries do not just provide access to workstations and laptops, they offer literacy programs, training, coaching, and information resources and tools that can be prohibitively expensive for any individuals to obtain. As they expand their public access facilities, libraries also need to expand and enhance these other services to support their growing user community.

b. Overall Approach One hundred thirty six public library sites distributed around the state have been selected based on need and readiness to expand their public access centers and services. Need was defined both by external factors, vulnerable population and economic distress, and by internal factors such as inadequate public access facilities and equipment to meet demands for public access. Readiness was determined by their ability to expand services and by their willingness to
participate in this project. Each partner will be provided with ten laptops. Staff of each participating library will be trained to guide users through the resources and identify possible training needs and employment opportunities that are available in the community. One hundred thirteen of these libraries will be provided with wireless routers to accommodate the increased load and increase public access. By locating the wireless routers to provide access in the vicinity outside of the library, they will provide around the clock Internet access to their communities. Staff of each participating library will be trained to guide users through the resources and identify possible training needs and employment opportunities that are available in the community. These upgraded Public Computer Centers will serve a wide range of patron needs, including K12 and adult education, health care, and e-government. Libraries offer resources that support all of these uses and more. But, given California's particularly high unemployment rate, this project will focus particularly on strengthening the ability of library-based public computer centers to provide help for the unemployed and economically disadvantaged. Some libraries in California have already begun programs targeted at unemployed people in their communities. CALIFA will strengthen these efforts and make them available them to all of the partners in this project. In particular, CALIFA will provide the following: 1. Establish a 'Free2 Connect 4 Success' web site with key resources to support job seeking, including help for resume development, training on interviewing skills or career changing, and pointers to possible employment opportunities. 2. Negotiate site licenses for the participating libraries to provide access to a comprehensive commercial and non-profit employment database provider. 3. Provide training opportunities for selected staff in partner libraries to help them provide assistance to patrons. 4. Host an annual Libraries, Economic Development, and Jobs Summit that will highlight the important role public access centers play in job seeking, identify and share best practices, and provide opportunities for major employers in the state to work with the statewide library community to improve the effectiveness of on-line job seeking. c. Areas to be served Twenty-five library jurisdictions representing 136 libraries serve at least 20 counties throughout the state. They are particularly concentrated in three areas of highest need: the 'Inland Empire' in southern California, the central valley region, and the northern region. A map has been included in the supplementary information describing the participating libraries. These areas generally have unemployment rates significantly greater than the state average of 12.4. d. Qualifications of Applicant The CALIFA Group is a non-profit membership consortium serving libraries and information organizations in California. Established in 2004 with LSTA funding from the California State Library, CALIFA collaborates with members and provides leadership for cooperative negotiations to help ensure that members receive quality information resources at the best possible pricing. With over 220 members, including most of the California public libraries, CALIFA is the largest library network in California. CALIFA manages more than $2,000,000 in grant-funded projects annually. CALIFA was created as a nimble, flexible, virtual organization to deliver services to a broad constituency, as conveniently and directly as possible. The five California regional library systems that coordinate services to the public libraries in their geographic areas will provide training and technical assistance for installing and supporting the participating libraries in their region. These five systems are also partners in this proposal. e. Jobs to be saved or created It is estimated that this project will directly save or create 11 job FTE's over the three years of the proposed grant, and will create 9 indirect jobs, and 10 induced jobs. Of much greater importance, however, will be the contribution of this project to economic development through training and job seeking assistance as the economy starts to grow again. Much research has
been done in the area of library contribution to local economic growth and it has consistently shown that it is not only positive, but substantial. For example, through library Internet access, local businesses, particularly in smaller communities and remote regions of the state, are able to better access the services and markets they need to grow and develop their services. f. Overall cost The total budget for this project is $3,203,952. Of that total, $2,536,167 is requested from federal funds and $667,785 is matching support.