Executive Summary

a. 'Meeting Community Needs by Expanding Computer/Internet Access at the Library' is a community-driven project that will address problems facing vulnerable populations throughout Arkansas (low-income and the unemployed and/or underemployed). 1) Arkansas's rising unemployment rate (currently 7.6%, up from 5% June 2008) 2) Lack of affordable public access to high-speed broadband services, education, training and technical support, particularly in rural areas of Arkansas, and 3) The increasing need for people to access essential E-government resources and other online resources for work, healthcare, education, and citizenship at the same time the economic downturn is reducing consumer ability to acquire the necessary computer technology and broadband access.

b. Meeting Community Needs by Expanding Computer/Internet Access at the Library will expand computer/Internet access at public library public computer centers in 33 counties throughout Arkansas. This is a community-driven project where public libraries submitted applications requesting funding for computer/Internet needs relevant to their communities. 63 public library public computer centers will provide free public access computing services to the general public and access to online job resources available 24 hours, seven days a week through remote access. The Arkansas State Library will subscribe to an online database that will essentially be a one-stop, job skill-building resource. This database will help job seekers with resume preparation, test preparation, interviewing, and job research. This database will be available to community colleges as well as the public library public computer center. This project will also expand public computer center hours of service, improve broadband capacity, provide computer equipment for users (more, newer, faster computers), and expand training and technical support.

c. Meeting Community Needs by Expanding Computer/Internet Access at the Library will serve the residents of 33 counties throughout Arkansas with a population of 917,610. These counties are located throughout Arkansas from the north to the south, and from the east to the west. These counties are part of the Mississippi Delta and the Ouachita National Forest. 62.9% of the population are considered living in a rural area. The counties represented in this project reflect a below poverty rate of 19%. The job skill-building resource will be available to all community colleges so that areas of Arkansas not involved in this project with a public library public computer center will be served.

d. The Arkansas State Library (ASL) is the lead applicant for Meeting Community Needs by Expanding Computer/Internet Access at the Library, working with 22 partner public libraries. ASL has extensive experience in managing innovative statewide grant projects of comparable size and complexity. With a proven history of the successful management of Library Services and Technology Act funding (annual funding of close to two million dollars), State Aid to Public Libraries, state supported General Improvement Fund grants, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation projects; ASL is well prepared to implement this project.
successfully throughout the years with LSTA; the current manager of grants administering, monitoring, and reporting on LSTA funded projects for the past nine years. The knowledge gained from this experience ensures the successful implementation of a project of this scope. The ASL business office is more than prepared and capable of implementing this project. ASL has disbursed State Aid to Public Libraries and state General Improvement Funds to public libraries throughout the state. ASL has an eleven-year history of implementing, operating, and sustaining Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Library Program projects (over $4 million total funding). These projects include the very first computers in libraries as well as the Staying Connected Grant and the Public Access Computer Hardware Upgrade Grant to the current Pilot Opportunity Online Broadband Grant Program. The current ASL grants manager has worked successfully with Gates Foundation grants since 2001, beginning with the Technology Training Program Grant. The operation of this project, from the disbursement of funds, to monitoring each public computer center, and reporting is one ASL is well prepared to undertake. ASL, building on 'lessons learned' from past grant initiatives, is confident that this project will be successful in Arkansas, having found that employing dedicated staff and partnering with and developing a supportive relationship with the individual participating libraries, helps to ensure the success of a statewide grant initiative. e. Meeting Community Needs by Expanding Computer/Internet Access at the Library has the potential to create 8 jobs and employ another 16 through contractual work. This project has the potential to help hundreds of Arkansans find jobs or start new small businesses through expanded public library public computer center hours, and job skill-building resources. The job skill-building resource will be available to all Arkansas public libraries and community colleges, so that more people needing this resource will be reached. This will ensure that other areas of Arkansas not involved in this project with a public library public computer center will also be served. f. The overall cost of Meeting Community Needs by Expanding Computer/Internet Access at the Library is $3,088,383 for the two year project. Costs are for expanding public library public computer centers at 63 public library locations, and to license online job search/skill-building resources available to ALL public libraries and community colleges in Arkansas. The Arkansas State Library is requesting $2,113,474 in BTOP Public computer Centers Program funds and project partners will provide $974,909 in cash match.