Overview: A large percentage of Mississippi citizens being connected by this regional public computing center (PCC) network project, called MS Broadband Enablement and Enhancement (B.E.E.) at each of the state’s 241 libraries, and in other of our small key communities, are rural and underserved. The U.S. League of Small Town Mayors (STM) was established to create a cost effective collaboration and information sharing platform to assist with key issues faced by small town mayors. STM proposes a unique regionally networked computing center model to bring affordable, fourth-generation broadband services to all residents across the state. This broadband centric fully web-based network maximizes network dollars spent when compared with most other traditional computing center models in use today, while still delivering the latest proven technology center functions to improve lives and transfer life-long self-empowerment skills. This approach serves the largest possible segment of the population in each of the Mississippi communities it connects through broadband, by leveraging engaged local leadership, technology-based innovations in teaching and public safety, bottom-up transference of STM’s economic development and rural entrepreneurship models, and the use of software designed to create information and general presentations, online training materials, web conferencing, learning modules, and user desktop sharing. The appreciation for what broadband can do to improve one’s life cannot simply be taught, it must be conveyed to those new to its potential, especially the most vulnerable populations in our communities, in a way that is thoroughly caught. The STM PCC’s labs and programmatic initiatives will assist multiple critical sectors including healthcare, life-long learning and early childhood development. STM’s MS B.E.E. planning and broadband integration and operations is managed by Community Development Leagues of America (CDL) which brings a track record and management team needed to ensure increased broadband adoption rates and sustainability across this region. STM and CDL will be assisted in these efforts by their project partners, including Telamon Corp., the Mississippi Library Commission and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

a) A statement of the problem or need your project addresses with regard to improving broadband service adoption rates. All constituencies in the MS B.E.E. network service area - residents, schools, libraries, healthcare and public safety facilities - need better broadband access and the opportunity to experience the transformative impact of broadband. In the counties and communities being interconnected with this proposal, not only is affordable high-speed broadband access lacking, but well below 40% of the resident consumers are currently subscribed to broadband services, so there is a dire need to both deliver and convey to the entire public in this region, a new appreciation for the difference broadband can make in direct improvement of their quality of life. b) Your overall approach to addressing the need, and how your approach is innovative. While leveraging maximum use of the small, often stretched pool of personnel
available to help administer PCC in the state's libraries and our smaller rural towns, MS B.E.E. will deliver its labs and programs via a virtual computing center, with public accessible PC workstations, providing customizable on-line meeting rooms; multiple meeting rooms per user; breakout sessions within a meeting; VoIP; video conferencing; meeting recording; screen sharing, chat and whiteboarding; user management, administration and reporting; polling; and a central content library. MS B.E.E. workstations are very easy to use, emphasizing the PC, a browser, and pervasive internet tools, e.g. adobe flash. c) Area(s) to be served; population of the target area(s), including demographic information; and the estimated number of potential users of your public computer center(s). All 82 counties of the state, using all 241 libraries in the state and other small rural communities without libraries. d) Qualifications of the applicant that demonstrate the ability to implement the project and achieve its intended results. CDL is particularly qualified to run this project having already facilitated community development processes, including community center design and deployment, around the state, as well as having designed and assisted in the deployment of similar types of statewide "collaborative networks". STM will be working with CDL and its partners to provide selective free broadband access, and its public computing/ broadband education, awareness, training, together with key equipment for anchor institutions located throughout the region. Additionally, STM-CDL is developing turnkey programs for housing projects, assisting/working with housing authorities and, towards horizontal federal agency collaboration, by helping establish HUD neighborhood networks as part MS B.E.E.'s future planning. STM's PCC proposal gains much additional momentum from collaborating with CDL's Critical Community Infrastructure network project planning underway. e) Jobs to be saved or created. It is anticipated that over the project's beginning 3 year staging and outreach period, that over 50 new jobs will be created. f) Overall cost of the proposed project. Is $8,393,971. 20% in cash match is being provided by the applicant as well, and the applicant is not receiving any federal support for non-recurring costs in the proposed funded service area.