The Toledo/Cowlitz Broadband Initiative is a collaborative effort of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe (Tribe) and the Toledo Telephone Company (Toledo). The initiative recognizes that multiple vulnerable populations exist 1) within the existing Toledo service area and 2) in surrounding areas Toledo is authorized to serve, but where there is currently no broadband access. Within the Toledo service area, there is 100% broadband access through robust fiber and enhanced copper technology, yet only 49% of all households subscribe to broadband service. The greater Toledo, Washington, area has lagged behind Washington State as a whole in terms of prosperity and access to resources that could improve the social, economic and health of the community. Centered in Lewis County, the area's median household income is 26% below average, at $42,947, in comparison to the state's $58,081, with an unemployment rate of 14.8%, which is 4.6% higher than the statewide unemployment rate of 10.2%. The proportion of Senior citizens is a third higher than the state's, and youth under age 18 tend to leave the area as soon as they are able in order to find better job opportunities. Toledo has recognized that a significant portion of its un-served and under-served population is Native American, so it has partnered with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe to coordinate efforts. According to the Tribe, approximately 700 of its 3,500 members, or 20%, do not have access to or do not subscribe to broadband service. Coupled with Toledo's roughly 1,000 telephone subscribers who do not subscribe to broadband, this initiative has an immediate potential participant pool of 1,700 households. In the areas targeted by this initiative, many of the households have no working vehicle, and the number of individuals above 25 with high school diplomas is only 80.5%, which is 6.6% below the state average. The number of individuals with a bachelor's degree or above is 53.4% below the state average. There are no institutions of higher learning within the area beyond that of secondary education. Simply put, to both obtain education and then to be able to apply that education in the local job market is problematic. The young go elsewhere while those who stay behind do not have the resources to expand the economic base of the area. Without improvements it will remain essentially an area of declining blue collar opportunity. According to a recent Pew report, which we have taken the liberty to combine with the recent FCC Broadband Survey, when people do not subscribe to broadband where it is readily available, the primary reasons are that they perceive broadband to be too difficult to use (Digital Hopefuls--FCC), not relevant to their lives (Digitally Distant--FCC), do not have the skills to use the Internet nor computers, (Digitally Uncomfortable--FCC) and in the context of these factors, too expensive for both access and the hardware itself (Digitally Broke'our nomenclature, there is no FCC classification). For those with broadband access, the non-adopters identified three or more barriers. The FCC report includes a statement which the Toledo/Cowlitz Broadband Initiative has used as an inspiration to develop its proposal: 'The gap in broadband adoption is a problem with many different
dimensions that will require many different solutions,' said John Horrigan, Director of Consumer Research for the Omnibus Broadband Initiative. 'Lowering costs of service or hardware, helping people develop online skills, and informing them about applications relevant to their lives are all key to sustainable adoption.' Thus, our overall strategy to increase sustainable broadband adoption among vulnerable populations is to meet these concerns directly. Our approach will be two-fold. First, we will address the issue of affordability by providing broadband access and computer equipment through grant and loan combinations, and second, we will provide training on how to use the equipment to access life-enhancing applications and activities. Equipment will be provided for individual households, as well as at a new public computer lab, called the Tribal Learning Center, hosted by Cowlitz Indian Tribal Housing. Because the internet is increasingly an interactive experience, matching needs with resources, we will offer training that goes beyond traditional searching activities by demonstrating how broadband access can open opportunities to government assistance programs, on-line education and job training, Tribal activities, health programs and youth activities. These activities will engage new audiences and show them how broadband can contribute substantially to their lives. Additionally, emerging small businesses, critical to the economic vitality of the area, will benefit from the opportunity to learn how to sell and advertise on the Internet and to use social media to promote their business. Community organizations, such as the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, will have the opportunity to learn how to better inform its members and other citizens of its resources available. The project envisions a total of 1,000 households, 100 businesses, and 10 Anchor institutions will benefit from the program, through provision of equipment, broadband access, and training. Additionally, we anticipate at least 200 community members will utilize the public computer lab. Those households requiring computers and broadband access will be identified in our Awareness Campaign described later in this application, with a needs assessment conducted to link participants to equipment and training. For those outside of Toledo's access area, a Wildblue satellite broadband connection will be provided. For those with access to the wired Toledo network, broadband will be provided via ADSL2+ and GPON. Access will be provided at no initial cost and a discount will be provided for access at the conclusion of the program for those of low income. Users will be provided service with a combined speed of 6mbs. Those requiring computers will receive a new Dell Inspirion 15 laptop loaded with Windows 7 and Microsoft Office Small Business. The program will leverage an annual grant received by Cowlitz Indian Tribal Housing by providing free training and broadband access to Tribal housing residents. CITH has agreed to provide educational facilities in its Tribal Learning Center with a computer lab and a classroom environment for all program participants, as well as providing trainers for the education program. The computer lab will be equipped with the same configuration as in participant households. For those without transportation to the Learning Center, the Tribe will provide round-trip transportation. Community outreach will be performed by both Toledo and the Tribe through direct contact with the potential participants door-to-door, utilizing member rosters, and spreading the word through civic organizations, newspapers and existing community events currently organized and/or sponsored by Toledo and the Tribe. Toledo will leverage its existing resources of 24/7 customer support, network operation, maintenance and technical support to insure the service is running properly and that end users can contact a trained individual while on-line with their computer equipment/applications. Toledo will also provide a cash contribution to the project for the purchase and acquisition of equipment and broadband access. Toledo will measure basic success of the program by comparing intake reports and needs assessments to
equipment installation tallies, subscribership and computer lab utilization at the end of the program. We will also track successful completion of the 40-hour training program, with benchmarks each quarter to dictate if changes need to be made to the features of the program. Success will also be measured by the number of businesses utilizing new skills (such as websites created), reduced unemployment and other improved economic indicators, and increased utilization of federal, state, and tribal programs in the area. Such information will be derived from participant questionnaires and participation rosters. Using the OMB rubric of 1 job created per $92,000 of federal expenditure, the minimum number of jobs created will be 36. We expect the number to be higher due to the lower cost of entry for new employers into the area and that some home-based businesses will arise through the utilization of the internet. The overall cost of the project is $3,531,703, including $2,701,300 in requested BTOP funds and $830,403 (23.5%) match, for a cost of $2,600 per subscriber.