CONNECT UP FOR RECOVERY: Increased bandwidth, public access to the internet, and digital literacy trainings are the key ingredients of a recovery formula for an 8,000-square mile region in southern Nevada, home to residents of the Las Vegas metro area and remote rural communities. This proposal develops and aligns a regional network of public computer centers and training and promotes connectivity as an effective way to connect people and businesses with tools for sustained economic recovery and reinvention. Statement of Problem: The Southern Nevada Computer Center Coalition project, CONNECT UP FOR RECOVERY, addresses the two major problems with broadband connectivity in the 8,000 sq. mile region: 1) the lack of or slow connectivity in 17 remote rural communities, and 2) the low and dropping levels of broadband adoption among the 1.7 million residents living in metro Las Vegas. Regional rural and tribal connectivity, including critical public safety and community anchor institutions, is currently costly, slow and often unavailable. Urban areas, which have traditionally seen low adoption rates due to low education and low income levels, are now seeing the phenomenon the FCC calls 'un-adoption,' where adoption rates fall further due to households in economic distress. High rates of foreclosures are evident across all the metro area, the unemployment rate is now rising above 13.8%, a precipitous decline in property valuations have hit over 75% of homeowners, tax revenues have plummeted to 2002 levels, and it does not appear that the region has hit bottom. Other challenges to broadband adoption are low adult literacy levels, a recent rapid influx of Spanish-speaking and other immigrants, and the predominance of service and construction sector jobs, and generally low levels of digital literacy in the workforce. This project is designed to close the gap between rural and metro broadband availability and adoption, and expand public access to computers, training, and critical broadband-based communications, with the goal of infusing digital proficiencies quickly and broadly throughout the region. An Effective Approach. The CONNECT UP FOR RECOVERY project significantly expands and strengthens regional connectivity to the leading driver for next-generation communications, education, employment, business development, health, and government services broadband infrastructure. The project builds to scale with demand in 43 existing public computer centers to provide over 3 million public access sessions and 208 trainings on a wide menu of topics. With increased center speeds, number of devices, digital resources and training, this inclusion strategy ensures that regional residents without access at home or businesses will have a neighborhood source of access to the net. Building on the training expertise and resources of Coalition partners and contractors, broadband introduction and instruction to minority, low-income, low-education and immigrant populations will be expanded broadly, building proficiency by pairing advanced skill training with employment, education, health, and entrepreneurial applications. Project communication efforts
will build public awareness of new regional broadband resources. The outcomes envisioned are the evolution of a robust, sustainable network of regional agencies with expanded capacity for effective training, and a population with increased knowledge, use and proficiency in broadband applications. The project’s estimated number of users during the first years is 3,177,200 people base on an average 52.3 hours per week and 10.8 hours per weekend of computer use. This estimate is a system capacity analysis for the potential users for 356 computer workstation and 206 laptops. The projected total population to be served by the project is 4,058,265 people. This projection is a combination of estimated number of users of computers and the estimated percentage of users of the expanded network being proposed by the project. Qualifications of the Coalition Partners: The Urban League, as lead partner, brings extensive experience of providing job readiness, search and placement services to unemployed, marginally employed and disabled people. The League will expand capacity at its Owens center and 2 North Las Vegas centers, and will provide a website hub for sharing project knowledge, including instruction on training curricula and a wiki of trainings to enhance the cross-fertilization of agency training capacity. The Library, with over 630,000 card holders, 6 million visits to facilities, 7,000 training sessions each year, and over 2 million hits a year on its website, has a strong foundation for building a broader base of digital proficiency. With public access computers available in 24 facilities, 7 days/week, additional speed, wifi coverage, 587 new or replacement public access devices, an experienced cadre of trainers and a vast collection of digital resources, the Library offers instruction for beginners and advanced topics related to health, housing, e-commerce, financial literacy, job search, business development, homework help, access to e-government services, and English language instruction. Upgrades to 16 County rec, community and senior centers with 107 workstations, 31 trainers and computer center monitors, will provide further broad diffusion of access and use among youth and seniors. The Southern Nevada College, Clark County School District, and Southern Nevada Health District will provide train the trainer instruction on curricula related to online learning, student achievement, career and job search, health issues, and certifications, along with assessment instruments for a variety of populations ranging from those without digital skills to early career professionals. All of these agencies have deep roots in the community, long-standing relationships with regional agencies and community leaders, deep knowledge of working with vulnerable populations, and, by connected up in a network to cross-train and improve services by sharing experiences on what works, the ability to significantly diffuse new skills throughout the region. All have the ability to mobilize communications through their reach in the community and their long-standing marketing relations with print and broadcast media to promote awareness and spread stories about the value of new broadband resources. The project creates 88 jobs and will save an additional 46 jobs. A requested 14 full-time positions and 66 part time positions to service the 43 sites are proposed. The project cost is $9,347,228 plus a 48.6% match of $8,837,761., for a grand total of $18,184,989 for the three years of operation. Based on these figures and the anticipated total clients served by the project over the 3 years, an estimated cost of $1.78 per client is realized. This project will incorporate other community computer centers resources and staffing to ensure maximum efficiency in its implementation and operation.