Applicant Name: UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS

Project Title: Enhancing Alaska's Rural Community Computing Centers

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________Executive Summary_______________________

The need for this project is evident many ways. Geographic isolation in rural Alaska limits access to public information, public safety resources, education, and health care that urban dwellers consider standard services. For example, many people order their prescriptions online, yet this convenience is not available to rural residents without Internet access. The unemployment rate in four of the project areas is higher than the state and national average - up to 15.1% in the northwest Arctic region and over 13% in Kenai, both well above the state average of 9% for January 2010. When rural discouraged workers are factored in, the unemployment rate skyrockets as high as 67%. Many job resources and training opportunities are available online but not to rural residents without a computer or personal access to the internet. One fourth of Alaska's schools that did not meet NCLB Annual Yearly Progress targets last year for student achievement are located within the project area. The NCLB law requires all schools not meeting AYP targets to provide supplemental educational services - a struggle at best without public use computers. The students who do succeed face challenges in completing online FAFSA and college admission forms without access to a computer or internet technology. To meet these needs, 29 Public Computing Centers will be created in the northern, northwestern, and south central regions of Alaska, reaching 154,299 residents, one fourth of the state population. The project will provide residents of economically distressed communities with access to information technology and related training that will improve academic and vocational achievement, as well as individual physical and social well-being. The 29 communities identified for a PCC have unique qualities, challenges, and needs yet all share a belief that a PCC can be a means for community members to increase their self-sufficiency. As a result of this project, the number of computers publicly available will triple; PCC partners expect to serve 3,325 individuals each week. An outreach program using print and electronic media will encourage use of PCCs. High-interest structured learning opportunities will engage PCC users with broadband technology. The project will spur economic growth by creating 199 direct and indirect jobs. Eighty eight jobs will be directly created through the construction and renovation of existing facilities for use as PCCs. Another 16 jobs will come from employment opportunities through staffing of the PCCs, and 95 jobs will be indirectly created or induced through increased access to educational and vocational training and job skills. One anchor partner - Ilisagvik Tribal College - has a proven track record for the development and delivery of short-duration workforce training designed collaboratively with employers. This project will expand their delivery capacity to reach more rural students. Internet access in the Ilisagvik Tribal College network on the North Slope will be upgraded from 256K to 2MB through the addition of HughesNet satellite dishes at each village center. The Mat-Su Community College has developed some timely programs (paramedic and health aide training, energy audit training, alternative energy, and green
horticulture) that will reach more students with improved fiber optic and videoconferencing capabilities. The Chickaloon PCCs will be connected to the main Mat-Su campus via 10MB DSL circuit provided by the local telco. Maniilaq Association, a regional Native health care organization, will create public computing centers within its network of rural health clinics in 11 very remote villages in northwestern Alaska. In small communities, the health clinic and school are the largest facilities and therefore a natural community center. This proposal maximizes and expands access to and use of existing anchor tenant facilities and broadband resources as far as possible. 25 of the 29 Public Computing Centers will be operational by the second quarter of the project. Four of the proposed PCCs are located at community colleges in the regional hub communities of Kotzebue, Kenai, Valdez, and Homer and require construction; three are remodel/additions to existing space. The construction projects are 'shovel ready' and therefore assured of completion during the grant period. The UAF Chukchi Campus consortium library in Kotzebue is the largest construction project; the facility currently has 3 heavily used computer stations and regularly serves 50-75 children on weekday afternoons. This proposal contains plans for a new 5100 sq. ft. PCC for the Chukchi campus to better meet public needs. This project combines the efforts of twelve partners from the education, health care, government, and community sectors. Six PCCs will be located in community colleges, one PCC will be at a Tribal College, nine will be in rural community centers, and two PCCs will be hosted by Alaska Native Tribal Councils. Leadership and management of the project will come from the University of Alaska (UA) Office of Information Technology (OIT). University of Alaska OIT has demonstrated success in planning and implementing large technology projects: The statewide wide area network, Arctic region supercomputing data center, system wide enterprise applications and a leading edge statewide videoconferencing network are just a few examples of success in large scale implementations involving a vast geographic area, multiple technologies and many urban and rural challenges. The overall cost of this proposal is $18,356,793; of that $12,949,500 is for construction. Construction in rural Alaska is 45% or higher than in Seattle; a fact illustrated by villages where WWII-era Quonset huts are still in service because the cost to build a new structure is prohibitive for the community. The project has a 31% match to the budget request. There is a total of $2,794,500 in matching funds for this project representing 31.1% of the total project budget. 59% of the match is cash, and 41% is in-kind contributions to the project. Partners are demonstrating their commitment to the sustainability of the project by contributing 40% of the matching funds for staffing, maintenance, and technical support of the PCCs.