Broadband USA Applications Database

**Applicant Name:** COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF SOUTH ALABAMA INC

**Project Title:** South Alabama Broadband Network (SABN)

**Project Type:** Comprehensive Community Infrastructure

_______________________Executive Summary_______________________

South Alabama has become a part of the United States where you find very large numbers of Internet 'Haves' and 'Have Nots'. This gulf exists primarily because of the unwillingness of the private sector to invest in an infrastructure for which highly profitable returns are not certain and the lack of effort by county governments working collectively to develop a regional strategy for solving this problem. Fortunately a third party has agreed to assume responsibility for applying for Federal funding for the purpose of making broadband access in the region a reality. South Alabama for the purpose of this application is comprised of eight counties located in the southern portion of the State. The counties that make up this region are: Baldwin, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Escambia, Mobile, Monroe and Washington. The region is bordered on the west by Mississippi, east by the Florida panhandle and south by the Gulf of Mexico. Technologically speaking, there exists both a logical and physical separation between the citizens in the remote rural areas and the urban population centers of South Alabama. Logically there's no reason for either group to experience the high rates of computer illiteracy or Internet incompetency given the abundance of high tech resources present in certain parts of the region. Physically the lack of public centers with free or low cost Internet Access or the lack of Internet Service access facilities beyond northern Baldwin and Mobile counties, makes this a reality which hampers the region's ability to tout itself as one of the areas in the state that is 'wired'. The Internet service beyond these points is slow (dial-up), expensive (satellite/private line), and sparsely deployed (towns/within city limits). The South Alabama Broadband Network (SABN) is applying for project funding under the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) as part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The SABN project will build a new Middle Mile broadband infrastructure, which will extend the high speed internet backbone capacity to local last-mile providers and regional anchor institutions in order to serve vital public sector services and private sector customers. Support for this new middle mile infrastructure is unanimous across government, incumbent providers and new entrants alike. Economically, this area has been hit hard by the recession and will likely remain underdeveloped without broadband for many years to come without this grant. The impact to the region is that, unlike many other places in the nation, South Alabama's inability to embrace or engage in educational, workforce/economic development, and healthcare initiatives is unlike other areas of the US where Broadband access is in abundance and affordable. Given a poverty rate of 19.85 (Source: www.city-data.com 2008) the benefit of having Broadband throughout the region could significantly help lower the region's poverty rate. SABN is an initiative undertaken by The Community Foundation of South Alabama (CFSA), a regional non-profit entity, that is specifically focused on bringing Broadband services to the South Alabama region. SABN will be a truly open access
system. The assets provided from the federal government will not be owned or controlled by commercial interest. CFSA will move to create an eight county Regional Authority to assume responsibility for SABN after the funding period has expired in order to maintain sustainability. The Authority will operate like an independent public utility, similar to a water, sewer or electrical utility, but focus on providing a sustainable and ubiquitous Middle Mile broadband transport network. The Pew Internet & American Life Project continues to report a digital divide in America, especially among people over 65, those with little education, with household incomes of $25,000 or less, people with disabilities, minorities, and those in rural areas. These are precisely the people that will be directly served by the SABN project via its service rollout in the eight counties. The project service area has a combined population of 307,274 people situated in larger cities like Mobile, smaller cities like Monroeville, Evergreen, Jackson and Butler, and the rural communities of Chatom, Coden, Pleasant Groves, Vaughn just to name a few. Together the residents of these communities are 35% minority (compared with US 12.4%); 32.9% have household incomes of less than $25K (compared with US 22%); 52.6% have a HS degree or less (compared with US 45.5%). The SABN project fully complies with all of the BIP and BTOP statutory goals as identified in the grant application. When completed, the project will provide the only 'open, ubiquitous, Middle Mile access to broadband Internet services for both private entities and public institutions in the eight county underserved areas of Southern Alabama. The SABN project will spur additional private investment in Last Mile infrastructure as a result of extending the large capacity network to reach the entire geographic region. Redundant, multi-megabit broadband access will be made available to critical first responder services, as well as to local internet service providers which will result in increased economic investment by existing and relocating companies to the region. Overall cost of the project is $34,283,949 and will create a minimum of 762 jobs throughout the eight counties during the three year BTOP funding period using the SABN platform. SABN partners will work to reduce that cost and raise the program's value through collaborations with suppliers and local funding resources. SABN will leverage to the best possible degree, all Recovery Act projects that are expanding technology accessibility within the South Alabama region.