Applicant Name: BROWARD, COUNTY OF

Project Title: Broward County Library Public Computer Centers

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary _______________________

Nationally, the digital divide continues to grow, further separating those in urban communities from others in more affluent areas. Although computer ownership has grown nationally, urban areas lag well behind in both PC ownership and online access. In a recent study funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 73% of libraries report they are the "only source of free public access to computers and the Internet in their communities." The Broward County Library Public Computing Centers program aims to bridge the digital divide by providing 1 Project Director, 10 Program Coordinators and 249 additional computers for computer technology centers at seven libraries, six park facilities and eight community centers located in neighborhoods with the greatest demand for computer access, computer skills training in English, Spanish and Creole, and E-Government assistance. Community demand has overwhelmed the Library's existing resources. Last year, more than 3 million people signed up to use the library's nearly 1,900 public computers. Libraries are overwhelmed by the number of people requiring technology assistance each day, and staff are unable to provide the needed level of hands-on attention and individualized instruction. Without additional funding, residents in these communities will find it increasingly difficult to access technology and gain the computer skills needed to be successful in today's information economy. Through increased computer access, enhanced computer skills training, and E-Government assistance, Broward County Library (BCL) will provide broadband access, training, and equipment to Broward's most vulnerable populations. Additionally, BCL Librarians will stimulate broadband demand by demonstrating to customers the critical role the internet plays in everyday life. BCL's unique assets already establish it as a trusted community resource and is the perfect outlet for establishing greater public awareness of the importance of broadband technology and the opportunities it presents. Overall approach to addressing the need: Laptops will be purchased specifically for program participant use at 21 Public Computing Center sites in Broward County. The laptops will be loaded with specialized software designed to improve skills in basic computer programs, as well as, improve efficiency in resume writing and job searching databases. Computer skills classes, taught by qualified instructors will be available in English, Spanish and Creole - dependent on community need. In addition, customers will be able to access E-Government services under the guidance of trained librarians. Broward County Library is an integral part of this community and has a long history of bridging the digital divide, by not only providing free computer access, but also by providing qualified computer instruction, thus teaching residents how to use technology as a resource for a lifetime of learning. Starting with the federally funded Libraries-in-Action program in 1976, BCL has incorporated an innovative and successful library outreach strategy to promote and enhance library services to minority communities and the economically disadvantaged. The library's highly successful New Comers/New
Americans program will provide the outreach model for the Public Computing Center program. Since 2005 the New Comers initiative has provided almost 700 programs to assist newcomers, particularly from South America and Haiti, in their transition into America. Over 20,000 people have participated in the programs, many of which are offered in the newcomers' native language. BCL's All Access Pass, an innovative tool to encourage newcomers to use the library, and other marketing tools will be utilized to promote the program as well. The All Access Pass offers a special invitation for newcomers to visit BCL and familiarize themselves with the services and resources it has to offer. In addition, BCL staff will promote the Public Computing Center programs through meaningful interaction with local schools, civic organizations, and churches. Areas to be served: Broward County, located in southeast Florida, is home to over 1.7 million people. The second largest and most diverse county in Florida, the population of Broward is 50% White, 23% Black and 21% Hispanic. Twenty-nine percent or almost 500,000 people living in Broward speak a language other than English. Broward's median family income in 2006 was $58,757. Despite this, over 180,000 people in Broward live below the poverty line. Broward County Library aims to address the technology needs of 21 of Broward's most vulnerable neighborhoods. The majority of residents in these communities are low-income, minority families (70% African-American, 25% Hispanic, 3.5% Haitian) who qualify for Title One Free Reduced Lunch programs. The unemployment rate is 9.4% and 37% of the residents lack basic literacy skills. The families living in these neighborhoods are the primary people who have little or no access to technology. BCL's Public Computing Center program has the potential capacity to provide an additional one million customers with some sort of computer access or instruction at the 21 libraries, parks and Community Centers.

Qualifications of Broward County Library to Implement Project: Established in 1974, BCL houses a collection of over three million items, including books, CDs, DVDs, and computer software and provides public computers with Internet access and free wireless service at all 37 library locations. During FY 2009, 11 million items were circulated, over 3 million people signed up to use a library computer and over 800,000 people were given some sort of computer instruction. The ninth largest library system in the nation, BCL has a $65 million annual operating budget, and provides an array of services including computer instruction, literacy classes, leadership and employability training for teens and adults, English as a second language classes, citizenship classes, cultural events and programs. BCL has offered computer classes taught by qualified instructors since opening the Library's first Computer Technology Center (CTC) at the Main Library in 1996. Additional CTCs were opened in 2000, with the assistance of a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Broward County Library is committed to sustaining the Public Computing Center program for the long term. There is a long tradition of community partners providing financial and general program support for BCL technology and family success initiatives. Additional support for library technology programs comes from the Broward County Board of County Commissioners. As the program meets the Board's goals for developing innovative human services strategies for assisting low-income families, it is anticipated that BCL will find some sort of ongoing support at the local level. Jobs saved or created 1 Full-time Project Director and 10 Part-time Program Coordinator positions will be created to manage the Public Computing Center program at program sites.

Overall cost of proposed project The overall project cost of the Broward County Library Public Computing Center program is $2,319,798. BCL requests Federal funds in the amount $1,315,077 over a two year period. Matching funds in the amount of $1,004,721 will be provided by Broward County Library, Broward Public Library Foundation, and the City of Fort Lauderdale.