EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a project intended for the 'Public Computer Center Projects' primary application area. In this innovative undertaking, Mississippi Action for Community Education's Community Empowerment and Technology Education Project (CETEP) 2010 will link five community-based organizations via the Internet and public computer centers at each site to provide communication technologies, entrepreneurial education, and job skills training programs to low-income communities. Participants will learn basic computer skills, learn how to use business software applications, receive leadership development training, job skills and have access to all available online learning opportunities. This will hasten the realization of our mission of empowering communities and individuals by increasing their capacity to help themselves. This project addresses two interrelated issues: The first concerns the isolation of low income rural communities in our service area that results from living in a rural southern environment, fragmented along racial and economic lines, together with the sheer geographic distance (it is over 145 miles between our two most distant community partners); The second is a crippling lack of access to local educational, training and technology resources for low-income residents with limited access to public or private transportation in isolated rural areas. MACE and its partners are currently implementing several initiatives designed to address the issues of limited training opportunities in the Mississippi Delta. MACE is currently implementing, YouthBuild, a job training initiative that targets low-income young adults, lacking high school diplomas, for training in construction-related skills. MACE partners with the Small Business Administration to implement a Women's Business Center, an entrepreneurial education program for low-income women designed to provide low-income women with basic instruction in running micro-enterprises. This will be followed up by technical assistance integrated with MACE's leadership development training program. MACE reaches out to over 11,000 Head Start parents through its state funded Families First Resource Center. Another 4,000 public school students are also target through our Families First Resource Center. We will incorporate information on computer technology into our presentations to Head Start parents to increase awareness of the proposed public computer centers and how they can use technology to improve their lives. We are not aware of other organizations in a similar rural area that are integrating technology into outreach to such a diverse target population. The CETEP 2010 network of public computer centers would allow us to offer our educational and technical assistance workshops, classes and other services to many low-income residents who would otherwise lack access to computer technology. Multimedia workshops and classes at each community partner site will provide participants with skills beyond the scope of both public school education and typical after-school offerings. We plan to more than double, from 226 to 450, the number of low-income persons receiving entrepreneurial education each year. We would
expose at least 300 low-income persons and youth per year to opportunities for continuing education, leadership development and job training. Partners include the Humphreys County Union for Progress, Sharkey-Issaquena County Improvement Association, Holmes County Union for Progress, and the Anguilla Children's Village. A recent study, released by Sunshine Week, the American Society of Newspaper Editors' Freedom of Information Committee, the National Freedom of Information Coalition and the Society of Professional Journalists' FOI Committee found that Mississippi was last in the nation in the amount of public information that is available online. But the Mississippi agencies responsible for these records aren't solely to blame in the lag of posting information online. Other culprits include a shortage of funding for developing and maintaining the Web sites; a shortage of broadband Internet access in this mostly rural state and lack of interest by residents who opt not to go online. Mississippi has the nation's lowest percentage of households with Internet access at 46 percent, according to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. It also has the second-lowest percentage of households with high-speed access at 33 percent. In the March 14, 2009 issue of the Memphis Commercial Appeal, Marty Wiseman, executive director of Mississippi State University's John C. Stennis Institute of Government stated, 'With so few people online, government agencies have little incentive to post records in cyberspace'. 'It's not just quality and type of information,' Wiseman said, 'but if you put it online, will the people who need it most have access to it' Wiseman said it's a common problem for rural states nationwide, because it's difficult to provide quality Internet access to people outside urban areas, which is where most Mississipians live. The problem that Dr. Wiseman refers to is compounded within our service area. The Community Empowerment and Technology Education Project proposed in this narrative will serve some of the poorest counties within the State of Mississippi: Washington, Sharkey, Humphreys and Holmes. Income Per Capita National Average Washington County Holmes County Humphreys Sharkey Income Per Capita $46,970 $24,175 $20,254 $20,755 $23,407 Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis Poverty Rates National Average Washington County Holmes County Humphreys Sharkey Poverty Rates 9.7% 38.1% 34.9% 35.2% 38.1% Source: USDA Economic Research Service Unemployment National Average Washington County Holmes County Humphreys Sharkey Rates 9.7% 16.9% 23.1% 17.7% 16.6% Source: MS Employment Security Commission