The Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency (ATCAA), is the lead applicant for the Central Sierra Connect Neighborhood Information Center Project (CSC). Since 1981, ATCAA has been a leading community and human services provider in Amador and Tuolumne counties. ATCAA's mission is to provide critical services and self-sufficiency opportunities for low-income residents in Amador and Tuolumne counties. ATCAA is a prior recipient of a NTIA Technology Opportunities Program grant in 2001. ATCAA Central Sierra Connect was formed through a grant by the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) to address a common lack of technology resources in the rural five-county (Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa and Tuolumne) area through an Aggregation of Broadband Demand Study (AOD). More than 50 local public, private and government partners teamed up with CSC on this effort. The long-term goals of the CSC Project are to make available ubiquitous broadband to all rural communities in the region through the aggregation of users, engagement of providers and potential users, and simplification of county and municipal policies; to bridge the Digital Divide through outreach and education to the unserved members of the community; and to build a current and competitive workforce that will ensure the economic vitality of the region. The ATCAA Central Sierra Connect Neighborhood Information Center Project (CSC) has partnered with Central Sierra Economic Development Broadband Middle Mile Project (CSRDBMMP), the Tuolumne County Rural Remote Broadband Initiative (TCRRBI), and the Mother Lode Broadband Project (MLBBP) to apply regionally for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) broadband funding from both NTIA Broadband Technology Opportunities Program and USDA Broadband Infrastructure Program. ATCAA CSC and the other regional projects are a direct outgrowth of the AOD project financed by CETF. A cross-section of factors such as extreme geography, poverty, lack of population and local policy contribute to an environment where the private sector struggles with building a business case to close coverage gaps. Information collected from the demand survey project helped to remove this barrier by identifying opportunities for increased broadband deployment and adoption, and enabling the development of new and advanced communications in the five-county region. Historically all five counties have applied for grant and Federal funding singly and in pairs, but never considered working as a regional block until the CSC Advisory Council brought the different counties together to accelerate the deployment of broadband throughout the region. Project mapping, detailed survey data and demographics collected by the CSC Team are at the heart of the regional ARRA applications. CSRDBMMP's project partners are Central Sierra Economic Development, Golden State Cellular, Volcano Communications & Calaveras Telephone (both legacy RUS grantees), Ericcson, and Western Blue. Major Anchor Tenants include the Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency with 12 Head Start Centers, the region's only homeless
shelters and transitional shelters, ATCAA Food Bank, Energy and Weatherization, regional youth mentoring programs, area allied Neighborhood Information Centers, YES Partnership youth drug prevention program, and three Community Centers; all four counties Administration and Board of Supervisors, Sheriff's Departments and Libraries, local community colleges, medical and healthcare providers, and other community support organizations. Project partners for MLBBP are Mother Lode Internet and Rapid Link. MLBBP is a current recipient of the California Advanced Services Fund and are expanding wireless service over the 5 counties. Project applicant for TCRRI is SHEL Communications applying for high speed broadband and cable for Tuolumne County. The CSC project will feature a trilogy of infrastructures: emerging wireless (Wi-Fi) technology; a regional Information and Referral (I&R) network of computer labs, digitally literate staff and volunteers; and skills training for service providers and residents and is the backbone for progress in this geographically-isolated environment. CSC will leverage the existing public computer centers located throughout the five-county region and establish new public computer centers focusing on job training skills and broadband accessibility such as computer technology training, refurbishing and salvaging computers and components, and establishing both free and paid hot spots for communities surrounding computer centers, making a concerted effort to facilitate collaboration between local community-based organizations and educational institutions as well as businesses and community members. Taking into consideration current digital literacy best practices and both local and statewide policy, CSC and its partners developed a comprehensive training course, based on the Targeted Technology Training Program developed by Zero Divide and Connecting Stanislaus. Community members will acquire digital life skills in increasingly challenging classes, which will enable CSC to track and evaluate progress of individuals through the program. Staff and volunteers will be trained to provide outreach and teach technology skills, including computer refurbishing and salvage with an emphasis on training clients of county Behavioral Health Departments. Each county will have a prioritized course of action to close the rural Digital Divide, including the formation of stronger public-private partnerships; heightened community interest in and access to technology, broadband and the Internet; current, complete information on needs, options and costs for broadband service and training. Public-private partnerships will also aid the establishment and sustainability of programs for low- and no-cost equipment, broadband service, wireless hotspots, computers and equipment for refurbishing and salvage and technical support. Broadband accessibility will increase opportunities for business development, jobs, and access to quality health care and education. In addition, residents in all parts of the region will have comprehensive access to affordable broadband technology and support services, so that they can be prepared to make full use of emerging technology in all aspects of their lives to connect, communicate and compete. In total, during the 24-month program period, over five counties 100 individuals will be placed in stipend-based internships and full-time living wage jobs, 100 new jobs will be created, 25 jobs will be retained, 500 residents will receive subsidized connectivity for the term of the grant, 500 residents will receive a free or low cost refurbished computer, 5000 residents will be reached through broadband awareness efforts and 2500 low-income and/or vulnerable persons will receive training that will boost their ability to compete for jobs requiring digital literacy skills. CSC proposes an overall project budget of $1,225,000. Of this amount, CSC requests $980,000 in BTOP Public Computer Centers funds and will provide $245,000 in matching resources representing 20% of project costs.