**Executive Summary**

Boat People SOS, Inc. (BPSOS) will facilitate broadband access for vulnerable and underserved residents of Bayou La Batre, Alabama and surrounding areas of South Mobile County (hereafter Bayou La Batre), including low income, limited English proficient individuals from ethnic minority groups that have been devastated by Hurricane Katrina and stressed by the economic downturn. Our Neighborhood Empowerment and Support through Teamwork - Community Technology Center (NEST-CTC-BLB) Project will facilitate and support reliable broadband access to this impoverished and under-resourced community in order to support the State of Alabama's efforts to connect all Alabamians to the 21st Century information economy. We request $461,539 in federal funding to contribute to a total project cost of $577,030. By enhancing local technological infrastructure and saving two local jobs, this project will address barriers to information and services faced by our target population, and will significantly contribute to the progress of some of the most vulnerable and underserved populations in Alabama.

The local population of Bayou La Batre and surrounding areas consists of 3,500 residents. Bayou La Batre is a severely distressed community that is faring significantly worse than the State of Alabama as a whole. The unemployment rate in Mobile County in December 2009 was 11.3%, up from 10.8% the month before and well above the state average of 10.6% and 10.2%, respectively. Furthermore, the poverty rate in Bayou La Batre (below 100% of poverty guidelines) is 28.2%. This is significantly higher than the national average (13.2%), state average (16.3%), and county average (19.4%). While small, the town is ethnically diverse; one third of the local residents are immigrants and refugees from Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand) many of whom have been in the U.S. for less than 15 years. Due to a language barrier, low levels of education and literacy, and poverty, a very large proportion of the local Southeast Asians do not have access to broadband service. Our project addresses the particular needs of over a thousand Southeast Asians in our community. The vast majority of them speak little or no English; the reason for their coming to the area in the first place was to work in the shrimping and seafood industries, which do not require English proficiency. Most adults in the area have not completed high school and the high school dropout rate is the highest in the state. A large proportion of the local Southeast Asians are Amerasians, children born to US servicemen and Vietnamese women during the Vietnam War; viewed as children of the enemy, they were denied education by the post-war government in Vietnam. The majority of them cannot read or write in their own language. Few parents among this project's target population are equipped to contribute to the education and future of their children. In addition, without access to vital information, many community members are ill-equipped to maintain their personal health and the health of their families. In addition
to already struggling with the above listed barriers, the area was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Recovery has been painfully slow as the community has limited resources and low capacity. Moreover, there is limited assistance available; most national organizations that offered post-Katrina case management have left the area. In addition to BPSOS, only four other service agencies currently serve a population of 3,500 residents. Three of these five organizations were formed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and have only a few staff members. A handful of faith-based organizations operate in the area, but offer only limited services to their parishioners. Only BPSOS has the capacity to serve Southeast Asian residents and connect them to needed services. According to our service experience over the past four years, we are not aware of any Southeast Asian households with broadband service. Despite the tremendous need for broadband access, there are very few locations in Bayou La Batre capable of providing access to broadband for the community. Through recent funding, BPSOS, and the Bayou Clinic as well as Alba Middle School - two community anchor institutions - have all been able to install basic broadband technologies in our facilities. However, additional funding is needed to enhance access, training, education, and support services - including support for equipment and staff. By adding computers and peripherals, our proposal will help the broadband services at our CTC, the Bayou Clinic, and the ESL classrooms in Alba Middle School become fully accessible. BPSOS' project staff will then equip community members with the knowledge needed to use the online educational and health resources introduced to community members at the anchor institutions. Our CTC will provide ongoing access to these resources and will also be used as a platform for conducting workshops and classes for on-going programs such as preventive health, financial education, non-profit capacity building and other topics. We believe that the usage of computers and broadband will have a very positive impact on the functioning of the community as a whole. Specifically, access to broadband will enhance our community's prospect for full recovery from the devastations of Hurricane Katrina, social integration, and education and ultimately for healthy, self-sufficient and economically stable lives. As the only culturally and linguistically competent service provider in Bayou La Batre and surrounding areas, BPSOS is uniquely positioned to successfully implement this project and support our partners as they work with the target population. Furthermore, as the local branch of a national community-based organization with a 30-year track record of success in serving the Vietnamese community and experience setting up and sustain seven CTCs nationwide, BPSOS will leverage our own experience, as well as the best practices and lessons learned by BPSOS branch offices across the country.