DeKalb County is Georgia's most urban and international county (Georgia Chamber of Commerce Annual Report, 2005). This low income urban community has three critical needs: 1) access to broadband for information; 2) electronic access to high quality education for students and education and job skills training for the adult community; 3) internet access for senior citizens. DeKalb faces low graduation rates, limited access to advanced academic curriculum, double-digit unemployment, diminished pools of qualified job applicants, limited access to health care information, unprecedented foreclosure rates, increased crime, and an influx of refugee and immigrant families. According to the World Relief Center, DeKalb is home to more refugee and immigrant children than anywhere else in the free world. The community is urban, international, and struggling. The impact of the current economic situation reaches into the home, classroom, office, factory, courtroom, and medical facility. Lack of broadband access due to economic factors has increased since 2007 as evidenced by the number of students enrolling in after school activities to do homework and projects that require internet access that they do not have at home. This vision is a comprehensive community approach that represents a collaborative of government, businesses, industries, community colleges, and the DeKalb County School System (DCSS) that maximizes resources by leveraging partner's contribution and building on existing infrastructure. DeKalb Public Computer Centers (DPCC) will be strategically located in the four highest need communities in the county in three high schools and one healthcare center, all on mass transit lines. These are the county's lowest income, underachieving, and underserved communities. DPCCs will provide access to broadband education, awareness, training, services, equipment, and support to all community members year round during the day, evening, and weekend, with childcare provided. DPCCs will offer classes, training, and tutoring and such courses as online PC skills, GED, ESOL, and job skills including 37 industry certification-level courses. DPCCs will provide open and unscheduled access to individuals for personal and professional use for other critical needs such as access to health and safety information. DCSS administered a community needs assessment, compiled demographic data, and analyzed community economic-dependent trends. This proposal addresses meeting clearly identified comprehensive community needs through a strategic plan that takes into consideration the reality of the community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to these needs. The collaboration, strategically-focused and accountable to many stakeholders, proposes a data-driven plan that includes effective leadership, a research-based array of services, a reasonable budget to provide adequate resources and support, and a communication and dissemination strategy for stakeholders and others who want to replicate the program. Standards set include performance, practices, capabilities, and results; communication and sharing of best practices across the nation; diagnostic tools for
understanding and managing program effectiveness; and collaborative planning for sustainability. DPCCs will serve the county's four most densely populated and underserved communities. The project will serve 149,000 residents who speak more than 136 languages and as many as 5,000 residents from outside the county. The percentage of children and families living in poverty is 18% (ranging from 13% to 22%) exceeding the State average (12%) and the national average (13%). Unemployment rates average 25% and foreclosure rates have increased up to 400% in one year. With year-round day and evening access, each center will be able to provide broadband access to more than 4,000 people per year who, without federal funding, would not have access to the information and services proposed in this application. DCSS is a highly qualified applicant. The district, a Local Education Agency (LEA) in GA, has no legal judgments against it and operates in compliance with state, local, and federal laws and regulations. DCSS has successfully managed $93 million in grants specifically focused on educational technology and community technology centers since 1990. From 1990- 2004 DCSS created and implemented the Family Technology Resource Center (FTRC) program in 16 school and community locations. In 1994 the FTRCs were permanently placed in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History for innovative use of information technology to produce positive social, economic, and educational change. Successfully sustained as Parent and Community Resource Centers, 11 sites include more partners and programs for students, families, and community. Previous success in them includes 60% increase in access to technology; 100% increase in access to and demand for broadband; expanded community collaboration; increased post secondary employment; improved technology skills; increased academic performance in science, reading, and math; and improved employment status. BTOP funding will allow expansion to six more communities. This proposal focuses on the immediate need to save and create jobs and the long term goal to better prepare students and the community for post secondary education and employment. To efficiently and effectively implement this program, 59 jobs will be created and 10 will be saved. Employable skills and access to information will be enhanced for the 27,170 community participants and 3,833 students and their teachers thus enriching and stabilizing families and communities. The overall cost of this project which advances 4 BTOP statutory purposes is realistic and reasonable. Over three years, this provides 30,973 people broadband access for $2,990,747.80 - less than $97 per person a year.