In 2009, The Hispanic Information and Telecommunications Network (HITN) submitted a highly qualified application which entered the due diligence review for NOFA1 of the BTOP SBA program. Unfortunately, the project was not funded. This application has refined our previous proposal by reducing the number of sites in the project, enhancing the match and better describing the project's approach to specifically address issues related to scalability and sustainability raised in the first review. HITN has also reviewed the revised rules and guidance to address program changes since NOFA1. The NY CBO Connect project is made up of 21 public virtual learning centers housed at targeted neighborhood locations of America's 'go to' organizations which serve the Hispanic community. Each Community Based Organization (CBO) has 15 to 25 computers for public use as part of a 21st century classroom with video conferencing, digital smart boards and other educational devices. All sites are staffed with trained instructors to support an online and distance learning curriculum designed to stimulate broadband adoption. The project will leverage HITN's existing public interest educational television network to promote broadband adoption and generate content to share among CBO Connect sites. The program will directly create jobs and help participants gain skills to secure jobs, improve their skills and expand their earning power. HITN currently operates 5 CBO Connect sites with plans to implement an additional 15 CBOs and one Long Island HITN location by September 2010. Funding for infrastructure has largely been secured through NY state legislators who have committed capital funds to support the CBO Connect program in their districts. This project is shovel-ready. Funding from NTIA would finance program content to be delivered over the CBO Connect network and staffing for the learning centers to rapidly serve vulnerable populations in NY. Over time, the learning centers will generate income from tuition, sponsorship and donations to become sustainable well beyond the grant period. HITN is an active participant of the NYC Broadband Advisory Committee where a NYC Study identified 'the lack of affordable computers and the cost of Internet access' as the most commonly cited reason for not having home internet service in low income neighborhoods. Similar studies demonstrate that computer literacy and language/cultural barriers, as well as presenting a convincing broadband value proposition are major reasons more Hispanics are not online. Therefore, overcoming these barriers is critical to the success of a broadband adoption strategy. This project addresses these issues by providing free broadband access to the community at the CBOs, establishing a computer and broadband services loan program, and combining a high-tech classroom learning experience with relevant content (social, economic, health, educational and job training) to create a value proposition for Latinos to adopt broadband technologies in order to maintain access to these benefits. HITN has established partnerships with the largest Hispanic organizations (US Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
(HACU), Hispanic Federation and others to stimulate broadband demand and to educate and empower Latino communities. HITN has formed similar alliances with over 250 CBOs around the country, demonstrating that this project can be replicated broadly. However, this application focuses on 21 CBOs in the State of New York where HITN has obtained legislative funding to implement 21st Century classrooms as part of the CBO Connect program. These CBOs are located in communities with high concentrations of Hispanics and share the following serving area profile: 1) Hispanic households with a broadband penetration level of less than 40% 2) Median income of $35K to $50K or less 3) Median education level is high school or lower 4) Higher unemployment levels than the national average. HITN will use its educational television network to further expand the broadband adoption message with specially created programs and Public Service Announcements to its viewing audience of over 30 million households. A compelling aspect of CBO Connect is its ability to allow the CBOs to receive and push content to HITN, to their members and other CBOs. This provides a continuous stream of broadband content and innovation for participating organizations to use broadband and encourage adoption among their members. HITN has the operational experience and the organizational capability to successfully execute and sustain this project. HITN is the First Public Service Media Network for Latinos, established in 1983 as a non-profit organization with a mission to advance the educational, cultural, and socio-economic aspirations of Hispanics in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. HITN is also the largest holder of EBS spectrum (utilized for WiMax broadband services) in the United States. No other Hispanic focused organization combines the unique ability to reach this growing population through a multimedia combination of TV broadcasting, the Internet, and community based initiatives. Since 1996, HITN has deployed distance education programs to schools and libraries serving thousands of students and residents in Puerto Rico. In 2009, within a span of 8 weeks, HITN mobilized a national network of CBOs to conduct 2,400 workshops and trained over 28,000 individuals on the analog-to-digital DTV transition. Lastly, HITN is currently operating a NY Department of Labor grant by using existing CBO Connect members to train transitional workers in NY State. The Federal Grant request for this proposal is $4,662,688 (with a 42% match of $3,363,721) to change and improve the lives of 21,000 CBO Connect annual participants and thousands of HITN-TV viewers. In order to implement and operate this program, HITN will increase its staff with 25 full time equivalent employees.