Applicant Name: CONNECTED NATION, INC.

Project Title: The Iowa Digital Empowerment Collaborative (IDEC)

Project Type: Sustainable Broadband Adoption

Executive Summary

The Iowa Digital Empowerment Collaborative (IDEC) is a broad partnership of stakeholders in Iowa’s digital future. The partnership is lead by Connect Iowa, a wholly owned subsidiary of Connected Nation, and joined by the following organizations: Iowa Workforce Development (IWD), Iowa Counties Information Technology Organization (ICIT), Iowa Association of Community College Trustees (IACCT), State of Iowa Library, Iowa Statewide Independent Living Council (ISILC), Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC), Iowa League of Cities (ILC), Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF), and Iowa Department on Aging (IDA). IDEC will work collaboratively with an array of entities jointly presenting the Iowa Broadband PCC Initiative (IB-PCC) application (ID #6734 PCC). IDEC has the support of the Iowa Broadband Deployment Governance Board (IBDGB) and the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB). Harnessing the experience, resources, and energy of all partners, Connect Iowa will lead the IDEC partnership over a 2-year program to implement a comprehensive awareness campaign aimed to identify and address barriers to broadband technology expansion across vulnerable populations in the State of Iowa.

According to the FCC report on broadband adoption trends, 35% of U.S. adults are non-broadband adopters, yet most of these non-adopters have broadband available. Ensuring that all Americans adopt broadband to enhance their lives is essential to continued economic and social growth. The IDEC partnership aims to harness the experience, energy, and resources of public and private partners to target barriers to adoption faced by vulnerable groups across Iowa. The IDEC proposal meets ARRA ‘6001 statutory goals 3 and 5. In particular, the IDEC proposal would provide broadband education, awareness, and support to schools, libraries, community colleges and other institutions of higher learning, and other community support organizations, including organizations that provide outreach, access, equipment, and support services to facilitate greater use of broadband services by vulnerable populations. Further, the IDEC program would help spur jobs. The IDEC will address directly and in collaboration with the IB-PCC the following key barriers to broadband adoption: relevance of the technology; lack of computer ownership; affordability; lack of IT literacy skills; and online safety concerns. The strategy to tackle these barriers to adoption includes: Research to Identify Local Challenges to Broadband Adoption, Develop Effective Programs, and Measure their Impact. Survey research at the county level will identify local drivers and barriers to adoption of broadband and provide an understanding of who is adopting broadband and who is not, the challenges to broadband adoption, and how these technologies are already impacting the community. The research will empower local communities to develop strategies tailored to tackle challenges on the ground. Survey research will be conducted on a periodic basis providing tools to track development of the sustainable adoption programs and objective measurement of the 'before and after' impact of the program. Connect Iowa will
leverage the online mapping and planning tools available via the Iowa State Broadband and Development grant program it currently manages. Broadband Awareness Campaigns and Strengthening the Role of Community Anchor Institutions (CAI) in Each Community. Armed with mapping and survey research, Connect Iowa will implement educational campaigns aimed at empowering leaders in vulnerable communities with information regarding the challenges and opportunities of broadband in their community. The ultimate goal of the program is to facilitate consensus among local elected officials, local business, civic leaders, and other stakeholders to build pragmatic solutions to address local barriers to digital expansion. The strategy is built to ensure that local stakeholders seeking to tackle the digital divide across a community are working together toward a common goal that aims to expand or create meaningful broadband resources within the community. Connect Iowa will work with IDEC partners to design and implement this concerted strategy and leverage their existing resources and extensive network of local associates. The program will leverage existing CAI infrastructure and services including IT literacy training programs and new resources generated by the IB-PCC. Such centers will become the focal point in each community for Connect Iowa’s outreach strategy, which in turn will aim to help promote the importance of these institutions across the community. Strengthen the Role of Local e-Government Online Resources (e-gov). Relevant content is a key driver of broadband adoption. An effective means to stimulate online content that is meaningful across a community is the expansion of local e-gov services. Availability of online local e-gov solutions generates high-value online local content, increasing the value proposition to the end broadband user and helping stimulate demand. This concept is well understood and triggering growth of such services, but there are communities lagging behind. In collaboration with the IWF, ICIT, IACCT, ISAC, ILC, and leveraging programs that are currently underway (IA’s No County Left Offline), Connect Iowa will identify counties and cities that have no online presence; those that have a static website; and those that while already providing e-gov services can expand and improve such resources. The partnership will then develop a concerted strategy that will present local government and community leaders with a clear understanding of the direct benefits of e-gov services for their community and best practice for how to get there. The intended goal of this campaign is to speed expansion of e-gov resources across Iowa. No Child Left Offline (NCLO). The NCLO program aims to tackle the computer ownership barrier to broadband adoption by donating 1,200 free computers. Eligibility for the program will be based on income and target three ‘high vulnerability’ groups: children eligible for school subsidized lunches, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Complimentary software addressing online safety concerns will also be provided. Broadband providers across Iowa have agreed to support this initiative by offering one or more of the following services to recipients of NCLO computers: free installation and setup, limited-time free or discounted broadband service, limited free or discounted digital literacy training. The program will be designed and implemented in coordination with key IDEC partners working with the target populations. To further empower recipients, the program will also aim to leverage the IT literacy programs funded via the IB-PCC. The program will facilitate awareness events in each community that receives computers. Connect Iowa will hold an awareness event with state and local leaders and key members of the community. The purpose of this effort is to spotlight the benefits of computers, broadband, and other related technologies, thus further presenting the case for broadband adoption. The IDEC program will target vulnerable populations across Iowa including: low-income households and children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and minorities. Because an estimated 38% of Iowa’s population lives in rural areas, the
IDEC partnership will ensure focus of vulnerable populations in rural areas. The IDEC local broadband awareness campaigns, training, and computer distributions will reach an estimated 84,536 potential broadband subscribers who are currently without a broadband connection at home. The estimated cost of the program per new subscriber is $60.76. The IDEC awareness campaign is estimated to impact 1,103,195 individuals. Further, 1200 vulnerable households will directly benefit from the NCLO computer distribution program and associated complementary services. Connected Nation is an internationally recognized nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization with nearly ten years experience working with consumers, community leaders, states, technology providers, foundations, and other nonprofits to implement technology expansion programs centered around a mission to improve digital inclusion amongst vulnerable populations. Connected Nation has worked with hundreds of communities to mobilize thousands of local technology champions to overcome the key challenges to broadband adoption and digital inclusion affecting their communities. The estimated number of year-jobs impacted by this program is 55.83: 17 direct, 18.73 indirect, and 20.10 induced. The cost of IDEC is $5,136,100, of which $1,553,916 or 30.3% is provided as matching contributions to this application's request of $3,582,183.