Executive Summary

A. Problem/Need Statement South Carolina faces tremendous challenges: a damaged economy, a struggling education system, poor health among its neediest residents and communities in crisis. South Carolina also has the second lowest rate of broadband access in the nation at only 39.1% of households (US Census Bureau, Internet and Computer Use Supplement to the Current Population Survey, 2007). Lack of access to broadband is compounded by these challenges: 12.6% unemployment rate, the 4th highest unemployment in the nation (US Dept. of Labor, BLS Statistics, Jan. 2010) 6th lowest per capita income in US at $31,884 (US Bureau of Econ. Analysis, Mar. 2009) 56.5% of entering 9th graders graduating from high school, (47th in US) 30% obesity rate, the 5th highest in US (Centers for Disease Control 2008) 21.5% of children living in poverty, the 10th highest in the nation. (American Communities Survey, 2007) 1st in US in violent crime, with 788 offenses per 100,000 population (Crime in the US, 2007, FBI) South Carolina must deploy extraordinary resources to combat the combined quality of life issues presented by high unemployment, low high school graduation rates, poor health outcomes, and families struggling to survive on low incomes. Broadband is a powerful tool for providing workforce development programs, education, and healthcare information. However, without access to technology or assistance with using the technology, the people that stand to benefit the most from broadband are the least likely to gain, specifically low-income, rural, elderly, disabled, and minority populations. As community anchor institutions, the SC REACH OUT Colleges are extremely well positioned to provide expanded broadband access and outreach, but the lack of financial resources is the obstacle. South Carolina has been particularly hard-hit by the economic downturn. Within the past two years the state has cut allocations to our Colleges by 31.2% These cuts have forced the Colleges to postpone replacements of technology equipment and reduce or eliminate service contracts. The Round 1 proposal went a long way toward providing the necessary resources for broadband expansions, however Colleges have little or no room in their budgets to support additional bandwidth, innovative approaches, or the technology required to provide the kind of outreach and awareness which are desperately needed in SC. Outreach programs to provide access, awareness and adoption are critical first steps toward improving the health, education and economic development in South Carolina. B. Overall Approach The SC Technical and Community College System, comprised of sixteen comprehensive community colleges, has developed a broad-based approach to expanding broadband access to rural, underserved and unserved areas of South Carolina. This proposal builds on the SC REACH FOR SUCCESS PCC proposal funded in Round 1 to stimulate broadband access, awareness and adoption. Together, these initiatives will significantly enhance South Carolina communities' health, education and economies, so that all South Carolinians can achieve successful futures. SC REACH FOR SUCCESS is a comprehensive approach to
addressing the lack of broadband access, awareness and adoption in South Carolina. Because of the low rate of broadband access in SC households, SC REACH OUT will expand access through additional training centers and in trusted community locations through mobile networks. SC REACH OUT will focus on bringing access directly to underserved communities in settings that are physically, culturally, and financially accessible with unique flexibility to meet the needs of each community and targeted population. This will be achieved by: SC TECH REACH Portal: a web site that will host resources and training materials and direct users to programs for special populations and the general public by location; the Portal will serve as the hub of the project's outreach and awareness activities. The REACH Portal will be used by all components of this proposal as well as the components of the Round 1 funded proposal. PCC Classrooms on a Cart: Each college will host one or more mobile computing centers for outreach to the most rural, underserved and vulnerable populations of the service areas (see map in uploads). These additional PCCs will complete the build-out of the statewide network of 19 new and 70 existing PCCs funded in Round 1. REACH OUT Mobile Classroom demonstration project: a self-contained mobile computing classroom which will serve target populations and in unserved and underserved areas. Doubling the number of access points in most high need counties. Expanding access points in other underserved locations. Providing faculty and staff to assist users and provide educational sessions that are free to help overcome the barrier of insufficient training or expertise among potential users. Expanding the original public awareness and outreach campaign to new partners, including SC ETV network; activities will include a variety of radio and print marketing tools, in-person workshops and online training opportunities. Increased bandwidth and expanded access for Colleges to provide further broadband improvements for PCCs as well as credit and continuing education students. Nearly a quarter of a million strong, the SC Technical and Community Colleges' students, many of whom are socially and economically disadvantaged, are a key target population for this project-both as users and as ambassadors to their families, friends and co-workers. C. Areas and populations served (with demographic information) estimated number of potential users. A demographic profile of the users will most likely mirror the state's overall population demographics. In 2008, the ethnic composition in South Carolina included 65.2% white, 28.1% African-American, 4.1% Hispanic, and 2.6% other races (US Census Bureau estimates). The expanded access for Colleges will reflect the student population of South Carolina Technical College System, which serves 114,000 credit students and 128,000 continuing education students. Of students enrolled in the fall 2008 semester, 49.1% received federal Pell Grant assistance and 40% of credit students were minorities. We estimate the number of potential new users of the PCC Carts, REACH MC and the expanded PCCs statewide will be more than 17,121 per year. D: Qualifications demonstrating ability to implement project and achieve intended results. The SC REACH FOR SUCCESS Colleges have: 1) a strong history of successful system-wide collaboration, 2) extensive experience administering federal and state grants, 3) existing broadband infrastructure, and 4) IT staff with qualifications and experience in implementing and administering broadband service. When added to the current college campuses, training sites and PCCs, the REACH Portal, the PCC Cart outreach systems and the REACH MC will literally bring broadband access to virtually every rural community, underserved neighborhood and targeted vulnerable population in the state. E. Jobs saved or created. This project will employ a minimum of 41 full-time employees and 52 part-time employees who will implement and administer the REACH Portal, provide maintenance and support for PCC Carts and the REACH MC and provide training and instruction through the PCC Carts and the REACH MC. In addition,
we anticipate that end-users of broadband will access job opportunities through knowledge gained about how to search for and apply for employment online. F. Overall cost. SC REACH OUT is requesting $9,452,180 in BTOP funds. The System and its member Colleges will commit a 24.3% match of $3,030,626 to broadband access, training and outreach.