Mountain Lakes Medical Center (Mountain Lakes) and the Development Authority of Rabun County propose the establishment of TECHNOLOGY WORKS! to provide the 16,500 residents of rural Rabun County, Georgia, with the access to broadband-driven workforce education/training/health care outreach opportunities through two public computer centers. Through these centers, which will realize approximately 15,250 visits annually, Technology Works! will offer opportunities for Rabun Co. target audiences, especially unemployed/underemployed populations, to participate in strategic retraining opportunities in large/small group and individual settings designed to address the community’s workforce needs. To this end, these centers will operate under a single overarching goal: to create a highly employable workforce for the 21st century by improving the skills and overall health of the area’s workforce. This holistic approach to addressing workforce issues, and subsequently creating/sustaining jobs, is critical in light of high unemployment, and the factors that negatively contribute to the current economic decline, including low educational attainment, persistent, generational poverty and poor health status of area residents. Problem Rabun Co.’s manufacturing, construction and tourism driven economic base has experienced significant declines recently and, since 2006, an estimated 1,080 jobs have been lost in the county - a number that equates to over 16% of the 6,689 adults in the County’s workforce. Further, many of those that have lost jobs have not been able to find other work, in that the GA Dept. of Labor reports unemployment for Rabun Co. at 11.8% as of 12/2009. According to the US Census, 18% of Rabun Co.’s residents overall, and 22.6% those families with children, live in poverty; less than 75% of residents possess a high school diploma. In addition to feeling the impact of a weak local economy from an employment perspective, Rabun Co. residents are also considered vulnerable due to health status. According to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 14.9% of residents are uninsured (an additional 23% are Medicaid-eligible); $2.5 million in charity care was provided in 2009, 1 in 4 adults smoke and just 26% participate in recommended levels of physical activity. Chronic disease rates, many of which are linked to poor health behaviors, are also high. BRFSS data indicates that 23% of Rabun Co.’s residents are obese and 6% have diabetes. Despite the poor health of this community, the availability of disease prevention/management support is limited. Project partners believe that a healthy workforce is an employable workforce, so health must also be addressed as a workforce issue. Limited resources also exist among local law enforcement and firefighters to access critical training and to coordinate disaster and emergency responses. Often, these public responders are required to attend trainings that are up to 65 miles away, which translates to high travel costs and increased time responders spend ‘out of community.’ Just as a healthy workforce is a vital component of positive economic growth, so to is the community’s public safety infrastructure, making this facet of the
Technology Works! a critical one. Solution Based on the job training, employment, educational, health and public responder needs in Rabun Co., TECHNOLOGY WORKS! takes a multicomponent approach to empower a highly skilled and healthy workforce through two PCCs: 1) Education will be provided to Rabun County residents specific to the effective use of broadband Internet technology itself and to provide training for high skill/high demand jobs 2) education will be provided specific to the health conditions that many Rabun County residents experience, with a focus on prevention/chronic disease management 3) Education will be facilitated to ensure that those entrusted with the safety and well-being of Rabun County’s residents have the training they need to be successful; and 4) Services will be provided to meet the critical needs of the unemployed, through the GA Dept. of Labor, and the underemployed and unemployable, through the skills-based education classes of North Georgia Technical College (NGTC). Specifically, the Rabun Co. Public Computing and Employment Center will be located in ground floor of Rabun Co. Health Dept. in Clayton, GA. By redeveloping a currently under-occupied county facility, the PCC will provide a one-stop resource to retrain and re-employ Rabun Co.’s workforce. PCC offerings will include a public computer lab, office space and consultation rooms for the GA Dept. of Labor, classroom facilities for NGTC, testing rooms for the Georgia Work Ready Assessment, interview rooms, and training facilities for public emergency responders. A health library staffed by volunteers, including physicians and nurses, will also be established. Mountain Lakes will also host a PCC in its renovated wellness center. Located on Mountain Lakes’ campus, this PCC will have the capacity for 147 individuals in an auditorium, and will offer both a small group learning center and 13 individual workstations. While health care education/workforce staff training will undoubtedly be the focus of the center, public safety trainings will also be offered. Proposed solutions to these critical problems clearly addresses the BTOP statutory purpose focused on providing broadband education awareness, training, access, equipment and support to community anchor institutions, job-creating strategic facilitates, and vulnerable populations. It is also important to note that no public access to broadband driven workstations is currently in place in Rabun Co. thus satisfying the the statutory purposes related to underserved/unserved areas. Proposed trainings address the BTOP statutory purpose focusing on improvement of the access to and use of broadband by public safety agencies. Combined, the PCCs will provide 15,250 visits annually; given the fact that it is estimated that each person using the facilities will visit five times on average, an estimated 9,150 total users will be served during the three-year project period. The Technology Works! management team is made up of Kim Ingram, CEO of Mountain Lakes and representative of the project’s fiscal agent, Sean Brady, Director of the Rabun County Chamber of Commerce and the Development Authority of Rabun County, and Steve Dougherty, President, North Georgia Technical College. This team has worked together in one aspect or another for several years. In addition, the team has outreach into supporting organizations that will only serve to strengthen the project over time. Resumes for each clearly demonstrate educational, professional and project specific readiness. In addition to demonstrating readiness from a project management perspective, Mountain Lakes, the lead applicant, and project partners also have the capacity and readiness to successfully carry out the proposed project from a logistical, partner and technological perspective. Mountain Lakes is committed to establishing the wellness center, and will soon begin completing the renovations necessary to do so. Given the fact that this process is underway at the time of BTOP application submission, Mountain Lakes leaders anticipate that construction will be complete just prior to the beginning of the grant funding period. Once a grant notification of award is received, Mountain Lakes
will be in the optimal phase of construction to install the requested equipment to establish the Mountain Lakes-based PCC. As such, Mountain Lakes is poised to initiate the action plan to achieve project objectives upon receipt of grant funds. 3 FTE jobs will be directly created as a result of the project. This total represents the project director and two facilitators that have been included in the project budget, and the federal funding request specifically; however, the project management team notes that, using the rule provided by the President's Council of Economic Advisors ($92,000 of government spending creates one job-year), the project will create 12 additional jobs. The project management team also estimates that 100 jobs will be induced, as industry relocates to the area to capitalize upon a more highly trained workforce. In order to effectively carry out project implementation plans, $1,097,091 is requested in federal funding; an additional $968,102 will be provided as in-kind/cash match contributions.