New York City's Adoption Challenge Mayor Bloomberg has recognized the importance of maintaining New York as a thriving urban center not only for its own residents and businesses, but also for the impact it has on the nation and world. The Mayor has undertaken a number of ambitious programs designed to ensure that the City remains vibrant and strong, such as PlaNYC 2030, a blueprint for environmental sustainability. Similar in spirit is NYC Connected, a set of programs included in the Mayor's larger Connected City Initiative that are aimed at increasing broadband use and adoption among vulnerable New Yorkers. These efforts are crucial at a time when the country faces a major economic crisis, with New York City at its epicenter. With historically high unemployment rates and the City facing an underlying structural shift in its economy, it is critical that all New Yorkers are provided the skills and access to broadband to enable them to contribute to rebuilding the City's, and the nation's economy. Recognizing the increasingly important role broadband plays in the economic and social well being of all New Yorkers, the Mayor commissioned a Broadband Needs Assessment Study in 2006/7. While broadband availability was found to be high, with at least 89% of New Yorkers having access to two options for broadband service, the Study identified a stark disparity in broadband adoption. Citywide adoption was comparable to national averages at 47%, yet adoption by low-income residents was strikingly low at 26% as compared to 54% in other income groups. Furthermore, this gap was projected to persist well into the future, absent targeted, large-scale initiatives aimed at addressing it. In a City where the number of low-income households exceeds the total number of households in almost every other city in the nation, this disparity demands action. In 2008, in response to the Study's findings, the City crafted a Broadband Action Plan, calling for a set of aggressive programs to spur broadband adoption by its vulnerable populations. Confronted with a contracting national economy and severe resulting budget cuts across the City, however, the Plan could not be implemented. BTOP brings new opportunity to realize these important programs. NYC Connected Learning and NYC Connected Foundations, education-focused programs proposed under the BTOP Sustainable Broadband Adoption category, and NYC Connected Communities, a wide reaching program to expand public computer center capacity, and the subject of this submission, were all developed based on this larger Plan. Together these programs target New York City's poorest communities and saturate them with holistic interventions to drive sustained broadband adoption. NYC Connected Communities - Approach Target Low-Income Communities NYC Connected Communities is intended to build on NYC Connected Learning and NYC Connected Foundations by making critical enhancements to public computer centers in the City's low-income communities. The program invests in the highest poverty areas in each of the City's five boroughs, targeting neighborhoods such as Harlem and the South Bronx to provide public
broadband access to the City's most vulnerable populations. In these areas, on average, 30.2% of households fall below the federal poverty line. Program investments are concentrated in those areas where poverty rates are highest (see maps included in Supplemental Materials). Increase Availability and Capacity of Public Centers The City's Study showed that public computer centers are a critical resource for low-income New Yorkers. With low home adoption rates, and few other outlets for Internet use, low-income City residents rely heavily on public centers to get online, and conduct the employment, educational, and health-related activities vital to their social and economic well being. Furthermore, the Study showed that existing public centers citywide were often under-resourced, and were meeting or exceeding their capacity in terms of both bandwidths and workstations available on a regular basis. By increasing both the availability and capacity of public computer centers in the City's high poverty areas, NYC Connected Communities seeks to address this critical need. Implement Holistic Programs But the City wants to not only boost access through its centers, it wants to also encourage an increase in broadband use, boost the digital literacy of its low-income residents, and encourage sustainable home adoption of broadband in the long term. The City's Study found that multiple, interconnected issues conspire to slow adoption in low-income households. These obstacles include the inability to afford a computer and broadband service, poor digital literacy skills, and a lack of recognition of the value of broadband adoption. The City feels strongly that these circumstances call for a holistic approach that confronts all obstacles to adoption in concert. Unlike many well-intentioned programs that address only portions of the adoption problem in isolation, NYC Connected Communities invests in four key areas across each of its centers: 1) Basic Investments in Public Access - increasing the availability and capacity of public centers. 2) Digital Literacy Training and Support - providing residents the basic skills and support they need to use broadband. 3) Advanced Training and Services - providing targeted training and resources to serve each center's specific population, and thereby demonstrating the value of technology for their unique needs. These services include, for example, educational programs, or employment support services. 4) Marketing and Outreach - promoting the availability and benefits of programs offered through NYC Connected Communities, and reinforcing the value of broadband adoption more broadly. Emphasize Employment Support Employment support services are highly needed in New York City. In December 2009, New York City's seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate was 10.5%, the highest level the City has seen since 1992, according to the New York State Department of Labor. Under these circumstances, public computer centers across the City are seeing a surge in broadband use. In particular, these centers are on the front lines of providing job-related services under these trying conditions. Job search support and resume building services, as well as workforce training programs, are experiencing increased demand as New Yorkers seek to boost their skills and qualifications to compete in the lagging economy. NYC Connected Communities therefore increases an array of employment support services across its centers, targeted to the specific populations served by each facility. Program Management NYC Connected Communities will be implemented under the leadership of the Mayor's office, and the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT). DoITT is New York City's primary technology delivery and support organization and is responsible for the management and oversight of the City's broadband strategy and programs. Since its inception in 1994, DoITT has managed multiple complex, multi-entity technology projects, including: 1) New York City Wireless Network (NYCWiN), a first-of-its-kind, advanced wireless public safety network providing first responders with high-speed data access
citywide, 2) 311 Customer Service Center, a consolidated call center that has provided customer service and government information to 85 million callers since its inception, and 3) New York City Automated Personnel System (NYCAPS), a state-of-the-art human resource management and benefit administration system for 160,000 City employees. NYC Connected Communities will work in partnership with a diverse group of anchor institutions. Partners include the City's three public library systems ' Brooklyn Public Library, New York Public Library and Queens Borough Public Library ' as well as community centers located in New York City Housing Authority, Department of Parks and Recreation, and Department for the Aging facilities. These partners are positioned at the front lines of serving the City's most vulnerable populations. They are well versed in the specific needs of their patrons, and best equipped to implement targeted programs that meet those needs. Flooding each community with resources through these multiple channels will also ensure that broadband and the critical services offered through this program are widely available. Impact and Cost NYC Connected Communities will add or replace 1,047 public workstations across the city, and offer 654 new hours per year of public access. With the investments made through the program, the City expects to serve more than 2 million new users annually, and create or retain 100 jobs. Of the $24.7M total program costs, the City and its partners are providing $9.7M in cash, and are requesting $15M in BTOP funds.