Executive Summary

Problem Statement The City of Kerman and project partners proudly submit this Central Valley Connections-Public Computer Centers proposal. The project will create and/or enhance sixteen (16) computer centers that will provide critically needed, free access to high speed computers, education, job skills training, and capacity building activities for California's most impoverished rural residents. Public Computer Centers will be created in Kerman (population 12,737), Del Rey (population 1,059), Huron (population 7,606), Mendota (population 10,339), and Parlier (population 13,273). 9,453 (21%) of our residents are potential users who will be served at the 16 centers each year in the categories of outreach, education, health access, computer give away, and job skills development. The Public Policy Institute of California reports that nearly half of Latino households have no computers and more than half have no high-speed internet service. In California's rural Central Valley, where this Public Computer Centers project will be implemented, 92% of the targeted participants are Latino, and fewer than 30% of the rural Latino households have computers with high speed internet service. The Central Valley of California is considered the nation's bread basket, yet our families have the lowest per capita income, highest jobless rates, lowest adult education levels, lowest student achievement levels, and most limited access to technology and health services in California and the United States. Our 45,014 rural residents remain strapped to the fields and an Agricultural Era that has been decimated by water shortages, unemployment, poverty, hunger, and declining resources. California's unemployment rate is 11.6%. The jobless rate in Kerman is 18%; Del Rey's jobless rate is 22%; Huron's jobless rate is 16%; Mendota's jobless rate is 41%; and Parlier's jobless rate is 27%. According to the Rural Assistance Center, the average poverty rate for a rural community in California is 15.5%. Poverty rates in the project communities range from 29% (Kerman) to 60% (Mendota). Most of project participants are Hispanic (41,413 individuals or 92% of the total population). Fifty-one percent (51%) of our residents are limited English speakers. The percent of adults with less than a high school education ranges from 48% in Kerman to 61% in Mendota. Increasing adult education rates and decreasing illiteracy rates are key strategies that will result in economic survival and improved living conditions for our families. Poverty begets poverty. Low student achievement mirrors their home environment. Nearly 30% of kindergarten age children in our communities lack required immunizations and health screenings and are unable to enter school. Over 42% of those children who enter kindergarten from the communities where the Public Computer Centers will be established enter without the pre-requisite 'kindergarten readiness' and pre-literacy skills. These children fall further and further behind their peers and by grade 4 are already 3+ grades below level in math, language, and social development. The autism rate in the United States is 1 per 150. The autism rate in our communities is 1 in 95. Pesticide exposure is most often cited as the
cause. At 27%, the high school dropout rate of our students is higher than the 20% rate for California. Our 55% attrition rate of students in grades 6-12 is a more compelling story. According to the California Department of Education and Public Policy Institute of California, teen pregnancy rates in the California's Central Valley are 69 per 1,000 females, ages 15-19. These are the highest reported rates in California. The Central Valley is also at high health risk. State officials report that by 2015 there will be 17,000 fewer physicians than needed across California. In the Central Valley, the shortage of doctors with specialty training is especially acute. There are only 43 specialists for every 100,000 Valley residents. The statewide average is 87. Air quality in the Central Valley is the second worst in the United States. Nearly 17% of our children use inhalers, due to poor air quality and pesticide exposure. Our largely Hispanic communities have Type II diabetes rates that exceed the state and national average. Our rural communities are unable to attract physicians and health care professionals and have lower rates of available core health care services than neighboring cities and regions. Solution and Quantitative Description Developing a literate and skilled workforce is central to breaking the cycle of poverty in the Central Valley. Our focus is language and literacy development, education, employment development, health access, and computer based training that includes basic computer and telecommunications, as well as literacy and job skills training that are free and accessible in the centers through direct instruction and/or distance learning offered through project partners. California’s Central Valley is experiencing a rapid economic transition. Land that was once used to grow fruits and vegetables is being converted to solar harvesting plants and other renewable energy applications. These initiatives have displaced thousands of field laborers and will continue to do so. However, opportunities in the new job sectors will be available, for those who are qualified. Building a single small scale solar plant will employ over 100 individuals for a year. In addition, a thin film solar plant that generates 10 megawatts of power requires 270,000 modules and inverters, which must be assembled and installed. Our Public Computer Centers will prepare our residents for these jobs and place them in them. Salaries and wages will be higher than field labor, and living conditions and the quality of life for our children and families will improve. Income will be spent in the community, and sustain our small cities and towns. Partnerships in the Central Valley Connections-Public Computer Centers project are critical to our success. Partner contributions, which are delineated in the Budget Match, exceed the required 30% federal match. Partners are included on the Management Charts and in Letters of Commitment. Partnerships with the cities, I-5 Social Services, One Economy, United Health Centers, school districts, Fresno County Office of Education, State Community College District, and Workforce Training Providers will enable us to deliver a variety of technology and workforce training packages that will result in improved language development, increased health access, increased education levels, job skills training certification and employment. Child care will be provided at the centers, and a Rural Transit route will be added to support participant involvement. Home access to the Internet and computers will be provided through our 'give away' computer program for the lowest income rural dwellers (200 per year). Project sustainability will result at the end of the 24-month period, and each center will be managed by the city, partner agency, or school district. Our management plan and timeline closely integrate and monitor facilities development, continuous training and employment placement, marketing and promotion, and capacity building activities. Applicant Qualifications The City of Kerman is highly qualified to substantially complete the Central Valley Connections project within a 24-month period and fully complete the project within 24-months. Kerman is considered one of the greatest open space master planners in
California and the nation. Kerman has developed and maintained four 'Club Parks' in collaboration with business partners, community members, students, and Soroptimist, Lions, Rotary, and Kiwanis service organizations. Kerman has successfully completed major construction projects, in partnership with the State of California, Service Clubs, businesses, and community: $2 million city hall renovation; community center development; Kerman public library; $8 million sewer and water construction project (in progress); planning department (in progress); multiple city and community owned parks; developer supported recreation areas; 60-acres leveraged green belt; and the beautification of the downtown with Cal Trans and State. The City of Kerman and I-5 Social Services have worked in partnership providing child care, family support, food, literacy, housing, and transportation services since 1997. Jobs Saved or Created We estimate that 480 jobs will be created or saved through the project: 155 jobs will be created or saved during project development and implementation; 200 new jobs will be created in solar and other clean energy sectors; 45 jobs will be created or saved in service, retail, irrigation, transportation and other job sectors. Overall cost of the project: $12,425,751