Challenge: As Orange County struggles to return to its once burgeoning economy, many have lost their homes due to a jobless recovery. There has always been an economic dichotomy in Orange County, the very highest end of the pay scale and the lowest. Everyone now in Orange County is hurting due to this recession. The unemployed are going back to school in droves to obtain training for different types of jobs and the access to education has become difficult due to loss of tax revenues and decrease of state funds flowing to the school systems, which are now over capacity. The underserved, unemployed and underemployed need access to computers and the internet more than ever before. Increased access and availability to computers and the internet is challenging for these groups and due to the budget circumstances of the State of California, access will only become less available due to staff cutbacks, aging computers in existing centers and libraries, or no computers at all and limited access in the public schools. The communities encompassed by the North Orange County Community College District-School of Continuing Education (NOCCCD-SCE) service area and surrounding areas have a significant population of individuals who not only do not have access to the internet, but do not possess the computer skills to utilize the services offered by internet access or the knowledge of its benefits. Connection to the internet is essential to looking for and applying for a job, doing schoolwork, having access to government agencies, and participating in our community as well as conveyance of health care information. Proposed Solution: North Orange County Community College District and state, county, city and community affiliates will work in conjunction with the County of Orange to provide low-cost WIFI or WIMAX access, computers, and training in the census track designated North Orange County Red Zones, Pink Zones and Enterprise Zones located in the North Orange County area. The Economic & Workforce Development Programs-California Community Colleges-New Media & Entertainment Initiative- Orange County Digital Media Center and NOCCCD will provide training and public computer centers while the County of Orange will provide low-cost internet access and low-cost computers to qualified households or individuals in these vulnerable, disadvantaged and diverse communities at libraries, workforce training centers, youth and family centers, parks, and recreation and community centers. Laptop computers equipped with WIFI or WIMAX for households, individuals and computer centers will be part of this program for portability, flexibility and space saving attributes and multi-use purposes, and not constrained to a dedicated computer lab. Area Served: NOCCCD encompasses approximately 155 square miles and includes the cities of Anaheim, Brea, Buena Park, Cypress, Fullerton, La Habra, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Placentia, Rossmoor, Yorba Linda, and portions of Garden Grove and Santa Ana, La Habra Heights, La Mirada, Orange, Seal Beach, Stanton, Whittier, and unincorporated territory in both Los Angeles and Orange counties. With a population of about one million people living within the
boundaries of the NOCCCD service area, a very large number are Latinos. Within the district's boundaries, there are 72,419 non-English speakers and 29,750 households with at least one non-English speaker. In addition, 130,540 residents do not have a high school diploma and 97,126 are older adults above the age of 65. Studies have shown that individuals in these people groups have much lower than average rates of internet usage at home. By reaching out to this population of individuals who lack an understanding of the need for internet services and providing them with an education in utilizing the internet, there is real potential for many more in the community to become subscribers of broadband services. Furthermore, in a business environment with an ever-increasing need for technical skills and abilities in all employment areas, this project will provide the needed resources to reach out to those previously underserved populations and equip them with the technical skills needed to help ensure their employability. Jobs: NOCCCD believes that no fewer than 20 jobs will be saved at the community colleges, cities, libraries, manufacturers and installers of computer, peripheral equipment and broadband services purchased for this project. NOCCCD works with several small and disadvantaged businesses, some of which are from the vulnerable population segment. 'Connect, Be Connected, Stay Connected' will create at least one job in 2010. Since NOCCCD and other community colleges in Orange County have recorded over capacity of their education systems, it can be assumed that all new computer centers and new training courses could be at over capacity as soon as they become available and an estimate of approximately 2,600 people per week will be accessing the education and computer centers which would lead to sustainable broadband adoption. By adding mobile computer labs to our instructional resources, we will enable these people, who were previously unable to access instructional technology, the opportunity to fully participate in programs and services. Cost: The total cost of the two year project is $2,721,086 of which NOCCCD seeks only $1,779,393 from the Federal government. We estimate that the federal funding will not only leverage more than $491,694 in local funds (matching funds), but this investment will provide a more skilled and internet-connected community and workforce for the economic recovery. It is proven that municipalities providing services through the internet can be more cost effective and time efficient. Studies have shown that once connected to the internet, the likelihood of staying connected is probable such as the use of a mobile phone has proven to be indispensable.