Executive Summary

The City of Philadelphia through its Philadelphia Freedom Rings Public Computing Center proposal will establish a network of 77 Public Computing Centers that will reach 14,513 of the most vulnerable citizens of Philadelphia weekly and expand broadband access to chronically underserved neighborhoods. We will invest in a coordinated system utilizing city facilities and identified nonprofits in challenged neighborhoods to develop a network of Public Computing Centers to provide broadband access to our poorest citizens. Statement of the Problem: Philadelphia is a city challenged by high poverty rates and dependence on public benefits. According to the U.S. Census, nearly 25% of individuals and more than 33% of children in Philadelphia live below the poverty level; in the most underserved neighborhoods targeted by this project, 38.6% of individuals and 41% of children live below the poverty level (see targeted area map in attachments). Nearly 15,000 are served in a year by the City's Office of Emergency Shelter and Services (http://www.projecthome.org/advocacy/facts.php). 52.5% of households in these sections of the city report that they do not have access to the Internet at home compared with 41% of residents in the city as a whole. In a city of 1.5 million people, nearly half of Philadelphia residents cannot afford broadband Internet access in their own homes or lack stable housing with which to have a place to access the Internet. According to the Pew Internet and American Life project, African-Americans, Hispanics and those making under $30,000 a year continue to lag in Internet adoption rates with broadband in the home at or under 50% (http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Internet-broadband-and-cell-phone-statistics.aspx?r=1). These statistics mirror the demographics of those left behind in the digital divide in Philadelphia; 36% of Philadelphians make at or under $25,000, 54% of those living below the poverty line are African-American, and 18% are Latino. Together, they make up 72% of Philadelphians living below the poverty line. When Internet access is essential to find and apply for jobs, access public benefits, find health information, complete schoolwork, and participate in civic life, these families are being left behind. To get these families access to broadband, a viable strategy must include Public Computing Centers that can provide staffing, training, and support for those who need it. Proposed Approach to Addressing the Need: The City of Philadelphia, with key partners who serve poor and disenfranchised communities, seeks to address the increasing divide between those with access to the Internet and those without by creating a PCC network that will reach the most vulnerable populations in Philadelphia. Our partners have substantial experience addressing the digital divide, and currently serve citizens who do not have the resources in their own homes to access broadband. This project will be organized around two City agencies, The Recreation Department and The Free Library of Philadelphia; with four sub-recipients that are well-established community organizations. These are Philadelphia FIGHT, People's Emergency
Center, the Philadelphia OIC, and the Media Mobilizing Project. Under the guidance of the City of Philadelphia, these partners will increase capacity of 25 already existing PCCs, create 48 new PCCs, provide 4 mobile computing units, add 819 new computers overall in this proposal, increase the hours available to Philadelphia residents by 15 hours on average during the week and 3 hours on average during the weekend, and serve an additional 14,513 users weekly. The 77 sites to be enhanced or created include a mix of anchor institutions such as 19 recreation centers, 10 homeless shelters and 15 other affordable housing sites, 29 community-based organization sites working with high-risk populations, and 4 mobile computing labs to reach those sites that have neither the space or capacity to house a PCC at their locations. Through these collaborations, underserved Philadelphians will have improved access to the Internet at trusted locations where they already receive services, and can use the organizational capacity that already exists to help them become experienced digital citizens. Areas to be served: This project will place the majority of Public Computing Centers in the neighborhoods that have the least access to broadband Internet, namely, North, West, and South Philadelphia. North Philadelphia continues to be among the most underserved sections of the city, with 34.1% of the people in the following zip codes 19121 19122 19123 19124 19130 19132 19133 19134 19140 19141 and 19144, living below the poverty line. While 57.9% in this area overall is African-American, certain areas targeted by this project are over 80% African-American. Likewise, 19.4 % overall in this region are Hispanic but in some chronically poor areas the Hispanic population is over 40%. Overall under 50% of the households have access to the Internet. We will add or enhance 32 PCCs in this region and we estimate an additional 8402 North Philadelphians will use these facilities on weekly basis. West Philadelphia includes the following zip codes 19104 19131 19139 19142 and 19143 with a total of 28% of the people living below the poverty line. This region is 75.9% African-American. This project will add or enhance 21 PCCs in this region, where there is less than 40% Internet access in the homes. We estimate an additional 3313 West Philadelphians will use these facilities weekly. South Philadelphia including zip codes 19146 and 19145 has 27.6% living below the poverty line. This region is 54% African-American and under 40% of the households have Internet access. This project will add or enhance 8 PCCs and we estimate an additional 1189 South Philadelphians will use these facilities weekly. 12 sites with city-wide reach are included because they serve highly impacted populations in a variety of settings. These organizations serve at-risk youth, homeless individuals, people with disabilities or the elderly. Their populations are among the least likely to have Internet access and we estimate an additional, 1609 Philadelphians will use these facilities on a weekly basis. Qualifications of the applicant: The City of Philadelphia operates on a budget of approximately $4 billion per year and is clearly organizationally qualified and experienced in large scale implementation projects. Specifically, the applicant for this grant, the City's Division of Technology, provides information technology guidance and support for all city technology systems and investment, including a fully functioning Program Management Office responsible for implementing large scale city technology projects. The management team identified within the Division of Technology is actively working on several large scale projects, one of which includes a build out of the City's video surveillance system. Additionally, the management team is involved in a consolidation of information technology resources across city agencies intended to create a more coordinated and efficient manner of providing technology services. The City also brings a large and experienced financial services group that is familiar with the reporting requirements for federal grants. The key partners were selected because of their experience and commitment to
addressing the digital divide in underserved communities and will be represented on a Freedom Rings Advisory Council, which will work to fulfill the grant obligations. These partners will be subject to compliance with local contracting requirements (Philadelphia code, chapter 17-1400) upon receipt of funding award. In selecting our partners, we assured that people in communities would have access to a variety of PCC sites, in familiar locations, overseen by trusted community based institutions. We partnered with The Free Library of Philadelphia, with nearly 6.5 visits annually and 584,000 registered borrowers and the Department of Recreation which operates 150 staffed facilities across the city and served 640,951 last year. We reached out to experienced community providers of Internet services, including Philadelphia FIGHT focused on health literacy, Media Mobilizing Project focused on media production and young people, OIC focused on job training, and PEC focused on helping homeless families become self sufficient. These partners provide a range of options to access our 73 community and 4 mobile computer labs. Through this project 91 jobs will be created, of which 12 will be full time and 78 will be part-time positions. Total Cost of the Project is: $9,682,765