Delaware is the corporate capital of the world and hosts some of the largest corporations in many industries, including banking, pharmaceuticals, car manufacturing, and energy. In good economic times this contributes to jobs and healthy economic returns to the state, but takes a particularly drastic toll on people's jobs and the state's tax revenues in an economic downturn. With the collapse of the banking industry, and the closings of car manufacturing and power plants, Delaware has seen an unprecedented job loss. Now more than ever, Delaware's libraries find themselves on the frontline for people seeking help. The Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL) will establish comprehensive Job/Learning Labs in libraries across the state by leveraging unique partnerships between libraries and social service organizations to combat unemployment through workforce development and educational programs. This initiative will ensure unprecedented levels of service to a wide spectrum of people in every community across the state. The Delaware Department of Labor has noted that 'Delaware's economy was essentially flat before falling off a cliff in the 4th quarter of 2008'. The situation has worsened with the loss of over 17,000 jobs in wholesale and retail trade, construction, and manufacturing between 2007 and 2009. Major sources of long-term employment, such as Valero Energy, Chrysler and GM plants, and INVISTA (a polymer/fiber producer), have closed, contributing to unemployment rates of up to 12.1% in some areas. Many recently displaced workers struggle to adapt to a 21st century job market, in which computer skills and technological literacy are critical to success. The situation is even worse for adults with low literacy and education levels. The Bureau of Labor Statistics noted a direct correlation between literacy and employment/income while the US Department of Education found 27 million adults cannot read well enough to complete a job application. Nationwide, only 57% of people with less than a high school education are employed, versus 85% of those with post-secondary training or education. With 68,000 functionally illiterate Delawareans, DDL believes a renewed focus on basic education and training can help develop a more skilled workforce that is better able to compete in the future. DDL will proactively combat unemployment and low literacy by creating job training and education centers called Job/Learning Labs in 4 anchor libraries located in the most economically underserved areas, in the Dover, Georgetown, Seaford, and Wilmington libraries, with specific scheduled sessions for job and educational activities. To reach pockets of the population that cannot access the anchor Labs, DDL will leverage and extend the job/learning content and assets from the anchor labs to the remaining 28 satellite PCCs at nominal cost to reach a statewide audience. DDL's Job/Learning Labs are an ideal candidate for BTOP funding as they not only provide broadband access, training, equipment, and awareness to vulnerable and potentially underserved populations, but also focus specifically on improving workforce skills, thereby stimulating demand for economic growth and job creation. This
The project is not a new idea but part of DDL's master plan for libraries; DDL has simply lacked the funding to begin. In December 2008, DDL and the Delaware Council on Libraries convened the Delaware Library Summit to identify critical issues in the areas of economic development, lifelong learning, and health. Recommendations from the summit are in part responsible for driving the services proposed in this BTOP project. While Delaware has a strong history of introducing and implementing statewide enhancements to library services, the recent growth of unemployment and underemployment coincides with severe decreases in DDL's budget, which have prevented it from fully implementing an approach to address the economic crisis. DDL staffing has been cut from 22 FTEs to 15 FTEs in the past 2 years. Training programs and online databases have been cut at a time when needed most. Without federal assistance, DDL lacks the resources to provide the proposed services. This project model expands on Delaware's successful Consumer Health Librarians model, where a librarian is headquartered in a library in each county but provides services (e.g., workshops for staff, public programming, informational brochures, collection development) to all other libraries in the county. In this project, the central Job/Learning Lab locations have been selected based on the demographics of greatest need; as the need also exists throughout the state, PCC services will be available at every library. The Librarians headquartered at the anchor Labs will coordinate services among the satellite libraries in the corresponding county and among the other Job/Learning Labs in the state. DDL is working with a number of partners in both the public and private sector to develop and deliver a robust schedule of training programs and educational activities. These partners will be providing trainers and programs for DDL's BTOP project, thereby allowing them to impact more people at minimum cost. DDL leveraged partnerships through its Community Resources Exchange, but needs this grant to develop and dedicate the tools and services necessary to support the libraries and partners in combating the crisis. The 4 PCC anchor locations are in areas of high need and have the capabilities and space needed to impact a broad swath of the population. All 4 cities have median household incomes that are 8-19% below the 2004 US average of $44,684. The main school districts of Dover, Seaford, and Wilmington rank first in their counties for high school dropout rates (7% in Dover, 9% in Seaford, and 11% in Wilmington versus a US average of 4%; Georgetown's rate is 4%), indicating that there is a large target market for educational programs. Unemployment in all 4 cities is elevated, with Wilmington the highest at 12.1%. Although the focus will be on the 4 anchor Labs, DDL will cover the entire library service area population of 749,279 people. Of these, DDL currently serves about 425,390 people. Based on the increase in PCs, training and educational programs offered, and outreach efforts, DDL believes this project will serve an incremental 138,000 people over 3 years, bringing the annual number of people served to 471,390 (an 11% increase). However, given the size of the target market and the fact that DDL will be providing services across the state, particularly to audiences who may not be traditional library users, this number could be significantly higher. Services at the Labs will include wireless Internet access, robust videoconferencing units, additional PCs without time limits, and workforce development (e.g., 'sum' writing and interviewing skills) and educational training courses (e.g., computer literacy). Dedicated staff at the 4 anchor Labs will be responsible for scheduling and providing training sessions at the 28 satellite PCCs as well. The 28 satellite PCCs will receive WiFi hot spots and desktop USB videoconferencing units to enable access to content from the Labs. DDL's project will create 31 jobs, of which 6 are directly employed contractors, 14 are indirect jobs, and 11 are induced jobs. In addition, DDL is leveraging partner training programs, which will provide the equivalent of 7.5 FTEs each year based on the number
of hours of workforce development and educational training provided at each anchor Lab. Volunteers from Retired Senior Volunteer Project will assist in the PCCs. Volunteers have not been counted as jobs saved or created for the purpose of this project. DDL's total project cost is $2,908,023 over 3 years. DDL is providing matching funds of $1,008,094 (34.7%), with a federal grant request of $1,899,929. Where possible, DDL has based its project budget on actual costs and has strived to maintain the optimal balance between quality and cost-effectiveness. DDL has a long history of implementing complex projects combining technological and human resources statewide and is fully prepared to execute the proposed Job/Learning Labs project. Delaware has been a leader among states in the availability of broadband to all libraries at over 10 Mbps, a key growth driver for the state as well as a model for other states to follow. Where DDL falls short, and what this application seeks to address, is expanding technological proficiency and broadband adoption to prepare the workforce for the evolving job market. This application will help cultivate additional technology elements to stay ahead of the curve. The state of Delaware is seeking effective ways to help Delawareans in need get back on their feet; DDL believes this proposal will help steer Delaware into economic recovery.