University of Missouri (MU) Extension submits this proposal for $1,486,532 ($371,837 match) to enhance access to job training and education to underserved individuals in Missouri using its existing statewide network of Telecommunication Community Resource Centers (TCRCs). As a trusted educational provider among rural Missourians, MU Extension has been serving the state for 15 years through the TCRC network and is thrilled to be presenting this proposal for a system-wide upgrade of its equipment, software, and course offerings. The goal of this proposal is to build on the existing TCRC infrastructure in order to expand its ability to offer educational opportunities that help people either become employed or become better employed (higher wage jobs). The project approach is to enhance the programming, equipment, and software at the TCRC sites so that the network can transmit more and higher quality programs and increase access to public computers. The planned enhancements include computers, videoconferencing equipment and associated audio-visual systems, computer software and necessary staff training to support reliable, high-quality program delivery using video streaming, video on demand and, web conferencing and webcasting. Specifically, each TCRC will use BTOP funds to broaden the number of computer training classes we offer relating to employment. Recent contact with the Missouri Career Center confirmed our offerings of computer training classes on the basics of using a computer, the latest versions of Microsoft Suite of Products 'Word, Excel, Publisher, Access, PowerPoint', accounting software 'QuickBooks, and web authoring -- Dreamweaver, are software applications that employers want their employees to have. These same 'latest version' classes are needed by those people already employed to improve their productivity. In addition, there is some demand for graphic arts applications including Adobe Photoshop. We are also planning to provide training on ArcView to satisfy a growing need for trained persons in Geographical Information systems. Our goal is to provide new skills to those that are unemployed and persons already employed. Our broadening the number of offerings will target the unemployed and those seeking to become better employed in 42 counties in Missouri. Specifically, the project will use BTOP funds to increase services unique to each of our communities. TCRCs can serve their communities by teaching the Microsoft Suite of products, including Microsoft Word, Access, Excel and PowerPoint, which is the most commonly used office software, and targeting these classes to the unemployed in 42 counties of Missouri. The objectives of the proposal are to: 1. increase the number of enrollments by 1,100 or 82% in computer and information technology training classes (for an annual increase of approximately 550 individuals); additional classes to be offered include Quickbooks, Quicken, ArcView, and other work-related software applications; 2. increase public access computers across the Network by 10% to approximately 900 additional users. 3. add 140 new educational offerings each year to equip Missourians with new or
enhanced workforce skills. This will add approximately 2,000 new registrations (1,000 individuals), which is a 23% increase over current enrollments. 4. Expand access to programs by using asynchronous delivery so learners can view/listen to training programs on their schedule. In their rural locations the TCRCs are one of very few educational resource centers and thus play a pivotal part in the work, education, and business life of the area. Two of the sites are already working with their workforce investment board to put Missourians back to work. Several sites are exploring the community benefits of offering computer instruction in Spanish. The TCRC sites provide vital educational opportunities to the recently unemployed and those who need education to retain their current job or advance in it. With this funding the TCRC’s will expand their ability to serve both. Background: MU is a land-grant university with a federally mandated mission to carry the benefits of university research beyond campus. In 1993, the outreach and extension division of MU developed a unique concept to create educational centers in rural communities statewide by partnering with local entities such as cities, businesses, schools, hospitals, and other higher education providers. These centers would provide public computers and videoconferencing capability through a broadband connection in order to provide community access to educational opportunities. MU Extension has supported the resulting network of nine TCRCs for over fifteen years which includes 17 full-time and 5 part-time staff. The TCRCs provide over 1,800 computer, credit, and non-credit courses a year to more than 19,000 individuals as well as Internet access to thousands of rural Missourians through the public computers at each site. Each TCRC provides help desk services to the public access computers as well as to the communities they serve. Each TCRC site utilizes distance education and information sharing technology to offer communities a place where people can come to participate, learn and access an electronic window to the world. TCRCs are equipped with high-quality, two-way interactive video (ITV) linked to the MU Intercampus Video Network. The TCRC concept is unique because each center operates with local partners who provide funding, facilities and time to ensure overall success of the Network and its programs. The partners help build awareness, establish advisory boards, define the vision and conduct needs assessments. MU Extension administration and local communities both strongly support the TCRC network and can sustain staff and facilities beyond the grant period. As technology centers in Missouri's rural and economically declining areas, the TCRC sites extend education and training to individuals who are otherwise very difficult to reach. The use of these centers reduces travel and time costs for both learners and presenters. However, declining state funding has put a strain on the TCRCs budget; at the same time the economic downturn has created more displaced workers who need education and training. This proposal seeks to expand access to education and training in rural areas of Missouri marked by 1) relatively high poverty and 2) low residential broadband access. The TCRC sites in this proposal cover 42 counties and over a million adults many of which are last or middle mile areas. The counties served are poorer than the state average 35 of the 42 have median household incomes below the state average and the average percentage living below poverty in the service area is almost 17%, compared to a statewide average of 13%. Unemployment and job creation: Through BTOP funding this project seeks to create 4 new jobs through spending and to induce approximately 500 to 750 jobs through training. The Department of Labor reported in January that the Missouri unemployment rate is 9.5 percent. Many of Missouri's job losses are in rural areas and in manufacturing, which are likely to have a slower and less robust recovery than jobs in many other employment sectors. There is certainly untapped potential; with improved equipment and software, the TCRC sites could expand services to meet the increasing rural need. With
funding for these upgrades, the sites will be better able to improve individuals' computer skills and employability. 1) While no maps or statistics are available showing the exact areas or number of households in these areas that are now considered 'last' or 'middle' mile, no residential broadband service is available in many areas of the counties that will be serviced in this proposal, so these areas are 'last' or 'middle' mile.