Executive Summary

Problem Statement: The El Paso City/County region faces great challenges because of its high levels of poverty – as high as 60 percent below the Federal Poverty Line in some areas. There is also a vast shortage of computer resources for a majority of El Paso City and County residents, with a 2009 Digital El Paso survey showing that only 35% of households have high-speed access to the Internet, compared to 61.7% nationwide (Texas Borderlands: Frontier of the Future, University of Texas ' El Paso, February 2009). The community's poor technology resources are directly linked to the region's lack of financial resources, educational attainment, job access, health disparities, and quality, affordable housing. Partners in the Virtual Village project currently provide only 912 computers at 43 locations to serve a population of 742,062 people. This lack of computers results in long waits for users to access the computer resources they need to improve their lives. In addition, many of the computers at these existing centers are too old to run current software or to support reliable, high-speed connections to the Internet. Contributing to this lack of computer and educational resources is the fact that El Paso has consistently been ranked last or next to last in the America's Most Literate Cities Study conducted by Dr. John Miller of Central Connecticut State University (www.ccsu.edu/amlc09). 2009 City data indicates over 30% of adults living in El Paso City and County lack a high school diploma (www.city-data.com). Our region also lacks training in computer software and equipment that would be of great benefit to computer users, including 1) the latest word processing software; 2) resume-writing software and job-search resources; 3) adaptive technology for the disabled; 4) consumer health resources, including nutrition education and health care resources for children and families; 5) small business resources, and 6) educational, e-government and social networking resources. Approach to Addressing the Need: The Virtual Village project will leverage community partnerships established through the Digital El Paso collaborative, a community-wide partnership involving non-profits, educational institutions, community-based organizations, civic and business leaders--uniting their resources and energy to build a technologically stronger future. In 2008, the Texas Association of Government Information Technology Managers recognized Digital El Paso for its innovative and bold approaches to digital inclusion efforts. Building on Digital El Paso's success, the Virtual Village Project will more than double the number of Public Computer Centers to 98 Centers with 1667 new or replacement computers greatly expanding the range of computer center resources available to all El Pasoans and blanketing the low-income neighborhoods that are most vulnerable. Our model was devised with adaptability and replication in mind, to make it sustainable and successful. The goal of this project is to help urban and rural community residents, including persons with disabilities, to enter the Pathway to Success Pyramid at any point and access the resources they need (see graphic in Supplemental Attachments.) 1 Literacy/Basic
Skills--Residents will attend free classes in Computer and Internet basics to gain the necessary skill sets to search for jobs, take online classes, complete homework assignments, engage in social networking, obtain government information and services, and access health/wellness information. Classes will also be offered in English-as-a-Second-Language, GED preparation, and Citizenship. Employment Skills--Public Computer Centers will be heavily used for on-line career counseling and testing, on-line job searches, to complete on-line job applications, write and post resumes, and gain interviewing skills. Higher Education'Residents will be encouraged to pursue their education with the help of grant partners. Technological Advancement--Families will receive training and information skills to access essential life-skill websites such as Casey Life Skills, http://www.caseylifeskills.org/index.htm which provides skills for career planning, daily living, work life and social relationships. Small Business Resources--Small business owners will use the Public Computer Centers in the community to access business resources, such as those available at the One-Stop Centers. Small Business Centers created in Public Library facilities will expand available resources to include Business Plan software and assistance from SCORE. Partners: The Virtual Village project will build on an existing broad mix of educational and service agency partnerships, able to begin project activities immediately by using our existing PCC's and employing current training resources. El Paso Public Library (EPPL): 12 Public Computer Centers will acquire 49 new computers, 297 replacement computers, and a new Bookmobile equipped with 10 laptops to operate in the County. El Paso Parks & Recreation Department ' Recreation & Senior Centers (EPPR): 24 new Public Computer Centers will be created providing 188 new computers for use by and training in low-income neighborhoods served by these centers. El Paso Public Health Department ' WIC Centers (WIC): 16 WIC Centers (Women, Infants and Children) will acquire 27 new computers to provide access to health resources for women and their children including CHIP/Medicaid and other City/County social service agencies. Boys and Girls Clubs of El Paso: will receive 35 computers for 3 computer centers, providing access to computer training and internet use for all child and youth Club members, and adults residing in communities served by the Clubs. Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe (La Fe): La Fe will purchase new computers and replace those no longer functioning properly in their five Computer and Learning Labs. La Fe will also update equipment for their Microsoft Academy, Multimedia Academy, Photography Lab, Video editing and Production Studios. El Paso Community College (EPCC): will provide in-kind support for computer training efforts, as well as access to computer labs in five EPCC libraries. Housing Authority, City of El Paso (HACEP): 12 Public Computer Centers at housing sites will receive new computers and updated software. Paso del Norte Children's Development Center (PDNCDC): will provide support for children with disabilities and their families from PDNCDC's one Public Computer Center. People Skills, Inc.: will operate a mobile Public Computer Center equipped with 15 laptop computers and wireless service, in rural areas of El Paso County. Volar Center for Independent Living (Volar): will replace 25 computers in its Center; will acquire 15 new stations and update software and assistive technology for persons with all types of disabilities. Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande (URG): Provides Work in Texas registration, job search resources and referrals to clients at 15 centers in the El Paso City and County. URG also operates 3 centers in outlying areas with services to Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, and Presidio counties. Ysleta del Sur Pueblo (Ysleta): The Tigua/IBM Technology Center will acquire 10 new computers and collaborate with (URG). Other contributing and supporting partners include the City Information Technology (IT) Department, El Paso Area Libraries Consortium (EPAL), Digital El Paso, Diocesan Migrant & Refugee Services, Inc., and two Independent
School Districts (El Paso and Socorro). Area(s) to be served/Population Demographics: The Virtual Village project will serve El Paso City and County, a combined population that is expected to increase to 850,000 by 2012 through the expansion of Ft. Bliss. El Paso has a per capita income of just $17,786 (2009 City Data) compared to the national per capita income of $40,208 and the Texas per capita Income of $37,774 (Bureau of Business & Economic Research, UNM, 2008 / bber@unm.edu). By greatly expanding the number of computers available to the community and aggressively marketing the training services, we propose to increase the number of potential computer-use sessions from the current 1.5 million per year to 3 million per year by the end of the grant period. Qualifications of the Applicant: The City has received more than $33 million in ARRA funding plus nearly $350 million in federal grant funds during the last five years. When combined with the project partners, collectively we have received nearly $700 million in federal grants of similar scope, indicating we are well able to administer this project. Jobs to be created: Direct jobs: 91 FTE Indirect jobs: 58 FTE Induced jobs: 33 FTE Overall cost of the proposed project: $12,931,882 ( $8,397,006 Grant Funds / $4,534,876 = 35.1% Match)