Statement of Problem: The Arkansas Delta Public Computer Access Project (ADPCAP) addresses economic, education, wellness and public safety needs for 12 counties in the Arkansas Delta, a rural (83%) region of great poverty, low wages, low academic achievement, low workforce skills and limited access to health care and health education. These disparities and disadvantages are mirrored in the region's broadband use and access to computer technologies. In 2008, only 10% of the region's population used broadband (Connect Arkansas Broadband Census Maps) as compared to 60% nationwide. Approach to Address the Need: Mid-South Community College (MSCC) joins together multiple community organizations and stakeholders across the value chain to address lack of meaningful access to Broadband. ADPCAP's partners include GeoVideo, Inc., a small, start-up technology business, five community college members of the Arkansas Delta Training & Education Consortium (ADTEC), three regional health care providers, two public safety organizations, workforce investment agencies, state agencies and a minority-owned small business and non-profit association of minority-owned businesses. ADPCAP will establish four public computer access centers for the Arkansas Delta region 'combining a physical center to serve mobile citizens in Crittenden County, Arkansas, who can travel, with three fully integrated virtual centers for outreach to the place-bound, individuals with mobility impairments and citizens in the surrounding rural counties who cannot conveniently travel. Each center will provide training, education and job development services focused on a specific community identified need: education, public safety/emergency response, health care and economic development. The physical center located on the MSCC campus will offer free computer access to the public 12 hours a day, 6 days per week, along with one-on-one walk-in training in basic digital literacy. Stimulating broadband adoption requires showing people who do not use broadband how broadband improves quality of life and ability to communicate and access information as informed individuals. This project builds ubiquitous wired and wireless public access for people throughout the Arkansas Delta connecting them to public services they need. The project focuses on three initial public services to attract the people of the Delta to broadband use: providing direct instruction to regional minority small business organizations, helping at-risk adults and students get at-work and after-work training, and improving access to health and emergency services. These initial services were identified as high priority needs by local citizens and partner service organizations. To enrich and provide more cost-effective, accessible public services, the project: -- Establishes a physical public computer center to provide capacity to train-the-trainers in using project technology. Trainers will return to their organizations and train service providers who will, in turn, interact directly with clients, multiplying the physical center's reach. -- Creates three initial virtual centers using customized graphical user interfaces (GUIs) to support health-
care providers, public safety and education organizations. For example, Crittenden Regional Hospital, one project partner, will establish a virtual room at the virtual health care center where place-bound diabetes patients receive information or counseling, and where they can meet with support groups of similarly immobile people. This example suggests the project's potential to promote broadband use as the virtual center deploys customized interactive collaborative rooms used by MSCC's partners and other service providers, and by their clients. --Provides broadband education and public service outreach to all place-bound and rural populations via wired and wireless broadband. --Provides centralized virtual, collaborative environments to support interactive learning using broadband video conference, peer-to-peer collaborative e-conferences, support services and distance education access. This project will develop a national model that could be replicated anywhere to support persistent, collaborative public broadband access, especially in rural regions by combining strengths of virtual and fixed-place environments. Area to be Served: The center will serve a 12-county region with a population of 350,000. In Crittenden County, with a population of about 52,000 and where the public center will be physically located and virtual centers hosted, the unemployment rate is 11% while nearly 35% of the population over 16 years of age is considered out of the labor force altogether. Of 20,102 households, 20.6% live at or below the poverty level; this rises to a staggering 57.8% for female-headed households with children under the age of five. Only 35.6% of the population over 25 years of age has high school diplomas or equivalents, and only 11.5% has bachelor's degrees. Child health is a good barometer of health status in general, and in Crittenden County nearly 50% of pregnant women receive no first trimester health care, 13% of births are low weight and there is a 17% infant mortality rate. Further, the mortality rates for cancer, heart disease, and diabetes exceed the Arkansas rate by 25%, 41%, and 96%, respectively (Arkansas Center for Health Statistics). Lee County, to the south of Crittenden County, is considered one of the poorest 50 counties in the U.S. With a total population of 10,782, 56.8% of the population is African American, the average per capita income is $10,983 and the poverty rate is 38.6%. In 2000, almost one third of the population over five years of age (3,000) was identified as having a disability. In Cross, Lee, Phillips, Poinsett and St. Francis counties, nearly 50% of minorities are considered economically and socially 'at risk.' (The Education Needs Index). Nine of the region's 12 counties face most critical education needs, and the remaining three face critical education needs (The Education Needs Index). Using the center's unique combination of physical and virtual capacity, it is estimated that approximately 10,000 citizens will access the center's services annually. Qualifications of the Applicant: Mid-South Community College is a public two-year institution of higher education with an open-door admission policy, serving Crittenden County, Arkansas, and surrounding areas with a responsive and comprehensive educational program. As such, MSCC has expertise in developing and delivering effective programs that support the community's education and training, from basic adult education through associate degrees and workforce training. Through the ADTEC University Center, MSCC has current infrastructure to offer bachelor degree programs via partnering universities throughout the 12-county region served by the ADTEC. It is within the University Center facility that build-out will occur to create the physical computer center and virtual centers to support broadband access. MSCC administers technically and managerially complex federal and state grants, through appropriate processes and administrative controls. In a recent DOL audit, MSCC was recognized for outstanding grant management processes, including a best practices citation for leveraged resources tracking and reporting. As the lead institution for ADTEC, MSCC has a proven track record in achieving
programmatic goals on federal projects. From October 2005-February 2010, MSCC and ADTEC have received 20 federal awards, including multiple awards from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and more than $20 million from the Department of Labor, including $6 million in ARRA funds. The grant that created ADTEC included a goal to train 2,500 advanced manufacturing workers, and nearly 9,000 were trained. MSCC has successfully met goals of NSF grants to create a workforce training program in transportation/logistics and to recruit minority students into STEM careers. MSCC and ADTEC have received national recognition several times for their collaborative workforce development model: 2010 Bellwether Award for Workforce Development, recognition as a national workforce development model in a report underwritten by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Department of Labor 2008 Recognition of Excellence Award, and the Southern Growth Policies Board 2007 Innovator of the Year Award. This demonstrates further evidence of MSCC's ability, as the lead institution for ADTEC, to partner successfully with multiple entities in a regional approach that focuses on workforce and economic development for the citizens and communities of eastern Arkansas. Jobs to Be Created or Saved: 44 FTE (Direct Jobs) Overall Cost of the Project: The overall cost of this project is $6,057,764, of which $4,423,026 is being requested from the U.S. Department of Commerce.