The Connecting Milwaukee Communities (CMC) project area encompasses six central city libraries and three public housing sites. The project area consists of residents that are: low-income, have limited job skills, are less likely to have graduated from high school, speak very little (or have no English speaking skills): are well below the poverty rate; have a high unemployment rates; and, little or no access to computers, much less a broadband program. The unemployment rate in this target area was estimated to be at least 38% during the development of the 2000 Census. The economic downturn has impacted on this area, and informal estimates indicate that the rate of unemployment may now be as high as 51%, particularly among African American males. The CMC intends to address the needs of a wide range of ages, races and ethnicities. The CMC will engage and educate residents in the area of computer access and use for a variety of participants including: 1) Senior citizen residents at the Olga Village Center, which is a residential program facilitated by El Centro de la Comunidad Unida (United Community Center), 2) Users of computer labs (from elementary age children to senior citizens) at six central city libraries operated by the Milwaukee Public Library System, 3) Public access at two public housing sites operated by the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM) 4) Connect with the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board (MAWIB), which will provide job information, job skill development courses and other employment readiness education programs at a number of community kiosks, and, 5) connect to the Ethernet though the work of Trinidad Group LLC, a State of Wisconsin minority business vendor. The project will enhance the capacity of two current computer centers as well as establish one new computer center, increasing the computer availability in the project area by 270 machines in the computer center environment and 300 additional machines in public housing residential units. It will maintain 5.5 FTE positions and create 10 FTE positions. CMC is concentrated on 67 Milwaukee Census tracts, which encompass 15 of the City of Milwaukee's 96 square miles, and includes residents who represent the grant required definition of underserved and un-served. According to the 2000 Census, 87.17% of the population is in the minority category. In addition, the target area has a concentration of low-income individuals and families (household income equaling an average of $26,968) and contains 43% (53,654) of the city's share of families below poverty. 43% of the target area residents, under the age of 25, do not have a high school diploma. A recent 2008 phone survey conducted by the Institute for Survey and Policy Research at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, revealed that 39% of the residents surveyed with household income below $39,999 do not have computers. When this group is included with the target area population, a conservative estimate is that 54,901 people have the potential to be served by the CMC. In addition to expanding access to computers and educational programs, the City of Milwaukee intends to develop and maintain the CMC
Bridging the Information Gap (BIG) website. Accessible to all citizens, the CMC-BIG will provide local, real time information about health issues, education and employment. The site will coordinate information distribution with the Milwaukee Health Department in cases of outbreaks (example: the H1N1 threat) as well as the Milwaukee Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI), in the case of bio-terrorism or other threats to the community. BIG will have the capacity to disperse critical information throughout the region regarding any and all threats throughout the Milwaukee community. In addition, the site will offer a plethora of resources for community residents (flu shot clinics, Census information, social and recreational announcements, educational opportunities and other pertinent information. The participants in the Connecting Milwaukee Communities Initiative are: the City of Milwaukee (Department of Administration, Milwaukee Public Library and the Housing Authority), Centro de la Comunidad Unida, Inc., and Trinidad Group LLC. Every partner brings a broad spectrum of experience, expertise and creativity to the CMC. The Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM) serves over 10,000 households and has a long, successful history of establishing sustainable partnerships with public, private organizations, the nonprofit community, local foundations and academia. HACM has received recognition as an 'Innovations in American Government' award finalist, and has been awarded the National Social Advocacy Award from the American Planning Association and the Gold Award for Municipal Excellence from the National League of Cities. The Milwaukee Public Library has been a national leader in the provision of technical resources to its users. Computer labs, instruction and staff assistance has been a benchmark of the MPL. Centro de la Comunidad Unida has been provided services to the Latino community for almost 40 years including education, elderly programs and housing, family fitness and health, prevention programs for youth. The overall request over the 3 year period is $3,526,502 with a local in-kind match of $1,046,760. Funding will be used for computer hardware, software, peripherals, cabling, network equipment, staff who will offer in-house technical and maintenance support and facilitate computer classes. Due to extraordinary economic conditions, the City of Milwaukee and the key partners in this application have little capacity to offer a direct cash match. As a result, the cash match is $23,405 and the remainder is in the form of in-kind match. The Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board operates as Milwaukee County's workforce connector providing linkages between employers and potential employees as well as offering job training and skill development programs. Trinidad Group, LLC, has experience in the design development and implementation of high performance, state of the art fiber networks. Trinidad Group will provide last mile connections to community center sites.