Workforce Solutions, Inc. is the only workforce development board serving the counties of Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy in South Texas, often referred to as the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Specifically, the geographic area is adjacent to the Texas/Mexico Border with a projected population of 1,202,189 by 2010. It currently serves a predominantly Hispanic population with the ethnicity breakdown as follows: 97%, 97%, and 90% respectively. Workforce Solutions, Inc. delivers publicly-funded employment and training services through a network of partners located throughout the region. The goal of Workforce Solutions, Inc. is to provide businesses, employers, job seekers and employees with the resources needed to succeed in an ever-changing world. Workforce Solutions is dedicated to the development and retention of a strong and vibrant workforce for the Lower Rio Grande Valley region. Workforce Solutions offers free job search assistance, Career Counseling and Job Search Workshops to all customers through Workforce Centers. The proposed project, consisting of one hundred free standing kiosks, will give Workforce Solutions the ability to reach a greater number of individuals by making use of the latest broadband technologies. The total project cost, including hardware, software design and implementation is slated to be $1,212,559 including local funding contributions. Workforce Solutions intends to develop and implement Remote Employment Database and Interface (R.E.D.I.) Centers designed with 'touch screen' and interactive digital technology. R.E.D.I Centers are interactive kiosks that will allow individuals to access services from Workforce Solutions without having to travel to Workforce Centers. Currently there are six physical Workforce Centers to serve an employable population of approximately 526,759. The goal of the kiosk concept is two-fold: 1) provide more accessibility of clientele to job availabilities and related information, and 2) increase the time efficiency of clientele who are seeking job opportunities and services of Workforce Solutions. Additionally, R.E.D.I Centers will provide broadband access to underserved communities who currently lack broadband infrastructure. One hundred R.E.D.I. Centers will be deployed throughout the Rio Grande Valley in rural underserved areas, giving Workforce Solutions the ability to reach populations currently living in rural communities through the use of broadband technologies. Workforce Solutions seeks to serve the highest proportion of rural residents that lack access to broadband service in the geographic region that it serves. Additionally, REDI Centers will provide broadband access, education, awareness, and access to training in three Congressional districts, the 28th, 25th and 15th. The impact of this program will address the lack of broadband technologies in rural areas, stimulate job creation, and provide access to training, education and availability of health care providers. All of the proposed sites are located in areas that have been identified by Connected Nation as qualifying under the Broadband Stimulus Eligibility of Rural and Remote Areas for the State of Texas. Workforce Solutions, via these centers will provide access to
broadband technologies for communities that would otherwise not be able to afford them. Utilizing the one hundred centers, Workforce Solutions will be able stimulate job creation in the proposed areas. The kiosks will give economically challenged populations the most up to date information on local and regional employment opportunities, career guidance, and training opportunities. Workforce Solutions will have the capability of providing rural communities with real time updates thereby reducing the amount of time it takes for information to reach people in rural areas. The lack of access to information in a timely fashion can pose many challenges for individuals that live in remote areas. By providing information in a timely manner, individuals who need to arrange for transportation or child care will utilize their time more effectively and efficiency in order make use of the information. Through requested funding Workforce Solutions will provide the targeted populations with access to local employment opportunities and career guidance which will ultimately impact job creation and job placement. In addition to job creation and job placement, the R.E.D.I. centers will enhance the skill set of the existing workforce in rural areas in that Workforce Solutions offers individuals job training and career counseling. In addition, Workforce Solutions will be able to provide individuals in rural areas with job training that would otherwise not be available in their communities. The more education and training an individual possesses the greater the marketability and increases the likelihood of job placement. This remote capability will not only create an environment that promotes education and training with in the community, but also provides access to communities that are 'cut-off' from these services. Workforce Solutions projects that for every $25,000 that is received in funding, one (1) job would be created. Therefore, under the current budget of $1,212,559 it is estimated that forty-eight (48) new jobs will be created in addition to the jobs created as a result of the kiosks. The Broadband Technology Opportunities Program will positively impact the Lower Rio Grande Valley's ability to create job opportunities and foster economic growth. The primary means of advancing this goal lies within education and the availability of resources. Currently, there are only six Workforce Solutions centers spread throughout the Rio Grande Valley in place to serve a population of well over one million residents. Based on this fact alone, it is unlikely that all residents of the Rio Grande Valley will have equal access to the information, services and resources provided by Workforce Solutions offices. In regards to job creation, the expanded availability of resources in the form of touch and go kiosks will itself promote job opportunities and economic growth. The kiosks, which rely on broadband technology that allow users to access real-time information, will give job seekers the information and training they need to attain employment. Furthermore, employers will greatly benefit as well. Businesses and employers will now have access to a greater pool of potential employees to choose from when making hiring decisions. Even more important is the opportunity available for rural residents to effectively manage their ability to seek out job opportunities. The close proximity of kiosks will drastically cut down the time it would take to otherwise drive to the nearest Workforce Solutions office and seek out information needed. Conversely, the kiosks will also benefit employers by reducing the time they need to disseminate employment information to residents of these rural communities. Without a doubt, the end result would be an increase in the availability of resources, which will positively impact the Lower Rio Grande Valley’s ability to create jobs and foster economic growth. Additionally, R.E.D.I. Centers will impact economic development in the region. R.E.D.I. Centers enhance rural economic development by addressing unemployment, and increasing awareness and training opportunities.