Increasingly, the skills necessary to work, prosper and participate in society are tied to the ability to use information and communication technology tools. In recent years, employers, educational organizations and government agencies have shifted their services online, making broadband access an indispensible part of personal achievement, social interaction and communication. While this can lead to streamlined operations for organizations, and wider access for the digitally connected populace, it has deepened the digital divide and has increasingly marginalized vulnerable populations. For low-income, unemployed populations, especially for those who speak English as a second language, a lack of consistent, reliable Internet access and a lack of technical proficiency create an insurmountable hurdle in achieving the American dream. This lack of broadband access is crippling for some of the most vulnerable populations in Texas today. The state is last in the percentage of residents with high school diplomas and near last in SAT scores. An estimated 16.3% of residents, nearly 4 million people, live in poverty. Over 1 million Texans are unemployed. For 67% of Texans, the local library is the only source of broadband access, the only source of free, basic computer skills training, and the first step on the journey towards achieving the American dream in the 21st century. To improve broadband access, encourage lifelong learning, provide workforce development and support vulnerable populations in underserved regions of the state, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) plans to launch the TEAL (Technology Expertise, Access, and Learning for all Texans) project. The TEAL project will focus on improving broadband access for the following: 1. Youth: The future of Texas depends on a creative, educated, tech-savvy, productive workforce. Texas has the second highest birthrate in the nation [www.statehealthfacts.org] and 30% of its population is under 18. It ranks 7th nationwide on the percentage of children living in poverty [http://factfinder.census.gov]. Taken together, these statistics highlight the growing number of impoverished youth across the state that are born digital natives, but are very likely to have neither the broadband access nor the opportunity to develop 21st century skills. TEAL will engage youth in their local libraries and through collaborative partnerships with local community colleges, schools and youth-serving non-profit organizations. 2. Seniors: Librarians regularly report that senior Texans frequently need help with basic computer skills training, social networking and access to government services. This population uses libraries extensively as the primary source of broadband access. TEAL will provide Texas seniors want training and broadband access so that they remain active in the workforce, engaged in their communities and supportive of the local economy. 3. Hispanics and ESL Residents: 36.5% of the population in Texas is Hispanic, more than twice the national average of 15.4%. More than 31% of respondents in Texas speak a language other than English at home, almost twice the national average of 17.9%. [http://quickfacts.census.gov]. TEAL will provide broadband
access and ESL, citizenship and GED training in locally relevant languages to this vulnerable group. Learning English is one of the quickest ways to assimilate into the American melting pot, and the first step on the path to citizenship for many. TEAL will provide these vulnerable residents with the tools and access to pursue their American dream, and will train library staff to work with this multi-lingual population.

4. Disabled: TSLAC will facilitate statewide training to educate libraries on making existing software and computer centers more accessible. Participating libraries will provide wheelchair access to the computer labs and incorporate special hardware and software for visually or audio-impaired patrons as needed. TSLAC mobile computer labs will also be accessible and provide software to meet patrons needs. TEAL will support this population with access to government services, educational content and training.

5. Unemployed/low income: Finding and applying for jobs, maintaining contact with employers, training to find better jobs and other basic aspects of employment are increasingly Internet based, leaving those without access or only intermittent access at a serious disadvantage. These problems are exacerbated by low Internet proficiency and limited English literacy. Across Texas, residents look for jobs, file for unemployment, apply for jobs and create resumes at computer centers in libraries. TEAL will provide library staff with training to support job-seekers, and job seekers will have access to training by the Texas Workforce Commission through program partners. To serve these vulnerable populations, TEAL will: 1. Strengthen broadband access at participating libraries across the state. 2. Provide library staff with customized training to support underserved, vulnerable populations seeking broadband access. 3. Provide Texans with access to training in basic technology skills, educational attainment, and workforce development. As the state library agency, TSLAC is charged with improving libraries statewide and promoting resource sharing among libraries of all types. This enables the agency to bring a statewide perspective and a large staff experienced in statewide grant management to the project, while also providing library staff with adequate training to support vulnerable populations. TEAL will support the creation of 126 direct, 81 indirect and 45 induced job-years (ARRA job creation estimates). A TEAL project manager, several local library staff, IT and training contractors will deploy and upgrade computer centers and train staff and patrons, increasing economic activity across the state. TEAL will provide 6,905,285 Texans with access to 155 public computer centers and 5,661 computer workstations with BTOP funding. The 31.5% regional match on the $11,637,419 project illustrates the commitment of Texas libraries and partner organizations in bridging the digital divide for the most vulnerable populations across the state. Since 1836, Texas has welcomed everyone from cattle ranchers to computer programmers with the idea that every Texan might rise as high and as far as their spirit, hard work, and talent might carry them. Through TEAL we bring that spirit of limitless possibility to all Texans and provide vulnerable populations with tools to succeed in the 21st century.