**Executive Summary**

The current economic recession has adversely affected most communities in America. In Missouri, the overall unemployment rate climbed from 7.1% in December 2008 to 9.6% in December 2009. In some parts of the state, the unemployment rate exceeds 12%. Vulnerable populations—low-income persons, senior citizens, and those with low educational attainment—bear the brunt of the economic downturn. The current economic situation for these populations is exacerbated by their lack of access to resources that can improve their circumstances. They lack access to broadband services that can provide them with information, education, and new work-related skills. The Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) will use funds provided by the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant to invest in technological infrastructure that will provide long-term economic benefits to the state and its citizens. The MDHE is collaborating with seven community colleges across the state to establish or expand a total of 23 public computer centers (PCC) in targeted areas. These facilities will function as one-stop technology centers for launching new opportunities and new careers, with a specific focus on the unemployed and underemployed citizens in the targeted areas. The computer centers will be located on the college campuses and at sites in the communities where vulnerable populations live. The colleges will also use mobile computer technology to bring broadband access to vulnerable populations in Missouri communities. Each college will be creative in the approach to delivering PCC services in order to accommodate diversity and variation within the region. The PCCs at the participating Missouri community colleges will provide: - Public access to broadband technology at new or expanded computer centers staffed by knowledgeable personnel who are sensitive to the needs of the vulnerable populations to be served - Courses in Basic Digital Literacy, including an introduction to using the technology careers (courses will be free of charge to the public) - Outreach to the vulnerable populations in the service area of each community college. Through this project, Missouri community colleges will enable vulnerable populations to access broadband services for a variety of purposes including, telemedicine (accessing personal health records), small business development, education, social networking, job searches, research, and personal enrichment. The community college partners in this project represent seven of the 12 Missouri community colleges located in different regions of the state. The western, south, southeastern, eastern, and northeastern portion of the states will be served by the PCCs. The service area includes the three largest metropolitan areas in the state. Some of the proposed computer centers will be located off campus in education centers, workforce training centers, and at others sites. Each community college has pledged to serve vulnerable populations, including low-income, the unemployed, those aged 55 and older, minority groups, and people with disabilities. Two
partner colleges are located in the state's two largest metropolitan areas, Kansas City and St. Louis. In the greater Kansas City area, 16.5% of the residents live in poverty. One permanent and one mobile PCC will be located in this area. In St. Louis, the PCCs will be located in areas of high poverty (19–35%) where the majority of residents are also African-American (73–95%). In the northeast Missouri service area, minority groups comprise 39% of the population, 29% of the population is over 55, and 16% live below the poverty line. Partner colleges in the southern region of the state will serve areas with unemployment rates as high as 12%, in addition to serving populations with low educational attainment. As the state's higher education agency, the MDHE is uniquely positioned to administer the funds needed to establish PCCs at community college across the state. The MDHE has responsibility for coordination and oversight of postsecondary education in the Missouri. The department is headed by the Coordinating Board for Higher Education, a bi-partisan citizen's board appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate. The department employs 75 FTE personnel, and has a direct relationship with all postsecondary institutions in the state. In addition to its direct relationship with the postsecondary institutions in the state, the department is also the administrative agency for the state's primary grant and scholarship programs. The MDHE administers the Access Missouri Student Assistance Program which is Missouri's primary need-based financial aid program. In fiscal year 2009, the department delivered more than $92 million in financial assistance to nearly 43,280 Missouri residents. The MDHE receives and administers approximately $1.2 million each year in federal funds for the professional development of K-12 teachers through the Improving Teacher Quality Grant. Staff at the department also administers the College Access Challenge Grant program (CACGP). This is a two-year formula grant program that was created as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRA) of 2007. It is unknown exactly how many jobs will be saved or created because of this project. However, approximately 21 FTE positions will be needed at the community colleges to support the instructional component of the proposed grant activities. In addition, the training to be made available via the PCCs at Missouri's community colleges has potential to assist vulnerable populations in obtaining gainful employment. Over a two year period, almost 6,000 users will be trained in basic digital literacy. For users who are unemployed, this basic digital literacy course will help them prepare for entry-level customer service, food service, retail, and clerical jobs. The MDHE is requesting $5,003,438 in federal funds to develop and/or enhance 23 public computer centers. MDHE and the partnering community colleges will provide $1,646,307 in matching funds for the project, which represents 24.8% of the project's total cost of $6,649,745.