Problem Statement: According to Connected Tennessee's Tennessee Technology Trends, nearly 1.5 million Tennessee residents do not own a computer. The Internet is an invaluable tool for promoting economic development, job growth and educational attainment and yet is remaining unutilized by thousands of Tennesseans due to lack of computer ownership. Of those without home Internet access, the top barrier to high-speed Internet adoption is the perceived belief that they do not need it, followed by the lack of a computer. This means that there are thousands of disadvantaged Tennesseans who are unable to participate in the educational, economic and civic opportunities presented by having the Internet simply because there is no computer in the household. This digital divide was also prevalent nationally in 2009, with only 60% of families with income less than $30,000 per year accessing Internet resources compared to 95% of those above $75,000. Also, only 64% of people with a high school degree or less were accessing the Internet while 94% of those with a college degree or more were using online resources. Never before has the plight of America's children been so concerning. According to the 'The Nation's Children' report by the CWLA, more than one-fifth of the nation's children are living in poverty. Children in urban communities and those in the foster care system are especially vulnerable, as they are faced with a lack of resources and training that could propel them to a more economically self-sufficient future. Research by the John Case Youth Opportunities Initiative reveals that youth transitioning out of foster care face major challenges in the area of education and employment; however, when provided with 'exposure to career options, opportunities to develop social, civic and leadership skills and access to safe places to interact with their peers,' these same youth flourish. Solution: Tennessee's children need access to computers and the Internet in order to prevent being left behind in today's digital world. Connected Tennessee's Computers 4 Kids (C4K) program is working to ensure that one of the top barriers to broadband adoption, namely the lack of a home computer, can be overcome, specifically among two target vulnerable populations in Tennessee—youth in the foster care system and youth that are active in one of the state's 76 Boys & Girls Clubs. This project will provide connectivity to these vulnerable youth populations while promoting economic, career and educational self-sufficiency under the C4K program. Partnering with the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, the Tennessee Department of Children's Services, the Boys & Girls Clubs in Tennessee, the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, CIBER and the Internet Keep Safe Coalition, C4K is seeking to bridge the digital divide for thousands of Tennessee's youth while addressing major barriers to broadband adoption. This will be achieved through the provision of secure access to computers and broadband Internet, online technology training to enhance skills needed for success in today's technology-driven world, career training to equip youth with vital job search and resume-
building skills that will launch them into a sustainable career, and community awareness that highlights the benefits of technology adoption. The C4K partnership will perform the following functions: ' Provide computers to all Boys & Girls Clubs in the state and to individual foster youth who are preparing to graduate from high school or attain their GED. ' Provide online and classroom-based training through Boys & Girls Clubs 'Club Tech' program. Funded by Microsoft, Club Tech emphasizes the safe, ethical use of technology and explores high-tech career options for children. The Boys & Girls Clubs will also offer this online training tool to foster youth targeted by C4K. ' Utilize Tennessee's network of Career Centers for job training for foster kids that are preparing to finish high school. These centers offer computerized labor market information, Internet access, workshops, an online talent bank, job placement, recruitment and training referrals. ' Facilitate community awareness events in each community that receives computers. Connected Tennessee will hold an awareness event involving state and local leaders and key members of the community. The purpose of this effort is to spotlight the benefits of computers, broadband and other related technologies, thus, further presenting the case for broadband adoption. Innovative Approach: Connected Tennessee’s strategy includes facilitating a collaborative relationship between the public and private sector to provide computers and training to underprivileged populations, thereby raising technology awareness and stimulating broadband demand and adoption statewide. This approach is innovative because it targets two of Tennessee's most vulnerable populations: foster children and youth served by the Boys & Girls Clubs in Tennessee, and engages them in online and classroom-based training designed to equip them for a technologically-savvy workforce. Through the online technology training component, Club Tech, the youth will increase their technology aptitude to position them to seek high-tech careers. Through the classroom-based career training provided by the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the youth will then learn the most effective methods for securing these careers. This two-fold process puts Tennessee’s most disadvantaged youth in a position to compete on a level playing field and achieve success. Through media and public relations awareness efforts that spotlight the impact of this process, the project will heighten awareness about the benefits of broadband, thus encouraging Tennessee communities to adopt. The innovative provision of lightweight, portable laptop computers to the DCS participants allows this target group to access technology wherever their lives take them; while the provision of desktops to every Boys & Girls Club in the state allows club participants to access technology in a safe location. The marriage of these two programs to propel Tennessee’s at-risk youth to greater career and economic heights is truly unprecedented. This project will level the playing field for Tennessee’s most vulnerable populations and propel them to greater career and economic heights in order to prepare Tennessee’s next generation for success. Target Areas: The youth targeted by this project are among Tennessee’s most at-risk youth, either in the foster care system or actively enrolled in one of the Boys & Girls Clubs across the state. With 8,000 kids currently in state custody through DCS and 58,055 served by the Boys & Girls Clubs in Tennessee, this project has the potential to impact more than 66,000 vulnerable youth across the state, creating a positive ripple effect on job growth, economic development and broadband adoption that may well be felt for years to come. In 2007, more than 783,000 youth were served by foster care in the U.S. The situation is particularly dire for youth turning 18 and aging out of the foster care system, the very age group this project targets. Aging out youth experience the same challenges that all young people face as they transition to adulthood; however, those challenges are intensified by the impact the overall experience of state custody has on their lives. The Boys & Girls Clubs in Tennessee
have traditionally served youth who come from families with low socioeconomic status or from homes with parents of low educational achievement, who have low academic achievement in school and who live in communities where they are surrounded by a high-risk peer group, as well as youth who possess many other risk factors. A large percentage of club participants also come from single-parent homes and are in free or reduced lunch programs. Applicant Qualifications: Connected Tennessee, a subsidiary of Connected Nation, is a non-profit organization that facilitates public-private partnerships to increase access to and use of broadband and related technology, creating dramatic results that translate into economic and community development, better education, higher quality healthcare, more efficient public service and improved quality of life. Since its inception, C4K has delivered over 2,000 computers to community support centers, kids and families across the state facing economic challenges, in the foster care system or struggling with behavioral disorders and other issues. The total budget is $3,628,962 which includes a federal request of $2,469,792 and 31.9% match of $1,159,170. The match includes a 10.3% cash match of $379,000. The main budget categories include staffing and project management along with computer equipment. The project is estimated to create 39.4 jobs including 7.5 direct jobs, 17.7 indirect jobs, and 14.2 induced jobs.