The application addresses a need to update, enhance and expand public computer center ('PCC') facilities and services in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County ('Forsyth' or 'County') North Carolina to better reach lower income, certain ethnic and disadvantaged populations with broadband access and train and educate them in its use. To address these needs, the application supports the acquisition of updated computer equipment, additional personnel for expanded training and new PCC locations. Currently over 40 free public access computer labs operate throughout Winston-Salem and Forsyth which have a combined population of 307,511 including locations in census tracks that contain more than 60% of the County's population with median annual household income under $40,000. The labs have operated since 2003 using an innovative support model that relies on strong partnerships between local government, educational institutions, and community non-profit organizations. Specifically, the labs are supported through WinstonNet, a non-profit organization comprised of City and County governments, four universities, a community college, the public school system, and the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce. A portion of WinstonNet's membership fees pay for maintenance of the labs, while administrative oversight is through a part-time administrative director and volunteers. A majority of the labs are located in city recreation centers and public libraries. Partnerships with other non-profit organizations such as the YMCA, YWCA, churches, and organizations that serve special populations have enabled further expansion of the labs. Collectively, the labs provide computer access to hundreds of residents of the served areas every day. Although public use remains substantial, the goal of providing continued and enhanced computer access to the underserved is at risk and needs to be expanded. This is in part due to reliance on donated desktop computers with an average age exceeding 9 years. The computers operate as thin-client terminals connected to servers over broadband connections. Although sufficient when deployed, computers now struggle with serving multimedia and Web 2.0 Internet services. In the past, donations from WinstonNet members allowed replacement replaced on a three year refresh cycle, but the equipment now must be kept longer due to challenging economic times and are less likely to have much functional value when finally replaced. The grant will be used to provide new equipment, expand the partnership with Forsyth Technical Community College ('FTCC'), better serve Winston-Salem and the County's large Hispanic population, establish a relationship with the federally funded Housing Authority of Winston-Salem, and open six new labs in low-income areas. Funding will also help us create one new full-time position, four new part-time positions, and preserve two full-time positions. This would allow us to serve approximately 1,500 new lab users weekly and provide Spanish speaking computer training classes to approximately 160 new participants each month. More specifically, it is proposed to provide all the labs with a combination of new thin-client
terminals specially designed for remote desktop services over the Internet and new desktop computers. The proposed enhanced technology architecture is very similar to the current delivery model, offering similar features for reducing management overhead and enforcing a standard operating environment, and operating on existing servers and the existing network infrastructure. In addition, FTCC proposes to provide six new publicly-accessible labs with new desktop PC's and new printers. A group of mobile devices will be used to bring computer access to public facilities in rural areas on a rotating basis. In addition, the grant will be used to expand a computer training program started in 2006 when WinstonNet partnered with the County to obtain a grant from the State of North Carolina to develop such a program in public libraries. Since then the 'Computer Training Bridge' has become a permanent program funded by the County that provides free computer training throughout the WinstonNet labs. Courses are taught by trained volunteers, focusing on computer literacy, work skills, and use of the Internet for personal needs. Students include, but are not limited to, children, the unemployed, the elderly, and the disabled. In the past 12 month period, 891 separate courses were taught to 4,464 attendees. All computer labs provide handicapped access and a few labs have special hardware and software for the blind. Grant funds will be used to expand the availability of special equipment and software for the physically disadvantaged, including support for a new lab within a non-profit organization focused on this special population. The computer training curriculum at six of the labs will be expanded to include courses in Spanish taught by a full-time instructor. The enhanced WinstonNet program will establish a close partnership with the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem. Because WinstonNet labs are located in disadvantaged areas, they are also located in proximity to low-income housing and near Housing Authority communities. Computer training programs targeted to the Housing Authority residents will be established. WinstonNet has successfully provided equipment and broadband Internet access to an entire community with focus on the underserved and disadvantaged populations. It has relied on a combination of volunteers, donated equipment, and cash contributions for maintenance and broadband services. This has proven to be a sustainable and successful model for over six years, and continues to operate even through difficult financial times. Grant funding will extend access into FTCC, add new computer labs into underserved areas, provide a focused program for residents of subsidized low income housing, and provide an extensive amount of focused training for Winston-Salem's growing Hispanic community. WinstonNet is asking for a total of $926,537 for equipment and personnel. WinstonNet will contribute $532,711 in cash during the project period and in-kind contributions totaling $163,500 in volunteer trainer and administrator time, lab site supervisors time, administrative overhead, and software licensing.