Project Description: The Latino Health Information Technology Empowerment Project (LHITEP) addresses the Recovery Act’s five overall goals: job creation and preservation, helping those most affected by the recession, economic efficiency via technological advances in science and health, and enhancement of broadband infrastructure at a Middle Mile Institution serving economically and linguistically vulnerable populations living in an underserved/unserved area, broadband-wise. LHITEP will enhance a Middle Mile anchor institution’s (a community hospital) generic broadband capacities to serve the community (as a technology and job skills training ground), and with its health-care core mission (creating a medical informatics system to provide culturally/linguistically appropriate evidence-based health information). Unmet health care needs are especially prevalent in low-income, non-English-speaking communities, chronically affected by poor or non-existent medical information. LHITEP will increase health care literacy in San Fernando, an independent city in Los Angeles County, where approximately 91% of its 26,000 residents self-identify as Latino. In 2000 fewer than 4% of target community households had home computers, and in 2008, informal surveys found computer penetration at less than 10%, illustrating this as underserved/unserved broadband area. Combining broadband and wireless technology, the project will develop an open source, net neutral health information technology system with both “top down” and “bottom up” components. From the “top down,” bilingual/bicultural health care providers and people living in underserved communities in County will have information about and access to evidence-based best health practices, as available in different media platforms, public reports, and reviews geared for public consumption, particularly the content in the Guide to Community Preventive Services by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a resource to aid in selecting programs and policies to improve health in communities by determining programs and policy interventions that have been proven effective, and whether the effective interventions are good fits for different communities, together with cost effectiveness estimates. The UCLA academic advisory committee will disseminate systematic reviews following evidence-based and best practices guidelines for the community and those that serve them, with the Promotores (lay health workers) playing a critical mediating role in terms of information interpretation and technology facilitation. Promotores will also play a critical role in facilitating the community’s feedback on the medical informatics system. For the “bottom up,” the community will have a systematic way of voicing feedback about the system, and about their needs in areas such as medical information, services needed, and policy concerns from the standpoint of an informed, active consumer. The project will use both face-to-face via the Promotores, and wireless technology as crucial social media to allow the community residents to record their voices, thereby permitting them to systematically gather hard
data to inform health care policy discourse from a community-based, grassroots perspective. The project will generate jobs, establish a sustainable training model, and an employment pipeline for health care paraprofessionals working in underserved communities: the Promotores, who bridge cultural and language gaps that often impede access to necessary health care. It will generate data on the impact of health IT intervention and the participation of Promotores in providing appropriate and cost-effective health care information in underserved communities. These approaches will provide critically needed avenues of health care information dissemination to underserved populations by supporting professional training for culturally and linguistically congruent Promotores and an equally robust open source health IT system. These approaches will connect healthcare providers with individuals in need of diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease, and inform health care providers, academicians and policy makers with information about best treatments and their effectiveness, and residents’ concerns and feedback. As part of the federal economic stimulus effort, The BTOP call for proposals stresses the need to expand broadband services and infrastructure among underserved populations, favoring areas, such as health care improvement and public/private partnerships. In this respect, OrgSync will develop social networking software, in Spanish, via wireless technology to both inform the community and get its feedback, and also to map the Promotores’ activities. Apple Computers will provide hardware, in-kind support/training, and assistance with application development. Verizon Wireless will provide the broadband connection upgrade and in-kind hardware. This combination of face-to-face, broadband and wireless components, public/private partnerships, job creation and commitment to net neutral platforms makes our project an ideal candidate for this economic stimulus measure.

How will this project improve the way news and information is delivered to geographic communities? A combination of health IT and contact with culturally and linguistically congruent health educators (Promotores) will provide Spanish-speaking Latinos in San Fernando and adjacent areas in Los Angeles with open source access to quality health care information, and an opportunity to voice their feedback, needs and expectations. This will require broadband in the form of a community anchor institution, Mission Community Hospital (MCH), and wireless technology access (instant messaging to alert where to access current medical information and services), and community-based training on computer and cell phone use. This pioneering, dual technological and face-to-face approach will ensure that medically underinformed and underserved Spanish-speaking Latinos, a population with the lowest rates of computer use, but with extensive cellular phone usage, become better informed and served and voice their needs and concerns.

How is this idea innovative? This project combines complementary paradigms: the creation of an open source, net neutral, health informatics system (broadband and wireless) deeply needed for an underinformed and underserved community, job creation and job training, technology and face-to-face contact, and a partnership between academic, community-based organizations and private entities. We will assess the impact of Promotores, computer literacy, and competency in health IT on healthcare access and career outcomes. This information will be critical for refining the healthcare network within the community, identifying disease prevalence and incidence, assessing evidence-based treatment efficacy and cost-effectiveness, and rapidly identifying emerging diseases and best treatments.
What experience does our consortium of organizations have to successfully develop this project? This is a partnership between UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, the UCLA Center for the Health Sciences (School of Dentistry, School of Medicine: Department of Family Medicine, General Clinical Research Center, and Neuropsychiatric Institute’s Spanish Speaking Psychosocial Clinic, School of Nursing and School of Public Health), the UCLA Department of Information Studies, and UCLA Community-Based Learning Program, together with MCH and Valley Care Community Consortium (VCCC) as community partners. The evidence-based and comparative effectiveness content will be generated and produced, by the UCLA CHS, which has a long history of community collaborations and/or expertise in evidence-based and best practices academic research and health care. UCLA will provide a good portion of the cost matching, some in the form of guaranteed FTE, in-kind time, and some based on graduate and post-doctoral involvement at no-cost to project. MCH is a nonprofit safety net hospital with years of collaboration with UCLA Dental School. VCCC is the health and mental health planning collaborative for Los Angeles County’s Planning Area 2 (SPA 2), representing over 2 million residents of the San Fernando and Santa Clarita Valleys, and partnering with County agencies, community clinics, schools, hospitals and HMOs, faith-based and community-based organizations, businesses, economic development agencies, higher education, residents, consumers and elected officials. LHITEP has key collaborative relations with technology companies in the private sector, has the community-based research infrastructure to assess and meet the community’s needs for health information, MCH has the ability to host the implementation of the technology platform, and Promotores will serve as key mediators of interpersonal health information. The project’s combined operating budget reflects this partnership.