Applicant Name: HLB MORALES PADILLO & CO.- PSC.

Project Title: SALINAS BROADBAND INITIATIVE - PUBLIC COMPUTER CENTERS (SABI-PCC)

Project Type: Public Computer Center

_______________________ Executive Summary _______________________

The Municipality of Salinas, Puerto Rico is a rural town with an estimated population of 31,000. An underserved area where more than half of its population lives under poverty level, the unemployment rate is around 30% and less than 17% of total households have high speed internet access. The Municipal Library houses the only public computer center with three workstations and internet connection speed of .768 MBps. There are not private cyber cafes either. These conditions present a clear limitation and are a handicap that impedes the progress and insertion of most of the population in the digital era. The local government neither has the resources to invest in its people and modernize public services nor can expect to receive such assistance from the state government. The proposed project intends to address the current equipment, technology and accessibility shortage that the municipality of Salinas has with the explicit aim to integrate most of its residents (children & youth, adults, senior citizens, disabled and unemployed). The efforts will be focused to (1) expand the capacity of the only library; (2) establish eight new public computer centers in different low-income neighborhoods; (3) provide on-going computer literacy training and special courses; (4) install assistive technology (AT) in three centers to provide access to the disabled population (estimated in 30%); and (5) expand the broadband capacity of critical local government agencies. By expanding the number of workstations from three to seven in the municipal library and the broadband connection speed from 1.00 (rounded) to 30.00 MBps, it is expected that the number of users increase substantially from 60 to around 300. In addition, equipment with AT will be installed in one computer with a wheelchair-friendly workstation desk. In order to succeed in reaching low-income population and integrate them as active users of the Public Computer Centers, eight new centers will be located in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods throughout the municipality. One of the centers provides tutoring to children and youth but lacks equipment and technology. There are four that will be reopened and used exclusively as public computer centers and three will be built for this initiative. The local government will retrofit the existing structures with the purpose of make them wheelchair-friendly as well as the new buildings. Five centers will have three workstations each and three will have four workstations each for a total of 27 computers with a broadband connection speed of 30.00 MBps. Also, two of the centers will have AT equipment installed and a wheelchair-friendly workstation. The Public Computer Centers will offer free access, 64-hours per week, six-day a week for the general public. Six hundred users per week are anticipated for the nine public computer centers (including the municipal library). With the acquisition and installation of broadband equipment for the public computer centers, this initiative also intends to expand the broadband access of local government agencies such as the mayor's office (includes emergency management operations), fire station and three rural health clinics. The goal is to increase the efficiency
and effectiveness of the services these facilities provide. Although there are not statistics that can provide precise data for the computer literate population of the municipality, given the educational attainment statistics, unemployment rate and the estimated percentage of total households with high speed broadband, computer literacy training is fundamental in order for this initiative to reach and integrate a large proportion of the population. An on-going training program will be administered to develop basic computing skills for successful human computer interactions, including communication, applications and basic internet tools. Courses will be designed to reach most of the population and some courses will be tailored for specific age or condition such as AT courses for the disabled, computer literacy for senior citizens, summer technology camps for children and youth, and on-line job search for the unemployed. For the duration of the project, the education component intends to reach at least 66% of total population, segmented and estimated as: 7,700 adults, 5,000 children & youth, 2,500 senior citizens, 3,000 disabled and 6,000 unemployed. Consequently, outreach efforts will be aimed to target most of its population as well: children and youth (8-21 years), adults, senior citizens (55-75 years), people with disabilities, unemployed and low income. Outreach activities will be designed to deliver awareness on the Public Computer Centers and on broadband technology and adoption through different media and stages during the three years of the project. The objectives of the campaign are to (1) create awareness and interest; (2) persuade and motivate; (3) stimulate action; and (4) maintain behavioral changes. The media to be used is local radio, TV, regional newspaper (free newspaper), posters, wall displays, flyers and leaflets. By providing an on-going training at no cost together with free access to computer and broadband technology, it is reasonably to anticipate that regular users will be comfortable using computer and navigating the internet not only for educational purposes but for professional and personal development also. The objective is for users to see the computer and high speed internet as indispensable tools for every day in a modern society so a strong participation and an adoption of broadband by 10,000 households are estimated. Given the interest of the municipality to develop this project, HLB is acting as main applicant because the Salinas' local government does not have the management capability to execute this initiative on its own. Therefore, HLB, with its managerial experience and professionals, will be in charge of carrying out and supervising the implementation of this project together with administering the computer literacy courses. The Municipality of Salinas will be the sub-recipient and will retrofit five community centers to be used as public computer centers, build three new additional centers, provide personnel to monitor the PPCs, provide location for the network equipment and supervise local outreach and communication efforts with community leaders. TCP Technologies will provide broadband, fiber optics and network equipment installation. Cisco will act as the network equipment provider including the installation of wireless network, installation of content control, maintenance, training and warranty. Puerto Rico Assistive Technology Program (PRATP) will be in charge of assessments, installation of AT equipment, training on equipment use and training on working with people with disabilities. A potential resource will be the Ana G. Mendez University System, a private institution of higher education with three university campus. Discussions have been initiated about using their training personnel for special courses, either face to face or on-line, such as the Summer Camp sessions and the on-line job-searching instruction. Other courses may be taught as feedback is received from the PCCs users about additional skills and knowledge they would like to develop and that for the first time they will have access to the equipment
and technology to achieve it. This project will create 18 direct new jobs and save 6 for a total of 24 jobs. The total cost of this project is $2,047,424 and the matching contribution is $856,672 or 42%.