The Public Housing Agency of the City of Saint Paul (PHA) is requesting $327,400 in grant funding to create public computer centers in the community rooms at all sixteen, PHA-owned hi-rises. The computer centers will provide broadband Wi-Fi access and training to 2,548 low-income, vulnerable adults. The PHA provides about 10,000 Saint Paul residents with safe, affordable housing through its public housing program. Over half of the PHA-owned units (2548) are in 16 high-rise apartment buildings for seniors, persons with disabilities and younger single people. Most of the hi-rise apartments are efficiency or one-bedroom units. Approximately 74% of the households in the PHA's hi-rises are occupied by residents who are elderly and/or disabled. The average annual income of the hi-rise population is slightly more than $14,000, just 21% of the area median income level. The project will provide the following services for the targeted population: 'Three computer stations in the community space at each hi-rise. The stations will include new desks, chairs and partitions, and one of the three stations will be handicap accessible, ' New Broadband connected computers and computer hardware such as large-screen monitors, mice, combination printer/fax machines, speakers, headphones, and web camera, ' Free Wi-Fi Broadband access in each Computer Center, ' Outreach to all residents regarding the availability of Broadband services in their hi-rise. Outreach efforts will include addressing the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) needs of hi-rise residents by providing information in languages other than English that are commonly spoken at these locations, ' Basic computer skills training and awareness programs on software and web-based resources such as email, Quicken, and search engines, ' Introduction and training on assistive technology such as speech recognition software, programs for visually impaired users (Job Access With Speech), and English Language Learners, ' Security Cameras that will be able to monitor the computer stations without violating the privacy of users. The PHA will partner with the Presidents Council in this initiative, an official group that is made up of representatives from all sixteen hi-rises, and that serves as the liaison to PHA management staff. The Presidents Council has given its unanimous support to this grant application. If grant funds are awarded, PHA staff will work conjointly with the President Council's Computer Team during the set-up of the computer stations and training process. The PHA and the Presidents Council have will partner with a local computer training organization to provide the training components outlined previously. The PHA and Presidents Council have already outlined a plan based on a train-the-trainer concept. This will allow for the creation of a group of knowledgeable users at each hi-rise who will then be available to assist fellow residents. The PHA is also working with employees of the City of Saint Paul's computer work group to learn how the City constructs computer stations for the St. Paul Public Library system. The PHA will use this information as a working model for the creation of public computer centers in its hi-rises. The PHA has
also received formal, written support from the Ramsey County Department of Human Services for this application. Eighty percent of hi-rise residents are currently receiving Social Security, SSI, or some form of public assistance through Ramsey County Human Services. As our society becomes more dependent on web-based systems, residents are finding it more difficult to access forms, services, or updates unless they have access to a computer and the internet. In addition, recent decreases in funding for county-based services have also meant that case-workers don't have access to portable computer devices when they conduct site visits for residents who may be homebound or limited in their ability to travel. The creation of public computer centers in PHA hi-rises not only serves to improve resident access and ability to receive needed services, but helps strengthen the partnership between the PHA and county human service agency. The PHA and the Presidents Council are requesting a waiver for matching contributions. The PHA and Presidents Council estimate that the annual cost to sustain this project will be approximately $14,000 for all sixteen hi-rises, excluding miscellaneous office supplies. Clearly understanding the value and benefit that access to Broadband services represents, each of the sixteen individual Resident Councils have agreed to sustain the annual costs for internet access and supplies out of their annual budgets and through the addition of Resident Participation dollars. PHA staff estimate that the cost per user will be $128.50 and this initiative will enhance the employment skills of 1,400 low-income adults, 34% of the current hi-rise resident population.