Elimination of the Digital Divide in Frederick County: The Housing Authority of the City of Frederick has developed a Partnership with Acela Technologies, a minority, veteran-owned small business specializing in designing and deploying converged wireless solutions. The organizations have agreed to form a partnership for the purpose of eliminating the digital divide that exist between the general population and low income families within public housing. Frederick City is a relatively affluent community, with a median income of over $60,000. The city currently has an unemployment rate of 7.9 percent. Residents of public housing within the city of Frederick, however, have a median income of barely $12,000, and an unemployment rate of 39 percent. A focused and powerful intervention is necessary if we are to help lift these families up and out of poverty. We believe that if we can successfully bridge the digital divide, families in public housing can begin to play on a level playing field with others in our city, county, state and nation. Low-income residents have been left behind by digital advances, and we propose to rectify that with the development of a middle mile and last mile solution. It is for this reason the Housing Authority is partnering with Acela Technologies in proposing this dynamic solution to help low-income families help themselves. The President of Acela Technologies, who also serves as an elected Board Member for Frederick County Public Schools, has witnessed the disadvantages low income families have when it comes to having access to the wealth of information available on the internet from their homes. Most children from middle-class homes are able to leave the school buildings with homework assignments and return home where they have access to many resources to include parents with a college degree or higher, who are typically more familiar with the subject matters relating to the homework assignments; books and other resource materials found in their homes; readily available transportation to the library and other educational centers and a computer/computers with the latest software and virus protection with unlimited access to the internet. The broad difference in these valuable resources has created a digital divide that makes it nearly impossible for any educational institution to meet the targets of the 'No Child Left Behind' mandate or to even begin to address the performance goals of the new federal initiative 'A race to the top'. The mission of the Housing Authority's proposal is to ensure that the children residing in the targeted low income housing communities of Frederick County are no longer handicapped by the digital divide. It is our goal to ensure these targeted populations have a home computer with safe access to the internet so that they can access the many resources available on the internet to assist them with locking steps with their peers. We will also provide training to both the students and their parents to ensure the children maximize their potential in achieving high marks academically. The parents will also benefit as internet access will provide access to more job opportunities and other useful information to better assist them in securing
meaningful employment. Acela Technologies is responsible for the design and deployment of wireless mesh networks in each of the targeted communities to provide high speed broadband wireless access for 300 low income families. Acela will also acquire and install an internet ready desk top computer with basic Microsoft software and a monitor in each home. Acela will also provide firewall protection for each user through the main server connection; thereby avoiding the need to purchase and activate virus protection software at each computer. We plan to serve over 300 families over five sites within three years, providing the technology to make the internet available, the computer to allow each household its own "enrichment center," and the training to ensure that the users are getting the maximum benefit from this resource.