The Marshall County Metronet project provides the opportunity for rural Marshall County, Indiana to participate fully in the national economic recovery strategy proposed by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and, more specifically, the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program. The local broadband environment in Marshall County is restricted with respect to access and services, and non-competitive with respect to pricing. Marshall County is currently not competitive in attracting or growing companies that rely upon moving large quantities of data. If left to develop under existing conditions, the current broadband market will continue under a single provider and will be unable to allow Marshall County to grow, retain and attract companies and organizations that require high speed data communications. The Marshall County Metronet project involves installing approximately seventy-eight (78) miles of middle-mile broadband infrastructure conduit from South Bend, Indiana to rural Marshall County and, through last mile (LM) providers, introducing affordable broadband access throughout the service area. Twenty-nine (29) miles of carrier-neutral, dark fiber optic cable will initially be deployed through the conduit. To accomplish this, Marshall County has the advantage of partnering with the St. Joe Valley Metronet, a private, non-profit corporation headquartered in adjacent St. Joseph County, Indiana. St. Joe Valley Metronet currently owns and operates a 51-mile dark fiber network which links 52 local users to long-haul trunk lines found at Global Access Point’s Carrier Hotel, Union Station, in South Bend, Indiana. The Marshall County Metronet project is an expansion of the existing successful economic development partnership between St. Joe Valley Metronet and the City of South Bend into Marshall County, Indiana. This project takes advantage of the demonstrated track record, mobilization capability and professional management of this vendor-neutral dark fiber network and enables Marshall County to connect to all of the service vendors who are already subscribers to the network. The Marshall County Metronet project is a comprehensive and scalable project that will meet the current demand in the service area for broadband access and provide for future growth of the network as projected demand increases occur. The Marshall County Metronet project: 1. Will connect 28 of 34 Community Anchor Institutions (CAI) to the fiber network within the service area 2. Will extend a public-private partnership between Marshall County and St Joe Valley Metronet 3. Will bolster growth and job creation in an economically distressed community by creating or saving 1200 jobs over five years 4. Will serve Ancilla College, a local 2-year institution of higher education and workforce development partner 5. Will serve ten (10) Public Safety Entities, including the County Department of Emergency Management 6. Will connect with three (3) local last mile (LM) providers of affordable broadband 7. Has committed to at least a 30% match The total cost of the project is $5,080,700. A $3,551,700 federal investment in the Marshall County MetroNet project will yield 39 job-years,
calculated using methodology from the Council of Economic Advisors. Through network effects of the impact of the increase in access to broadband technology, an estimated 1200 jobs will be created or retained within five years. This project will serve the communities of Argos, Bourbon, Bremen, Culver, La Paz, Lakeville, and Plymouth, Indiana. There are a total of 23,290 Households in the project area, of which 9,989 are underserved for broadband needs. There are 1,707 employer businesses in this project area. There are 34 Community Anchor Institutions, Public Safety Entities, and Local Governmental Units passed or involved with the project. This project will connect over 6300 household subscribers, 25 business customers, and 28 Community Anchor Institutions. The system proposed is an open architecture model consisting of available pathways to enable service providers and end users to install their own fiber optic cable to meet their unique needs, and a fiber optic backbone that can be leased for point-to-point and point-to-multipoint connections. The scalable design of the system will provide for current and future demand while minimizing upfront costs to construct. Once this project is complete, multiple private telecom providers will openly compete for the business of Marshall County's business and industry, municipal agencies, public safety entities, hospitals, schools, libraries and community organizations. The underserved area of Marshall County will, as a result of the project, be able to access a competitive network of over twenty (20) telecom providers. The effect of this is certain to be an increased number of household and business subscribers and decreased costs to existing subscribers. The impact on the individual business, government, educational and residential end user will be specific and immediate -- the speed and bandwidth to be made available to St. Joe Valley Metronet users in Marshall County are many times in excess of that currently available to the area, and St. Joe Valley Metronet is committed to rates and terms far below that which is currently offered in the service area. Additionally, increasing access to this communications network means many possibilities are opened that did not exist previously for the same business, government, educational and residential users. St. Joe Valley Metronet's reciprocal license use agreement with Marshall County will give Marshall County access to 12 pair of fiber free of charge for the duration of the agreement. This will enable all of Marshall County government, including the public safety entities, i.e., Emergency Management, Sheriff's Department and others, to significantly reduce existing operating costs, and opens up exciting new possibilities for life-saving applications that are only made possible by the Gigabit+ capabilities of fiber optics. Community Anchor Institutions will immediately benefit from increased connectivity speeds, enhanced application possibilities, universal linkages, and reduced monthly operating costs. Marshall County is considered an Economically Distressed County. The unemployment rate in the proposed funding service area is currently 12.4%, one of the highest in the nation. Marshall County is disproportionately affected by the dramatic downturn of the manufacturing sector in adjacent Elkhart County, as this has traditionally been the employment base for a significant portion of the Marshall County labor force. Prospects for recovery depend upon Marshall County's participation in regional strategic economic growth initiatives, with the goal of diversifying employment options and shifting the area's dependence on manufacturing. Future job growth will come from the transition of traditional jobs into the high wage, high skill jobs in an information-based, technology-driven environment. This project will put in place the infrastructure necessary to attain strong economic growth in the technology sector, and provide for the well-being of the residents of Marshall County over the next 25 years. Marshall County faces urgency in building a sustainable network of fiber connectivity to its neighbors, as business owners, residents, hospitals, higher education institutions and students who have a choice as to where
to live and work can very easily and affordably access needed digital capabilities nearby. Whereas the Northwest Indiana region surrounding Marshall County has positioned itself to attract diverse, innovation-based employment sectors like green energy development and nanotechnology research with investment in high-capacity telecommunications networks that directly link the area to Chicago, Marshall County cannot. Because it is rural and without the capital to undertake a project of this scale on its own, Marshall County is dependent upon BTOP grant funding to be able to benefit from St. Joe Valley Metronet's willingness to expand from adjacent St. Joseph County. In supporting the expansion of the existing network, St. Joe Valley Metronet, St Joseph County and Marshall County leaders demonstrate recognition of the interdependence of the region in positioning for future economic growth and a shared commitment to addressing barriers to this growth.