STATEMENT OF NEED: Over the last two decades, Lincoln, Nebraska has welcomed over 30,000 refugees from across the world. Recent Census estimates indicate that the community has 248,967 residents, of which 10.7% are minorities and 5% are Latinos. The community has an overall poverty rate of 12.3%. The proposed Jobs & Education Linkage (JEL) Computer Centers Project has targeted six Census Tracts, which are identified by the Department of Labor as Areas of Sustained Unemployment. These neighborhoods are also home to most of the city's low-income, minority and new American communities. We call them gateway neighborhoods because Lincoln embraces the community ethic that all boats rise together. In other words, community leaders work as hard as community activists to provide a level field of opportunity. This is best exemplified by the decades long tradition of a unified school district that grows as the City annexes newly developed neighborhoods. Information Technology has evolved at a dizzying pace. It is inconceivable to conduct business in today's world without access to a computer and the Internet. Yet, the residents living in the targeted Census Tracts have difficulty making such a large purchase and certainly cannot pay the monthly subscription costs to access the Internet. So even though Nebraska Health & Human Services System requires all applications for public assistance be made via the Internet, the people in the most need for their services do not possess the English proficiency to understand the forms, cannot access a computer, do not know how to operate the computer, and cannot access the Internet. Of course, these barriers carryover into all aspects of daily life, including securing job training and employment. Lincoln is a resourceful community. Many of its local government agencies and nonprofits have stepped up to the challenge and have designated former janitor closets to be public computer centers, and have gathered up donations of used computers from local companies to bridge this digital divide. But the need remains to bring these public computer centers up to the level of service, bandwidth, connectivity capacity and speed to be reliable resources. Additionally to make these public computer centers truly effective, computer skills training, as well as ESL, vocational, and GED training must be provided, free of charge. In addition to this need, the same Census Tracts that have been identified as experiencing high levels of unemployment, poverty and welfare participation also experience approximately three to four times the crime as other Lincoln neighborhoods. The Lincoln Police Department struggles to meet these fragile neighborhoods' needs, but they have not been able to add officers for several years due to budget constraints. Hence, the pressure exists to utilize police officers more effectively by installing a WiMax system, which is essentially a high powered WiFi, allowing officers to stay on their beats while accessing law enforcement data and uploading reports. By developing a WiMax system, Lincoln's police officers will stay visible in the fragile neighborhoods, which means public safety will be enhanced without adding more officers to
the City's payroll. OVERALL APPROACH: The Lincoln City Libraries has decided to serve as the Lead Applicant for this City of Lincoln-led proposal. LCL will serve as the flagship for public computer centers and will ensure universal access to the community, while targeting their services by locating their PCCs in libraries located within the targeted Census Tracts. For nearly six months, LCL, in partnership with the City's Engineering Services, Information Services, and Lincoln Police Department's IT Services, has investigated the issue of lack of access to computers, the Internet, and the need for a WiMax system to enhance public safety. Bandwidth, reliable connectivity, speed, and other related issues were limiting this broadband project. The steering committee came to the conclusion that a public fiber optic network needed to be established to ensure that all partners and City sites had enough bandwidth to handle the increased demand. Next, the steering committee contacted each of the partners bringing them to the table to discuss their needs for expanded public computer centers. (Partnering organizations are nonprofits that were originally created by the people they serve. For instance, the African-American community created the Malone Community Center in the 1940s to address their unique needs. Partnering organizations involve all of Lincoln's minority, new American, older adult, youth, unemployed, disabled and low-income populations.) Our first meeting was spent gathering information regarding the age of computers, accessibility to centers, and if computer skills training was available. Many lessons were learned, including the pervasive need for English as Second Language skills development, and the overwhelming need for entry-level jobs skills training. As a result, the JEL Project will pursue establishing 21 public computer centers, featuring new computers and peripherals, appropriate software, tailored software for GED and job training, online access to other types of training, and a strong partnership with Southeast Community College. We believe the success of the public computer centers will be dependent on the quality of instruction; thus, we are accessing SCC instructors to come on-site at partner locations to provide instruction. Each of the partners has agreed to host a WiMax system, which will be attached to their rooftops. These systems impact the connectivity of the public computer centers, leading the steering committee to pursue establishing a public fiber optic network that can easily handle today's connectivity demands, and with enough capacity to be a viable service well into the future. The fiber optic network will be managed and operated by a private Telco, Unite Private Networks, enhancing this portion of the project's sustainability. The Lincoln Police Department is re-appropriating some unspent departmental funds to utilize as a cash match and some PSIC grant funds to construct the backbone of the WiMax system. This once in a lifetime opportunity will mean that only the individual rooftop WiMax installations will need BTOP funds. The result is the creation of a functioning WiMax system in the heart of Lincoln's most fragile neighborhoods. The WiMax system will dramatically improve public safety in these needy neighborhoods. An added bonus is enhanced safety at each of partner sites. AREAS TO BE SERVED: Census Tracts 4, 30.03, 5, 21, 20 and 32.02 have been targeted due to their high unemployment, poverty and welfare participation rates, as identified by the U.S. and Nebraska Departments of Labor. These Census Tracts ring Lincoln's downtown area. Census Tract 30.03 is set apart from the rest because of the location of the municipal airport. Their needs are as pressing as the other five Census Tracts so the steering committee opted to include this neighborhood in the project. Partnering organizations have offices and/or sites available in these CT's that can be converted or renovated as public computer centers. QUALIFICATIONS OF APPLICANT: The City of Lincoln has been cited as a national leader in Information Technology applications. Its Information Services division was among the first recipients of NTIA's Technology Opportunities
Program grant. Engineering Services has developed 113,500 LF of fiber network, bringing together City and County services. Lincoln City Libraries was among the first library systems in the country to embrace emerging Information Technology by installing public computer centers starting in the early 1990s. The City has a wealth of experience successfully implementing federal, state and private foundation grants. Additionally, we bring with us the community's enthusiasm for public service as evidenced through its strong and diverse nonprofit organizations. JOBS TO BE SAVED & CREATED: 15 jobs will be saved; 28 jobs will be created; Total Jobs Induced: 62. OVERALL PROJECT COST: $5,385,473 Federal; $360,000 Cash Match; $6,429,569 In-kind Match; $12,175,042 Project Total