Crook County, Oregon, a rural community of 25,000 is struggling to enter the 21st century. It was once a thriving center of economic activity involving forest products, agriculture, and recreation/tourism services. All that changed in the 1990s. Declines in the timber industry resulted in the closing of five lumber mills. Declines in manufacturing and the distribution of goods soon followed, taking away more living-wage jobs. By 2007, the rising gas prices had killed tourism, and the economy of Crook County was faltering. In the winter of 2009, county unemployment rates soared to over 20 percent. Today the County is experiencing the worst economic/labor conditions since the great depression. It has the highest rate of unemployment in the State and the 3rd highest rate in the nation. Families are struggling just to put food on the table. Residents of this small rural community don't have the wide array of options open to urban dwellers. They can't go to the neighborhood community college to learn more marketable job skills, because there is no community college in Crook County. They can't register for a trade school to learn a new trade, because there are no trade schools here either. They can't even take online courses, because there is no high speed internet access. Residents of Crook County are caught in a time warp, stuck in the 20th century with no access to a future beyond more poverty and despair. In 2008, Crook County, with the help of key state, regional, and local partners, developed a very important plan—a plan that will give residents of this rural area a chance to catch up with 21st century technology, a chance to create 21st century lives. It will create a 2-part technology and training/education program designed to build a highly educated and well-trained workforce in this community. Part 1: The construction of the Crook County Computer and Education Center (The Center, formerly known as the Open Campus) in downtown Prineville, the County's only incorporated area. This a 12,315 square foot facility will provide wired and wireless computer service supporting 65 stations. The bandwidth will ultimately support up to 100 Mbps. It will have flexible classroom and community space for up to seven rooms, with total maximum capacity of 500. It will offer the latest online and distance training/educational opportunities using current SMART classroom technology. Courses will be offered using a hybrid approach of online and face-to-face instruction. It will serve the public and provide continuing education/training opportunities for local employers: law enforcement, medical personnel, educators, etc. The Center will be open to the public from 7 A.M. to 10 P.M. seven days a week. Part 2: The purchase, modification and equipping of a mobile computer and education center (the BIT MOBILE). The bus will support 12 stations supporting 24 learners and use Satellite Technologies for connectivity. It will provide high speed internet access, job training and education courses for those who live in the remote areas of the county and are unable to commute to Prineville. USAGE: Collectively, these two centers will serve approximately 2390 users each week, and the number will grow over time. COSTS:
Total construction, equipment and partial staffing costs for both centers are $5,733,952. Crook County and its partners are providing $1,825,888 in matching funds for this portion of the project, a 31.8% match. When calculating the full project cost of $6,985,541, total cash and in-kind contributions equal 44.1%. Our 22 partners have been critical in developing a sound and fundable plan. Many are anchor institutions that have given generously of their time and money (see Budget-Matching Contributions Section for a breakdown). Our primary partners are Central Oregon Community College, Oregon State University, Oregon State University Extension Service District and the Crook County Education Council.