California Connects 'by offering laptops and online education and training' will provide real lifelong incentives to individuals who have not previously seen the need or had the resources to learn digital literacy skills, acquire computers, or connect to the internet. This project designs and offers resources that will have a direct impact on the life of underserved populations. Research from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that earnings increase with increased education and training. Demonstrating that online resources can improve the skills of individuals will open the door to lifelong learning and the opportunities that it provides. California Connects will generate 61,120 new broadband users & partner with 33 community colleges along with libraries, public computing centers, & community-based organizations. California Connect will provide outreach to target populations, provide them with laptops, & free online digital literacy learning tools. Individuals will access the internet, acquire digital literacy skills, use digital skills to learn basic English and math in order to help students and their families build skills for jobs, participate in the economy, and embark on lifelong learning opportunities. The entire project cost will be $14,053,967 million which includes $3,109,124 million in matching funds. California's digital divide has widened through the last decade. A June 2009 study by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) found that while the digital divide has narrowed significantly among some demographic groups a gap remains for Latinos (especially those from Spanish-speaking households), the less-educated, and immigrants. Latinos are substantially less likely than whites, blacks, or Asians to use technology as are individuals with incomes under $40,000. The report also indicates that internet and broadband use has increased in all regions of the state except the Central Valley. These findings provide the focus for California Connect. California Connects will focus on reaching populations for whom computer and internet access is still a challenge and yet necessary to enhance their lifelong learning ability, improve their economic and health care status and advance their general quality of life. In order to bridge this divide, California Connect will target underserved populations with special emphasis on the Central Valley, in order to improve digital literacy, encourage computer and broadband adoption, and prepare students, families, and others for the workforce. The program will demonstrate the benefits of computer ownership, internet usage, and information technology training with collaboration and support from higher education institutions and public libraries. The major innovation in California Connect is the development of free online training tools that can be accessed in public computing centers or anywhere with internet connectivity to reach large numbers of individuals interested in developing and improving their digital literacy skills. California Connect will employ a three-part strategy: 1 -The program will target economically disadvantaged California Community College students who participate in the Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement (MESA) program. All MESA
students come from socio-economically disadvantaged homes and are often first generation college students. As a condition of participation in the program, students will sign a contract specifying that they will share the laptops with their families, participate in the provided online training and certification program, and volunteer for 12 hours in local libraries or other public computing centers to provide assistance to individuals accessing the online digital literacy tool that is being developed as part of this grant (Attachment 17.10). Students will have the opportunity to take an online Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint or Word class and certification exam to increase their digital proficiency and better prepare them to enter the workforce. Additionally, the students will assist in developing a public awareness campaign about digital literacy emphasizing the advantages of digital skill attainment and broadband access. The students will write articles in campus-based newsletters and community newspapers. Students will also conduct outreach to MESA students in their local high schools along with volunteering a minimum of 12 hours in local libraries and public computing centers assisting individuals with use of the digital literacy tool being developed as part of this grant. 2 -The project will develop an internet-based software tool to increase basic digital literacy skills. The California Community College Technology Center, housed at Butte College, will develop and maintain an online digital literacy tool that will be accessed free of charge in libraries, public computing centers, or any home or business site that is connected to the internet. The digital literacy tool will be developed as a module that will be added to a basic skills online course, and will provide a gateway for individuals who need literacy and basic skills to gain employment and necessary skills for today's workforce. The project will conduct public awareness campaigns throughout the state on digital literacy and promoting the use of both the digital literacy tool and the basic skills courses. 3 -The third strategy ' entitled Central Valley Connects - will focus on the Central Valley of California which has the lowest level of internet and broadband use and academic achievement, paired with the highest rate of unemployment in California. Central Valley Connect will be responsible for developing an outreach effort in 18 Central Valley counties including Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, El Dorado, Fresno, King, Kern, Mariposa, Merced, Madera, Nevada, Placer, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tuolumne, Tulare, & Yuba. The outreach effort, spearheaded by the Great Valley Center (GVC is affiliated with the University of California, Merced) will focus on promoting digital literacy and recruiting individuals into libraries and other public computing centers to use the digital literacy and basic skills online tools. They will also provide in-person training assistance on the use of the digital literacy tool. GVC will conduct a public awareness campaign in the Central Valley that will include outreach to community partner organizations, writing articles for local newspapers, creating e-letters to the community, and posting information on the GVC and the Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley websites. These websites currently receive thousands of visits per month. California Connects demonstrates innovation by exposing these vulnerable communities to multiple levels of lifelong learning skills in ways they would not traditionally use. By offering not only the hardware, but also relevant programming that individuals can easily access, California Connects believes it can increase computer and internet use in traditionally underserved communities. It will also result in an online fundamentals of information technology program that can be accessed free of charge by anyone throughout the state. This programming will be enhanced by a number of public awareness strategies that use participants in the design and implementation. The MESA program, nationally recognized for its innovative and effective academic development program has for the past 40 years engaged thousands of educationally disadvantaged students to excel in math and science and graduate with math-based
degrees. Great Valley Center (GVC) is a nonprofit organization that supports activities and organizations benefiting the economic, social and environmental well-being of California's Great Central Valley. The California Community College (CCC) Technology Center has experience and published success developing online resources for basic skills. Relying on collaborative expertise from varying participating educational institutions in California, the CCC Technology Center has developed and put in place an online basic skills tool. California Connects' strategy demonstrates innovation by: 1) the development of open access online digital literacy tools that can be accessed anytime anywhere in libraries, public computing centers, homes, places of business; 2) utilizing student volunteers (MESA students) and GVC staff to assist users in accessing the digital literacy program, and 3) leveraging efforts by other entities CVIN's proposal to enhance broadband network in Central Valley counties and CALIFA's efforts to equip public libraries statewide with the necessary tools as well as personnel to assist new broadband adopters. We estimate that the California Connect program will generate 22 direct, 76 indirect and 55 induced jobs for the state.