The DISKovery Center Project, a public computer center project of the Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC), will increase broadband participation, adoption, and access to low-income, underserved Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities in the Greater Los Angeles area. In a collaborative effort with community-based organizations and other anchor institutions, this initiative will focus on workforce development skills training among older adults, promote job creation through small business development and e-commerce applications, and increase the overall digital literacy rates among underserved API communities. In the LA County communities the Project will target, one-third of individuals live below the poverty line compared to the 15.3% in LA county. Located in California State-recognized TEA Zones and Federal Empowerment Zones, the targeted populations face significant economic distress. These communities face cultural and linguistic barriers to economic development, making them particularly vulnerable to poverty: 46% of our target population is "linguistically isolated," making job-finding, business success, and education resources that much further out of reach. The DISKovery Center Project will address these economic development broadband adoption needs among primarily low-income Asian and Pacific Islander (API) residents of the Greater Los Angeles area through culturally- and linguistically-sensitive digital literacy training and access at public computer centers operated by LTSC and its partners. The Project will confront unemployment and lack of broadband adoption amongst seniors, promote broadband adoption as a way to increase profit for struggling API small businesses, and maintain LTSC's track record of providing broadband access and computer training to low income communities. LTSC has provided public broadband access and technology classes for more than 10 years at the DISKovery Center, and this project would sustain and expand its public computer center access and training activities. LTSC and its partners will increase its number of broadband-enabled workstations from 67 to 83 computers over five public computer facilities, and double open access availability to 265 hours per week. The public computer centers will be located in LTSC's affordable housing facilities in Little Tokyo and Echo Park, as well as in partner locations in West Covina (East San Gabriel Japanese Cultural Center), Gardena/Torrance (Japanese Cultural Institute), and Los Angeles Koreatown (Koreatown Youth and Community Center). Senior unemployment rates have risen dramatically in recent years, with the Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting a record 7.1% unemployment rate and over 2 million unemployed age 55 and over. With the 2007 Current Population Survey showing only 55% of seniors using broadband compared to 71% of the total population using broadband, the DISKovery Center Project will address the senior unemployment rate by taking on this lack of broadband and technology adoption. Partnering with the National Asian Pacific Center for Aging in Los Angeles, an anchor institution that places the elderly back into the workforce, the Project will
provide workforce training to API seniors enrolled in the Senior Community Service Employment Program. SCSEP places seniors in nonprofit organizations for on-the-job training. The DISKovery Center Project will provide broadband training that will include office software and Internet skills, offered in participants' primary languages in Chinese and Korean. 69% of SCSEP participants earn at or below poverty levels, 96% have low literacy, and 92% have limited English proficiency, so offering classes in language is critical to educating these minority seniors in the skills they will need to be competitive in the job market. Over the course of the grant, this Project will train 150 SCSEP seniors and support their job placement goals through basic computer literacy training, including resume and Internet job search workshops. The DISKovery Center will also support job creation by helping small businesses, especially those owned by API minorities, take advantage of broadband resources. Los Angeles Times research showed that though only 10-13% of minority businesses used the Internet for business, 60% of these businesses saw the benefits of e-commerce. LTSC will partner with the Asian Pacific Islander Small Business Program and Small Business Association's Women's Business Center (API SBP), an anchor institution that offers in-language counseling to small businesses and hosts an annual Small Business Expo to connect business owners with resources they need. The Project will collaborate with API SBP to offer business website training, social networking, and e-commerce workshops to local ethnic entrepreneurs; it will provide 20 workshops to 500 small businesses, and will help produce 75 business websites. These workshops, offered in multiple languages, will provide our linguistically isolated populations with the Internet-based skills they need. The Project estimates that it will retain or generate up to 2,500 jobs as a result of its activities. The DISKovery Center Project will reach beyond the duration of the grant period. US Department of Labor funds will sustain the NAPCA senior workforce training program, and small business workshops will become fee-based. LTSC is also in the process of developing partnerships with other community-based agencies and private foundations to further support this broadband initiative. These steps will continue to fund instructor positions, lab maintenance, and program operations. The total DISKovery Center Project is $743,509. LTSC is requesting a grant award of $503,243 from BTOP, with matching support from the applicant and its partners totaling $240,266 (32%). The Project will generate the following outcomes over an 18-month period: - open computer lab access: 265 persons served/week, 20,670 served/18 months - NAPCA workforce seniors trained: 150 - small business websites produced: 75 - small business owners trained: 500 - other community broadband class enrollment: 1,800 - computer center and resident users connected to broadband Internet: 750 - total instructor hours: 1,800 - total broadband courses and workshops: 156 - total volunteer hours: 634 This totals 26,535 outcomes, or a total cost of $28/outcome. LTSC believes that this is a cost effective solution, given the time and resource-intense challenges associated with serving non-English, Asian-language residents in need of broadband access, training, outreach, and adoption. The DISKovery Center Project will create an estimated 8.08 job years; 64% or 5.17 of these job-years will be direct or indirect effects and 36% or 2.9 of these job-years will be induced. In addition, LTSC and API SBP anticipate an expansion of small business activity due to the e-commerce trainings provided by the DISKovery Center, and estimate that the 500 small businesses participating in the program will retain or generate up to 2,500 jobs. The 150 seniors to be trained through our partnership with NAPCA will also be workforce-ready following their broadband class and workshop trainings.