The University of Hawaii's Pacific Business Center Program (PBCP), whose mission is to provide economic assistance to the US affiliated Pacific islands by leveraging the resources of the University of Hawaii system, aims to establish viable ecommerce platforms for the various island territories. The Pacific Basin Islands Ecommerce Platform project aims to establish a viable ecommerce system for the US territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the Republic of Palau. In addition, Pacific Islander groups in the State of Hawaii will be included in the project. PBCP will provide the technical and managerial expertise to bring this project to fruition. To this end, PBCP has already obtained letters of support from the relevant parties in the region. Ecommerce adoption in the region (excluding Hawaii) has been very low, owing primarily due to a lack of expertise, tiny markets, and expensive internet access. Specialists in ecommerce are rare or non-existent in these small island regions, since demand for their services is minimal, as are opportunities for growth. Markets are very small internally, and the overall demand for products and services are also limited. Furthermore, the extreme isolation of the islands in the region and the vast distances between them means that internet access is very expensive, often prohibitively so. Broadband internet is almost exclusively delivered by undersea fiber-optic cables, which are not feasible for most of the smaller island nations and territories, which are too far and too small to make financial sense for cables to be laid. Therefore most of the smaller islands rely on satellite-based internet connectivity, which is very expensive, and is usually supplied at sub-broadband speeds. This project aims to address these issues, in a limited and practical manner, owing to the unique geographical circumstances of the Pacific Basin islands. The Pacific Basin Islands ecommerce platform aims to bring entrepreneurs as well as established businesses in region in contact with customers who are interested in products and services from the territory. PBCP, whose mission is to adapt the scientific and technical resources of the University of Hawaii system to help the pacific islands, will establish and manage the ecommerce portal, providing it with the expertise and stability that it would require to succeed. The ecommerce portal will be a mix of culture and commerce, in that shoppers will be able to learn about the culture of the region, and buy products, most of which will be handicrafts, and services, which will primarily be tourism related. The ecommerce portal will be divided into sections, based on the territory or region. The glue that holds the ecommerce portal together will be the shared cultural heritage of the Pacific Islanders. In addition to providing the technical expertise to establish the ecommerce portal, PBCP will provide technical and business training to entrepreneurs and local businesses on how to sell their products and services online. To this end, PBCP will work with various community anchor institutions in the territories to set up training courses.
whereby an ecommerce expert from the University of Hawaii will conduct a series of training courses for entrepreneurs. A basic training course will reach 2500 individuals, and will focus on broadband education. In addition, approximately another 300 will be given the opportunity to participate in a more intense ecommerce training course. Upon successfully completing the training course, the first 318 graduating entrepreneurs will be provided with a laptop and a year's high-speed broadband access, via the grant. Aside from establishing the portal and providing training to entrepreneurs, the primary challenge will be to get the underlying business processes and procedures in place. This would involve procedures dealing with brand management, quality control, inventory management, shipping, customer service and policies, formal guidelines for listing/delisting a vendor, pricing structures, etc. To this end, PBCP will provide assistance in developing policies and procedures to enable a viable ecommerce platform for the region to flourish. The timeline for the project is 1.5 years, with the first six months dedicated towards establishing the portal, conducting training, providing equipment and access, and establishing the initial procedures. The next year will be dedicated towards providing technical and managerial advice by PBCP in order to make the ecommerce platform sustainable, by leveraging resources from the University of Hawaii. The project aims to create jobs and generate demand for broadband internet access. The Pacific Business Center Program has a history of working on successful projects in the region, and has won numerous national and regional awards for its work. The ecommerce portal would arrive at a turning point for several of the economies of the region. American Samoa for example, whose historic reliance on the canneries has been shaken by closures and layoffs at the canneries, as well as the recent devastating tsunami, would greatly benefit. The proposed ecommerce portal will create valuable jobs in the knowledge sector of the economy, and plug American Samoa into the national and global economy via electronic commerce. All the islands (except for the State of Hawaii) are almost entirely dependent on US federal aid to sustain themselves, and the ecommerce portal offers an opportunity for economic self reliance for entrepreneurs and businesses in the region. The proposed ecommerce portal and broadband connectivity would allow for the vast distances and limited resources to be bridged and open a new chapter in the economic history of the region.