Executive Summary

Although the 'Applicant Organization' for this Project is identified as the Navajo Nation Tribal Government, this is based on the EIN Number associated with the DUNS Number. The actual Applicant, to which this specific DUNS Number is assigned, is the Navajo Nation Department of Information Technology. 

a) The Problem: The Navajo are America's largest tribe of indigenous peoples. Navajo are a resourceful and unique people, whose communications skills are legendary. The Navajo Code Talkers drew upon the complexity of the Navajo language during World War II to provide encoded messaging services for all of the major surges in the Pacific Campaign. Yet on the Navajo Nation, access to the 21st Century version of encoded messaging ' digital communication on the Internet ' remains substandard and uneven. Telephone access in much of Navajo Country is less than broadband penetration in the rest of the United States, and residential broadband adoption across the Navajo Nation is nearly non-existent outside of a few pockets in some of the larger Navajo communities. This disparity in access to the "information age" is reflective of deeper economic and social inequalities between and within the Navajo Nation. The Navajo people suffer from disproportionately high rates of poverty and unemployment; low levels of formal education; and increased risk of disease and infant mortality. Lack of education, poverty, unemployment, and ill health drain resources universally whether it's County, State, Federal, or Tribal entities. Nationally, Native Americans remain the poorest minority group in the United States; the poverty rate is 25.9% compared to the national rate of 11.3%. Unemployment in Navajo Country exceeds 40%. Associated with this poverty is poor health conditions; lack of affordable and decent housing; substandard education; a critical lack of jobs; and a host of other barriers that keep most Native American communities isolated and economically distressed. The Navajo people suffer from similar metrics. One way to significantly impact these issues would be enhancing the network infrastructure to effectively address economic and social divides. The Navajo Nation needs to be successful in developing technology and e-Development strategies to put in place and support the necessary policy, human, and physical infrastructure; and to adopt measures to ensure equitable access and widespread capacity to make use of Information Technology. The success of the project will create a net benefit to the States of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and other surrounding states and native communities. 

b/c) The Solution: The Round 2 BTOP PCC NOFA represents a once in a generation opportunity to help bridge the digital divide for one of the most remote and rugged, and least served and economically vulnerable populations in this country. Covering 27,000 square miles, or equivalent in size to the states of West Virginia or South Carolina, the Navajo Chapter Broadband Initiative (NCBI) will provide free broadband access to the entire Navajo Nation population living within the Nation's boundaries at 309 sites, including 110 chapter houses, 88 senior centers and 111 Head Start centers (for
a total of 1,260 desktops). With the core technology centered at the Navajo chapter houses, the traditional center of community and cultural life of the 110 chapters of the Navajo Nation, wireless canopy communications will provide broadband access to head start and senior citizen centers. Native American chapter houses are specifically identified in the NOFA as an appropriate location for Public Computer Centers. To minimize costs and allow for substantial scaling economies, the technical configuration chosen employs a server and thin client architecture, and wireless canopy communications hubbed at the chapter houses, the anchor institution and focal point of most government services at each chapter. This allows for better remote monitoring, repair, and training for the 309 sites, lowering both hardware and especially labor costs which would otherwise be required for technicians to "ride the circuit" over the 26,000 square miles of the Navajo Nation, often over unimproved roads. For just over $350 per square mile, virtually all of the nearly 200,000 residents of the Navajo Nation will have access to the broadband connections to the internet at their local anchor institutions, the places they are used to traveling to for cultural events and community meetings, health care, education, and senior care and activities. It is estimated that at least 40,000 unique Navajo users will avail themselves of access to e-government support systems provided by the NCBI during the two-year period covered by this grant. d) Qualifications: The Navajo Department of Information Technology (DIT) is the lead on this application, and is tasked under Navajo law to provide telecommunications and information support for the Nation. The DIT technical staff has significant experience maintaining computer networks across the rugged terrain that is Navajo Country. Partnering with DIT is the Navajo Head Start, Department of Din' Education, and the Navajo Area Agency on Aging. In preparing this application, DIT has also coordinated closely with the State of New Mexico, Department of Economic Development (NMDED), and the Nation's Din' College in the creation and utilization of traditional Navajo web based content, including Navajo cultural and language resources. The Nation has previously successfully applied for and managed $6,135,285.00 in private grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in support of public access computing, installed at the chapter houses and Head Start centers. This existing hardware and building infrastructure will be leveraged under this Initiative, with many of the desktop computers reloaded with the new software. e) Jobs Created: It is anticipated that this Initiative will directly or indirectly create 66 new jobs and induce 37 others. The potential for local economic growth made possible through access to the digital economy could create far more jobs and reverse generations of the poverty cycle on the Navajo Nation.