The New Jersey State Library (NJSL), an affiliate of Thomas Edison State College, is the lead applicant for 'New Jersey Libraries-Anchor Institutions as Instruments of Recovery', with partners from the New Jersey public library community, government and non-profit agencies and telecommunications vendors. The State Library's mission is to ‘connect people with information through its service to libraries, government and people with special needs.’ For this project, NJSL is requesting funding under the Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) in the Public Computing Center (PCC) category to establish job-creating facilities at public libraries in New Jersey. New Jersey has been hit particularly hard by the recession, with employment losses in 2009 totaling 90,100. By December 2009, New Jersey's unemployment rate rose to a 33-year high of 10.1%, which is up from 6.8% in December 2008. In addition, many residents are struggling to adapt to a 21st century job market, in which computer access and the availability of high-speed broadband are requirements for job search, employment application and workforce skills training. Yet, in 77.8% of New Jersey communities, the public library is the only place that offers free use of computers and Internet access to the public. Despite the public dependency on libraries for this connectivity, many are unable to keep pace with the demand for public access.

NJSL's approach to addressing the unemployment problem is to offer job search assistance, employment skills and workforce development programs at libraries across the state. These programs will be offered in partnership with the New Jersey Council of County Colleges' Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development (The Consortium) and the New Jersey Network (NJN), the public broadcasting and radio station in New Jersey. NJSL is partnering with The Consortium to deliver professional development training modules to library staff across the state. The focus of these professional development sessions will be on providing library staff with tools that will help them assist their patrons with conducting their own online job searches and workforce skills improvement. The Consortium will also deliver workforce-focused courses in basic computer skills needed by every job applicant today including proficiency in Microsoft Windows, Word, Outlook and the Internet. Trainings will be provided directly to library patrons through 8 mobile training centers. Each mobile training center includes 16 laptop computers and 1 projector and will travel with a Consortium trainer to public libraries. The centers will provide job readiness computer trainings to vulnerable populations including the unemployed and underemployed, which includes those who can only find part-time work and those highly skilled workers in low-wage jobs. Library staff is currently overwhelmed with the number of individuals seeking job assistance in their libraries, and these training centers will seek to make library patrons more self-sufficient and better prepared for the workforce. NJSL estimates 12,800 patrons will attend the training programs and make use of the computers. In addition to these training programs, NJN, in cooperation with the
Department of Labor and Workforce Development, has developed specialized workplace skills and job training video content specifically for New Jersey residents. As part of this project, NJN will make this content accessible for patrons at 365 participating libraries. NJSL will also provide access to Learning Express' Job & Career Accelerator, the industry's most comprehensive, online job search system. In order to provide access to these programs, NJSL proposes adding 810 computers at 125 public libraries. These computers will be used by unemployed, underemployed and general library patrons to access job search assistance, employment skills and workforce development programs. NJSL estimates that adding these computers will enable New Jersey libraries to serve 22,587 additional computer users per week. To facilitate the job search assistance, employment skills and workforce development programs and support the new computers, 79 libraries with less than 10 Mbps of broadband access will be upgraded to Ethernet services. Specifically, local libraries will be upgraded through the JerseyConnect program. JerseyConnect currently delivers technology services to 276 public libraries in New Jersey, including broadband connectivity to 137. NJSL has extensive experience in managing innovative statewide grant projects of comparable size and complexity. One of the most significant examples is the New Jersey Knowledge Initiative, the first statewide program of its kind to provide electronic resources specifically directed towards supporting entrepreneurs, small business owners, researchers and students with information tools through Internet access to science, technology, medical and business resources. Funded by the State of New Jersey in 2005 at $6 million, NJSL was responsible for all aspects of the program-convening and advisory committee/task force, selecting electronic resources and negotiating contracts, ensuring remote access to these online databases and marketing the program to potential customers. As a result, the State Library was one of the national recipients of the Council of State Governments' Innovation Award in 2007. In addition to this unique project, the State Library manages over $4 million annually in federal Library Services and Technology Act funds in addition to other federal grants of over $2 million awarded in recent years by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). NJSL also administers over $7 million annually in per capita state aid to public libraries and oversees the State's library network consisting of over 2,000 multi-type libraries. NJSL believes this project is an ideal approach to addressing New Jersey's economic challenges and is aligned with the BTOP statutory purpose 'to stimulate demand for broadband, economic growth, and job creation' as well as providing broadband education, awareness, training and access at libraries. The NJSL project will facilitate 'greater use of broadband services by vulnerable populations' and support job-creating facilities. These job-creating facilities, which NJSL describes as Instruments of Recovery, will be enabled by improved access to broadband connectivity. These facilities will serve the unemployed residents of New Jersey, which as of December 2009 numbered over 440,000. The total budget for the project over the three-year funding period is $7,503,792. NJSL is requesting $5,104,916 in federal funds with the remaining funded through cash and in-kind matches. Cash match has been provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with additional in-kind matches provided by NJN and NJSL. NJSL's proposal will have a significant impact on the state and the national economic environment with the project creating 82 jobs.