Executive Summary

Neighborhood Centers' Digital ASSETS (Access, Support, Sustainability, Equipment and Training for Success) Project, supports the digital integration of Houston's most underserved communities by helping families accumulate the assets - affordable access, equipment, training and support - necessary for increased, sustainable broadband adoption. While Houston is home to numerous broadband providers, there are large segments of the population, particularly individuals and families that are low-income, African-American, Hispanic and/or have limited English proficiency, who we know from both national statistics and personal experience - remain largely underserved and unconnected. According to a 2009 Pew Report, non-broadband users identify the following four factors as significant barriers to adoption: low levels of digital literacy (people just don't understand how it all works); lack of relevant content to diverse groups (culturally, linguistically and economically); low awareness/understanding of the valuable benefits broadband offers to them and their families; and the inability to afford the necessary connectivity and/or hardware. In looking to address these issues, it has been NCI's experience that, when working with vulnerable populations the use of one strategy in isolation is seldom enough. Comprehensive programming is needed that meets people where they are and supports them as they move along their own path to success. NCI's Digital ASSETS Project provides this needed programming, offering replicable, innovative solutions that stimulate demand, increase affordability and promote sustainable broadband use. Specifically, NCI and our project partner, One Economy, will:  

- Implement a grassroots community awareness campaign that builds a sense of value and necessity around broadband adoption;  
- Offer regular, hands-on opportunities to utilize broadband technology that results in individuals finding information and content relevant/beneficial to their lives;  
- Provide digital literacy training and support for youth and adults designed to meet individuals where they are in terms of skill level, language, cultural relevancy and literacy; and  
- Expand affordable access to the equipment and technology necessary for broadband adoption through public community computer labs and open WiFi zones, a Technology Assistance Program and free internet access to 1,388 units of low-income housing.  

Our efforts will focus on six communities across the greater Houston area where NCI currently operates community centers: Southwest Houston (Gulfton), Independence Heights, East End, South East Houston, Pasadena and La Porte. While each neighborhood has its own unique culture and assets, overall the population we serve is 89% Hispanic, 7% African-American and 3% Caucasian; 64% identify Spanish as their primary language and 14% identify both English and Spanish; 26% of households earn between $50k - $25k, 44% between $25k-$10k and 26% less than $10k annually. Based on our current service levels and proposed activity plan, we estimate that through this project 25,000 households, comprised of 100,000 individuals (4 per household average), will become connected to broadband and...
another 43,024 will be reached through education and training. The Digital ASSETS Project brings together two leaders in the non-profit field: Neighborhood Centers Inc. (NCI) and One Economy Corporation. A 501(c)3 non-profit agency, NCI has more than 100 years experience in crafting meaningful, sustainable social service programs out of often-disconnected parts. Over the years, in collaboration with other service providers and through a variety of funding mechanisms, NCI has built a systems approach to quickly, efficiently and professionally resolve complicated community quality-of-life problems, particularly in underserved communities. This approach integrates and harmonizes administrative functions with service delivery and community building functions to expedite an appropriate response to critical needs. Local advisory boards, site councils and parent committees provide input and feedback to ensure our programs are timely and responsive to the specific issues expressed and identified in each community in which we operate. In 2009, NCI served over 250,000 people in Houston and surrounding areas through a variety of programs structured around its three divisions: `Community Based Initiatives are neighborhood center-based programs that develop skills to enhance self-sufficiency through an asset-based approach that emphasizes opportunities rather than needs. Our Asset-Based Community Development Model is focused on long-term economic and social development that connects neighbors, develops leaders and drives growth. This enables us to nurture the resources and capabilities already residing in our neighborhoods, creating a powerful sense of community. ` Choices in Education recognizes that education is the driver of long-term success by providing options and opportunities for students and their parents through an integrated birth through 5th grade model of education that focuses on academic excellence, family involvement, and the consistency and connection needed at every juncture in a child's life. Programs include elementary Charter Schools, Early Head Start, Head Start and nationally-accredited Early Childhood Development Centers. ` Public Sector Solutions draws on our expertise and history in developing efficient and effective delivery systems that ensure the flow of resources toward a specific public policy priority. Solutions often rely heavily on economies of scale and information technology. As a multi-million dollar agency, recognized by the Better Business Bureau in 2004 as a leader in the field of non-profit management, NCI has strong systems in place to ensure fiscal and programmatic accountability and extensive experience in the proper management of funds awarded. Currently, NCI has grants/contracts from 6 federal agencies, 3 state agencies and numerous City of Houston, Harris County and other local government units. These grants, worth approximately $157 million, represent over 70 different funding streams, each with its own unique requirements and restrictions. Our private funding sources include monies from United Way and over 500 private foundations, corporations and individuals totaling more than $13 million, each requiring individual management. One Economy is the largest digital adoption organization in the United States. During the last 9 years, they have established numerous partnerships and raised approximately $59 million in private dollars. Their digital literacy, public-purpose media and housing-based broadband deployment initiatives are currently being utilized in nearly all 50 states. It is estimated that our program will create 33 direct job-years and 21 indirect jobs. The overall cost of NCI's Digital ASSETS Project is $4,656,239 ($2,993,120 in federal funding under the BTOP Sustainable Broadband Grant program and $1,663,119 (35.7%) in non-federal match.