Executive Summary

In this era of technology innovation, broadband is the highway of the new economy and a vital connection linking the entire nation and the global economy. Broadband is one of our generation’s most important challenges, primarily because it presents one of our most monumental opportunities. Universal broadband and the skills to use it can lower barriers of means and distance to help achieve a more equal opportunity for all Americans. It is estimated that 93 million Americans do not have broadband at home. Adoption rates are much lower among certain populations, including rural Americans (50%), the elderly (65%), persons with disabilities (42%), low-income Americans (40%), African Americans (59%), and Hispanics (49%). Included are 13 million children aged 5-17 who do not have broadband at home and 6 million who are either Hispanic or African American. Access to training in the use, installation and deployment of the technology has become essential for the American people to take advantage of opportunities and democratic citizenship. 25% of states are ranked higher than New York State (NYS) for Digital Economic competitiveness and this is based on seven digital economic indicators according to the 2008 State New Economy Index ‘Benchmarking Economic Transformation in the States, published in November 2008. Although broadband infrastructure has been deployed throughout NYS, there are still communities where access to broadband is neither affordable nor available. The NYS Universal Broadband Strategic Roadmap, June 2009, states that two-thirds of the residents of New York City (NYC) do not have affordable high-speed Internet access and acknowledges that if broadband is available, but not affordable, its full value to New Yorkers cannot be achieved. Similarly, if broadband is available and affordable, but citizens have not been exposed or educated to its capabilities and benefits, the state’s vision cannot be realized. To launch the state into the 21st century, both technology adoption and cultural barriers must be overcome. The responsibility of the NYS Council for Universal Broadband whose mission is to ensure every New Yorker has access to affordable, high-speed broadband services. The strategy anticipates creating more "e-citizens" who are digitally literate and connected to affordable Internet access, so they can be full participants in the Information Age. The digital age is creating a virtual information and communications renaissance and the residents of Queens and Kings Counties are not currently being adequately served to exploit the current opportunities as their information ecology is not meeting their current personal, professional and civic information needs. Currently, residents who do not have broadband access in their homes, experience wait time of at least one hour and maximum usage time of one hour at public computer centers. This level of access militates against pervasive digital literacy of the population. This project intends to bridge the digital divide and increase broadband access and digital literacy of disadvantaged communities in NYC through the design, construction and operation of a Public Computer and Technology Center (PCTC).
located in the NYS designated Empire State Development Zone Queens: Far Rockaway and South Jamaica. The effective use of broadband technology by low income, unemployed disadvantaged persons in economic empowerment zones depends significantly on the digital literacy of the community. While access and service may be available, use is restricted often due to the lack of knowledge of the technology and its capabilities. By providing a PCTC in NYC, the knowledge and skills needed to promote increased use will be transferred to these vulnerable population groups. When they acquire knowledge and skills including how to install, deploy and troubleshoot broadband technology systems which are increasingly becoming part of their daily lives, these persons will enjoy a confidence and familiarity which become pervasive and lead to higher levels of demand, adoption and technology use. This will also result in the creation of skills for employment in better paying jobs, access to the range of NYS services available online, explode their options for sourcing educational, health and other information to help them achieve their full potential and contribute more significantly to the economic empowerment of the community. The vision for the proposed PCTC is that it will become an anchor institution in the community, providing technology access and training opportunities to guide residents on their pathway out of poverty. The PCTC will provide internet access using various broadband technologies, provide technical computer training to increase digital literacy, enhance employability and create jobs in the community and ensure sustainability by providing installation, maintenance and other consulting services to businesses, schools and other institutions, including ISPs for cable and satellite. This approach is innovative because in addition to teaching computer skills, life skills will be taught which aid critical thinking, results in more incisive and creative decision making and life choices and help persons integrate better socially and become more productive citizens. The associated SBA project (EasyGrant ID# 6870) will provide training in energy efficiency (EE) and RE, thus providing users of the PCTC with even more career choices and opportunities to lift them out of poverty. At present, no institutions in the community offer this range of pertinent skills which support the development of the whole person in a single location. The PCTC will serve the following NY Congressional Districts, NY-006, NY-009, NY-010, NY-011, NY-012 and NY-014 which are located in Kings and Queens Counties and jointly have a population of 4.8m persons, approximately 48% of whom are minorities. RCI projects that approximately 3,840,000 persons over a period of 8 years will use the range of services offered by the Center. The PCTC will be a Leadership in Energy and Engineering Design (LEED) and Americans with Disability (ADA) certified net zero energy building, powered by solar, wind and geothermal energy with 100 workstations, a rich menu of technical, IT and digital literacy and life skills training options. It will have a broadband IP broadcasting studio which will support course offerings, stream various kinds of programming targeted at cultural and other niches, while simultaneously providing advertising revenues to supplement income from installation, maintenance and consulting services for the sustainability of the Center. As our resumes attest, our team to manage this project consists of several highly qualified information technology engineers, some with over 25 years industry experience, including in the design, deployment and management of advanced technologies and projects valued at millions of dollars, cyber security and other engineering disciplines. Our expertise is supplemented by other relevant specialist skills including in management and online management training, program and project management, human resource management, organizational development, medical informatics, financial and legal. As a result of the proposed training facility, 20 jobs will be created directly and 5,000 jobs will be enriched, created or saved as a cadre of skilled technicians position themselves to help propel the economic
development of NYS. In addition, the construction of the building, its presence in the community and use of services provided by local businesses will be a catalyst to the community, aid the improvement in quality of life of users and enhance incomes earned in community. Construction, equipping and operating the PCTC is anticipated to cost $10m for three years. Based on conservative estimates of income from the provision of digital literacy, broadband technology and IT training, consulting services in these areas and the economic and environmental benefits to the community in terms of health and safety, the project will pay for itself in approximately 5 years.