Applicant Name: MONTGOMERY AREA COMMUNITY WELLNESS COALITION

Project Title: Project Health Connect

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary _________________________

This Public Computer Centers project will be implemented in four unserved/underserved counties in the River Region of Alabama. The project is unique in that it will simultaneously address two pressing needs in our community -- the need for expanded broadband services and the need for increased access to health care information. The River Region of Alabama has many rural areas that are unserved by broadband services and other areas that, while relatively urban in nature, are nevertheless underserved with regard to broadband. There are many people in the River Region who have no access at all to use of a computer. This lack of access to electronic information, and to broadband service which will bring the world of information to them, places these individuals at a disadvantage in knowledge and ability to care for their health and other life issues. These counties in central Alabama also have very high rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, asthma, and mental illness. Indeed, Montgomery, Alabama recently was identified as one of the top two "obese" cities in the nation. Further, there are substantial racial and socioeconomic disparities with regard to the effects of chronic diseases. Our region has high numbers of minority groups, particularly in the more rural areas. In order to manage chronic diseases and prevent further deterioration and complications that can lead to death, individuals need information about the diseases in general and their treatment, and they need information about their own health and health care. Further, the rural areas are underserved in terms of availability of healthcare professionals--all areas of the River Region are federally designated as medically underserved areas, medically underserved populations, and health professional shortage areas, making it doubly important for both providers and consumers to have access to real-time health information. The project will simultaneously address the need for expanded broadband service and the need for access to health care information, through placement of public computer centers in anchor institutions, including hospitals, mental health centers, federally qualified and other community health centers, public health departments, and public libraries. The project will enable anchor institutions to share health care data among their health care providers through a health information exchange (HIE) that will include access to an electronic health record for physician offices and access to a personal health record provided for consumers. Broadband use will be expanded among both the professional community and the public. The sharing of health information has high importance for improving the quality and efficiency of health care. When an individuals appears at a hospital emergency room, for example, the provider will be able to access information within the system to show diagnoses, medications and other treatment, tests performed and results, and other health information. Through this access, treatment can be more accurate, duplicative tests will not be needed, and unnecessary hospitalizations can be avoided. Further, information can smooth the transition of care from hospital to
community health center or other provider. With expanded broadband access in public computer centers, consumers can access their personal health records as well as general health resources and information on how to manage chronic diseases. We believe that this project will also increase the demand for the further spread of broadband. People will value having access to health information through the computer centers and will want to have that access in other aspects of their lives. The project will serve Autauga (population 43,671), Elmore (population 65,773), Lowndes (population 13,473) and Montgomery (population 223,510) Counties in central Alabama. All of these areas have no or limited broadband service. All have high health care needs, and all have high ratios of people in minority and low-income groups. 15.89% of the River Region population live below the poverty level; an estimated 49,220 individuals or 17.35% of the population have no health insurance. This project will provide for computer centers in anchor institutions consisting of three hospitals, four mental health centers, seven community health centers, and 3 public health department clinics, as well as 10 public library sites. Persons served by these anchor institutions will be exposed to broadband through receiving health care information in public-access computer centers located in these anchor institutions. The Wellness Coalition has extensive experience in managing complex programs, federal grants, and local funding resources. The Coalition’s development and services were initially funded in 2002 through a three-year HRSA Health Care Access Program (HCAP) grant that provided over $2 million for coalition building and services of wellness case managers/navigators utilizing the community health advisor model. In addition, the Wellness Coalition was awarded in 2003 a five-year Steps to a Healthier US grant totalling over $4 million from the Centers for Disease Control to provide community wellness/disease prevention activities for the River Region. The Wellness Coalition also received funding in 2006 from the City of Montgomery through the HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to provide additional wellness case management, transportation, and diabetic testing supplies. The grant award also included funds awarded to Community Care Network (CCN) and Medical Outreach Ministries (MOM) with the Wellness Coalition responsible for grant management for these two agencies. Total grant funding was $200,000 with the Wellness Coalition receiving $51,906 and the remainder going to CCN ($100,000) and MOM ($48,094). CDBG funding was awarded for another year’s grant commencing September 2007 to the Wellness Coalition addressing the same needs as the previous year. The Wellness Coalition has remained solvent since its inception, with no audit findings or other financial issues. The most recent grant award was a planning grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to plan health care services for the homeless. The coalition works in collaboration with the Envision 2020/River Region Healthcare Council Information Technology Work Group consisting of the Chief Information Officers of anchor health care institutions, providing guidance for the broadband expansion and health information exchange. This project will create several jobs, both directly and indirectly. The project itself will require addition of approximately 5 positions to manage development and implementation of the health information exchange. In addition, jobs at the anchor institution sites will be preserved in that the positions will be needed to monitor and support the public computer centers. These centers are being placed in 37 locations with necessary staff for monitoring and support. In addition, while it is difficult to estimate the numbers of persons affected, those using the public computer centers will also have access to information on employment, both within and outside of the health care field. Using the federal calculation method valuing each job at $92,000, the project will
generate 27 jobs. The overall cost of the project is federal $2,488,697, match $683,424, total $3,172,121.