A. A statement of the problem: Ohio currently has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, 10.9% in December 2009. Some counties have unemployment as high as 17.5% (Morgan County). As unemployment skyrockets public libraries are seeing an increasing number of users. Public library funding has also decreased. Because the primary funding source for public libraries is the Public Library Fund, or 1.97% of the state's general revenue, the amount of funds going to public libraries is decreasing. Budget cuts have severely impacted libraries' abilities to replace old computers or purchase new ones. And, the high unemployment rates mean an increased demand for computer access which continues to stretch library resources. Libraries remain one of the few, if not the only, place providing no-fee access to the Internet. Thus these two factors, increased use and decreased funding, has led to a vast gap in the ability of public libraries to provide a reasonable amount of public access computers to their users. It is not only desktop computers which libraries need. Many libraries, because of space issues, rely on laptops for training purposes. They use laptop training labs which they can set-up in their meeting rooms. Other libraries take laptops to community centers, senior centers and other such facilities to provide services to targeted and special populations. The ConnectOhio patron survey indicated that 67% of those responding had to wait for a public access computer. Waiting is due to inadequate numbers of computers and outdated hardware. Heavy, continuous use results in rapid wear and tear and often leads to PCs that are down a significant percentage of the time. Currently Ohio is involved in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) Opportunity Online grant. This grant will provide 651 public access computers to 61 public library systems. However, many libraries were not found to be poverty eligible when the BMGF did their initial assessment in 2008. This was before the economy collapsed in the state. Many libraries, ineligible in 2008, now find themselves in dire need of additional computer access but do not have the resources available to purchase them. ConnectOhio, a nonprofit, technology-neutral public-private partnership in the state conducted a survey of the 251 public library systems in Ohio in January 2010. Their survey reinforced the anecdotal information of the State Library of Ohio, that there is a great need for additional PACs in Ohio public libraries. A companion survey, completed by 6,977 public library patrons further indicates a need for additional public access computers at libraries. Of the 251 public library systems, 89 indicated that they are able to provide a match and are ready to enhance their PACs at 330 outlets to meet growing community needs. The PACs will be used to deliver a wide range of services, including access to Learning Express Library and Job and Career Accelerator, two databases funded through the State Library which provide sample tests, resume and writing skills, and a wrap-around service to assist users in discovering where their talents lie and what type of preparation is needed for that career. Partnerships for this project exist with the Ohio
Public Library Information Network (OPLIN) and ConnectOhio. ConnectOhio is submitting a complementary application which will provide additional curriculum materials, training and public awareness to those libraries purchasing PACs. B. Overall approach to addressing the need. Libraries were asked to estimate, by outlet, the number of computers and laptops they would need to add/replace/upgrade to their existing systems to alleviate long wait times and to meet the needs of users. Details can be found in the PCC Summary section of this application. The State Library provides access to a wide range of databases and resources on a broad range of topics that would be of special interest to the un- and under-employed. In particular, the use of Learning Express Library and the Job and Career Accelerator will provide job-seekers much needed 21st century learning skills and the ability to focus on job skills and career building that will help them attain their maximum potential. OPLIN is the agency within the State Library which provides network access to all 251 public library systems to ensure equity of access to the Internet to all Ohio residents. OPLIN provides an Internet connection and Internet bandwidth to public library systems proportional to the library system's needs and connects them to a backbone of broadband telecommunications. C. Area(s) to be served: The 89 library systems are spread across the state covering urban, suburban, and rural areas. All of the libraries included have indicated that there is a significant need in their facilities for increased access to public computers. The population served is from all ethnicity, age, income, and educational levels. The overall population served by the libraries in this grant is about 6,531,500. D. Qualifications of the applicants: The State Library of Ohio is well placed to implement the project and achieve the stated results. Each year the State Library administers Library Services and Technology Act funding. Around 5.5 million dollars a year are distributed to statewide projects and to competitive grants. Additionally, the State Library has, in the last five years, administered three Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) grants. Currently the BMGF Opportunity Online grant is being successfully implemented in Ohio. An Institute of Museum and Library Services Connecting to Collections Planning Grant is about to enter its second year. Finally, the State Library contracts with eTech Ohio to provide training and support for E-Rate applicants. E. Jobs to be saved or created: Although expanding public computer access, providing better bandwidth and linking users to key resources will not directly create jobs, access to Learning Express Library, LearnATest, and Job and Career Accelerator will improve opportunities to successfully gain employment. Thus, there will be an indirect positive impact. Access to these resources and expanded training are key components to sustaining the communities and stimulating long-term economic growth. Adding public access computers in public libraries is a return on investment for the community.