Executive Summary

a. Statement of Problem or Need

Access to broadband connectivity holds the best potential for closing the digital divide. A 2005 Pew report defines the digital divide in terms of Internet access at home, and the differences are dramatic: 71% of higher-income households have high-speed connections compared to just 23% in households with incomes below $30,000. While high-speed connectivity may be available outside the home (e.g., schools, centers), once individuals from the poorest families go home, they lose an important economic and educational advantage. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, jobs requiring science, engineering and technical training increased by 51% from 1998-2008, with more than six million unfilled due to a lack of qualified workers. A recent report by the State Education Technology Directors Association stated, 'High-speed broadband access and connectivity are vital for economic growth, global competitiveness, education, innovation, and creativity,' as well as the 21st century workplace. Economic opportunity and jobs can only thrive if everyone has access to high-speed Internet. Broadband connectivity gives rural communities the same advantage as those in areas of higher penetration; and creates opportunities to look for a job and to work (particularly as more employers move to online open listings). A study by the Brookings Institution shows that for every percentage point increase in broadband penetration, employment increases by close to 300,000 jobs. (Communication Workers of America. (retrieved 03/05/10). High speed Internet. www.speedmatters.org. In 2006, Digital Millennial Consulting (DMC) conducted a USDE-funded poll in the DC metropolitan area to determine how technology and broadband access could engage high-school students in STEM careers. Findings, correlated with national surveys, confirmed that students favor cell phones as their communication tool of choice, and want anytime, anywhere learning. This research contributed to the development of Project K-Nect. The value of Project K-Nect Florida is to give validity to the use of mobile technology intersected with broadband connectivity access to close the digital divide; increase high-school and adult learning opportunities and achievement; increase 21st century job skills; increase job placement, retention, and advancement; and advance educational goals of our communities and nations. b. Overall approach and innovation

Project K-Nect Florida is a model of public and private partnership with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL); Digital Millennial Consulting (DMC); Florida Adult and Technical Distance Education Consortium (FATDEC); Florida State University (FSU); Florida Virtual Schools (FLVS, fiscal agent); PowerLine Telco (PLT); and the University of Florida. The approach/flow of activities follows: ' FLVS compiled a list of high-risk, primarily rural school districts. This list was filtered to show highest poverty, unemployment, concentrations of Native Americans, and family characteristics. ' Working with this initial target population list, PLT will create a data map of the state, looking at broadband penetration and use, and underserved populations with limited access to true
broadband capabilities. Using these findings, the geographic target areas will be adjusted. CAEL will conduct a workforce analysis concentrating on economic trends, jobs, and skill sets that are in demand in the adjusted target area. This map will address transportation, child care, wage studies, and other contributing issues as well. Based on the analyses of PLT and CAEL, the list of participating districts will be finalized. The University of Florida independent evaluator will finalize the evaluation design and progress metrics, based on work above. DMC and FLVS will modify two STEM-related courses' math (Algebra 1) and science (biology I) for data delivery over mobile technology. (Storyboards are available for these two courses, facilitating development.) DMC and FATDEC will modify credit recovery and GED courses for mobile data delivery. Based on findings from the CAEL need analysis, DMC and FATDEC will develop two new job-supporting courses. FSU content development teams, comprising both technical developers and subject matter experts, will lead this development. FLVS will be the lead portal for this program, providing STEM coursework to struggling students referred by the participating schools, and referring the adult learners to FATDEC. As noted in The Economist (03/12/05), 'For policymakers interested in closing the 'digital divide' to boost growth, the message is clear; mobile phones are the most effective means of doing so.' Integrating broadband wireless network computing with an established online distributor of educational content may be the most effective way to remove barriers to access for learning to establish future workskills and training for current jobs. Access to the Internet and high-speed broadband is a necessity for economic growth and employment.

c. Areas to be served

Based on criteria of race/ethnicity, adults' educational levels, labor force participation, unemployment, number of individuals living below poverty, and school district AYP achievement, the following 17 primarily rural counties (un-served/underserved) will be served: Calhoun, Escambia, Gulf, Highlands, Holmes, Indian River, Jefferson, Levy, Okaloosa, Okeechobee, Palm Beach, Pasco, Polk, Putnam, Santa Rosa, Walton, and Washington. Together, these counties have a population of 3.5 M, with 12.6% Black and 8.5% Hispanic/Latino. Just 79.2% of those over 25 years old received a high-school diploma; 55% over 18 participate in the workforce; unemployment is 7.1%; and 16% of individuals live in poverty. A full chart identifying demographics for these counties is included in Section 11. This list of participants will be refined and broadened by the PLT and CAEL analyses. The project goal is to provide 10,000 high-school and adult learners ('users') in 5,000 households with broadband Internet access that, as a result of access to GED/job skills training and courses, will result in the households being able to assume and sustain broadband connectivity on their own after the project.

d. Applicant qualifications

FLVS, the largest and most successful K-12 online program nationally, is part of the Florida Public Education System and serves students in all 67 Florida school districts. Nineteen school districts across Florida operate FLVS franchises, allowing the districts to offer FLVS online courses using their own teachers and administrators. Funding for FLVS is based on the number of students who successfully complete their online courses'a groundbreaking and first-of-its-kind funding approach that emphasizes student achievement. FLVS's growth accelerated after 2003, when state legislation was passed allowing all Florida high-school students to choose an online course. A 2007 report by Florida TaxWatch found that FLVS students earn higher scores on state assessments than students who take courses traditionally. In 2005, FLVS was featured in the National Education Technology Plan as a model of success for other states to follow. In December of 2008, the state of Florida was recognized as '#1 in Virtual Education' by the Center for Digital Education, an acknowledgement of the statewide virtual program and the impact FLVS has made. e. Jobs saved or created

In establishing benchmarks for current job growth (adult
learners), the project will target employing at least 70% of the adult learners (3,500 jobs). In establishing benchmarks for future career development, the project estimates that 95% of all participating high school students (4,750) will graduate high school. Of these, 40% will enter the workforce directly and secure jobs (1,900 jobs created); and 50% will pursue college degrees that contribute toward higher-paying jobs (2,375 jobs created). The total impact of the project, therefore, is 5,875 jobs. Because the online courses offered are in STEM-related disciplines, it is expected many of these students will pursue STEM careers, which will have a multiplier effect on economic development, geographic competitiveness, and availability of new jobs.

f. Project Cost

The project has successfully obtained a match of 42.7%, with costs as follows: Federal Grant Request $13,438,800 Total Match Amount $10,028,800 Total Budget $23,467,600 The match for this grant is 42%.