a) Since our country’s founding, rural America has faced more economic challenges than urban areas. As more people migrated to cities, rural Americans found it difficult to compete for jobs and sustain education, medical and economic development opportunities. Federal and state governments, often through the US Department of Agriculture, addressed these issues through various programs. In the 1930s, the Rural Utilities Service was created to supply middle and last mile electrical power subsidies, bringing electricity to farms. Today, like electricity a century ago, broadband and telecommunications infrastructure are the modern missing links to open rural America to global business, telemedicine and education opportunities. Past federal and state initiatives served rural Georgia well for two generations. However, if rural regions are to effectively compete and access world markets and opportunities, they must have the technology and infrastructure necessary. We ask that the federal government continue its long-standing commitment to this Georgia region by investing not only in fiber infrastructure (as it has), but also in wireless infrastructure with no accessibility limitations. The Solution. The Georgia Rural Connection Alliance proposes to deliver 100 Megabyte broadband speeds to the region through wireless connectivity supported by new fiber backhaul so that residents of the region can access reliable, non-redundant high speed broadband. We propose to build 64 telecommunications towers in 28 economically challenged and underserved counties across Georgia. b) A 28 County Service Area. This middle mile telecommunications tower project will benefit a twenty-eight (28) county area with an estimated population of more than 483,313 people spread over 11,264 miles. The counties in these services areas are among the most economically distressed and vulnerable populations in Georgia. The first region is in southwest Georgia, including Sumter, Stewart, Randolph, Clay, Early, Decatur, Grady, and Thomas counties. The second region runs across middle and South Georgia, including Putnam, Baldwin, Wilkinson, Screven, Jenkins, Emanuel, Johnson, Laurens, Treutlen, Montgomery, Wheeler, Jeff Davis, Telfair, Dodge, Wilcox, Ben Hill, Irwin, Turner, Crisp, and Dooly counties. The total population of the southwest Georgia region is 161,639. Median household income ranges from $21,448 (Clay) to $31,115 (Thomas); families below the poverty level range from 28.1% (Clay) to 13.6% (Thomas). Thus, the average percentage of families below the poverty level in the region (18.7%) is 9.5% greater than the national average (9.2%) with a rate of familial poverty 203% greater than the national average. The total population of the middle and South Georgia region is 315,921. Median household income ranges from $23,848 (Johnson) to $36,956 (Putnam); families below the poverty level range from 24.6% (Crisp) to 10.5% (Putnam). Thus, the average percentage of families below the poverty level in the region (17.5%) is 8.3% greater than the national average (9.2%) with a rate of familial poverty 203% greater than the national average. Our project covers 53 strategic anchor institutions including 9 county government
facilities, 11 community support facilities, 21 public schools, 5 technical institutions, colleges and universities and 4 hospitals while also supporting deployment of last-mile high speed broadband wireless coverage to 46,233 households, 7,328 businesses and 53 strategic anchor institutions. An Open Network GRCA is an open access network that features 64 interconnection points where independent services providers will be encouraged, on a non-discriminatory basis, to interconnect with the system in order to offer end users high speed broadband and wireless services. Initial interconnection will be provided through Verizon Wireless, which has entered into a Letter of Intent (LOI) with GRCA to offer affordable high speed broadband to households, businesses and anchors across the regions (See attached LOI). The agnostic multi-tenant telecommunication towers will provide an abundance of high speed broadband capacity through which consumers can access lawful internet content through their choice of service providers in compliance with FCC guidelines. An agnostic shared tower reduces the overhead cost for all wireless competitors to deploy their services. These towers will be constructed to maximize the number of wireless providers per tower while complying with all structural and zoning requirements. Residents and visitors in the region will have a choice of broadband providers, employing competitive economic forces to reduce prices to the level enjoyed in urban areas. Multi-provider towers create competition among wireless providers and service providers, offering the end user choices of internet applications and devices at competitive and affordable prices. g) Type of broadband system that will be deployed (network type and technology standard): Verizon Wireless has agreed, via a letter of intent, to locate on the towers to provide wireless broadband service to the communities. They intend to deploy their EVDo technology and eventually upgrade to LTE technology. Additionally, an enhanced breadth and speed of broadband systems would be facilitated by the erection of 64 cell towers in 28 counties. Construction of the towers will facilitate numerous technologies and services including but not limited to: Cellular voice and data services such as GSM, iDEN, UMTS, 1XRTT, EVDO, and LTE; Trunked Radio Services; WiMAX Data Services, including Streaming and VOIP services supported by WiMAX; Public Safety Communication Nodes, such as Police, Fire, and EMS Repeaters; Industrial and Motorist Safety Call Boxes (on Towers in Transportation Corridors); WiFi Hotspots at Rest Areas and Service Plazas; Broadband Data delivery via Microwave to Local Government, Hospitals, and Public Safety Offices; Acoustical Warning Devices such as Sirens and Horns for Catastrophic Events, such as Tornados, Hurricanes, Tsunamis, Floods, Toxic Contamination. h) The GRCA is well qualified and prepared to implement and operate the alliance in terms of both its organizational, management and operations team. GRCA is a united collaboration between CIG and WFI and several formal and informal alliance partners ranging from a national wireless carrier, Verizon Wireless, to telemedicine partnerships throughout the state, providing a strong, sustainable financial and technical cooperative and viable end user accessibility. CIG is an Atlanta-based developer of multi-provider communications infrastructure focused on telecommunications tower design, construction, acquisition and management. WFI is a broadly experienced network infrastructure design, deployment, program management, quality assurance and maintenance service provider. WFI has engineered and successfully, rapidly and cost-effectively developed more than $2 billion in telecom infrastructure since 1994. Verizon Wireless is a national wireless provider. For many years, each group has routinely engaged in the activities that will be required by the proposed project. In addition to contributing organizational resources and back office support to launch the project expeditiously, they have committed time and expertise of key individuals who will function as a management team for project activities. i) Overall infrastructure cost:
$11,926,848, with an equity contributions equal to 30% of the project costs. j) Overall expected subscriber projections: This project, in its first 8 years, will bring high speed broadband to rural locations across GA where high speed wireless broadband is limited to an estimated 21,958 households, 2,909 businesses, 38 strategic anchor institutions. k) Number of jobs estimated to be created: Based on published research on economics of broadband infrastructure construction, GRCA estimates each tower (64) will directly create or sustain at least 50 jobs per year in each of the two years of the projects' phases. The project will directly stimulate economic growth and job creation by: 1) Directly creating demand for the manufacture of 64 towers and the equipment associated with their operation; 2) Directly creating demand for the installation of 64 towers, including the transport and installation of the towers and components, land clearing and providing access and utilities to the site; and 3) Directly creating demand for ongoing expansion (adding service providers) and ongoing tower maintenance. Therefore, our project will generate an estimated 3,200 direct jobs and 3,200 indirect jobs. Furthermore, an estimated 5,000 regional professional service jobs will be created within the small business community and anchor institutions which currently have difficulty attracting and sustaining jobs.