

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL TO THE TECHNOLOGY OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM

The Merced County Community Action Agency is acting as lead agency in the development of a proposal to be submitted to the U.S. Department of Commerce Technology Opportunities Program (TOP). While the proposal is still in the development stages, it is anticipated that the following agencies will be involved as partners: Merced County Workforce Investment Board, Merced County Private Industry Training Department, Merced County Business-Economic Opportunities Department, Merced County Human Services Agency, Merced College, Merced Lao Family Community, Inc., Planada Community Development Corporation, Merced Adult School, and the Employment Development Department.

The proposed project consists of two distinct elements. The first involves the use of networking technologies to create a seamless continuum of services for the partners' customers. Specifically, a shared database will be designed so that employees of the various partners can offer their customers more comprehensive information about benefits and services they may be eligible for. The second element of the proposal involves the creation of community technology centers. These centers will promote workforce development and economic development by making a wide variety of computer-based and on-line courses, from basic education to technology and business training, available to community members.

The groups targeted to receive direct benefits from this project are the Unemployed & Underemployed, Small Business & Self-Employed, Low-Income & Disadvantaged, Youth, and Seniors. While the budget and scope of this project are still being developed, it is estimated that \$423,000 in funds will be requested from the TOP program. An equal match (consisting of cash and in-kind contributions) will be contributed by the project partners. The match is not to include County General Fund monies or non-allowed federal monies. Presently, the WIB is being asked to commit the following: 1) Staff time towards participation in a project steering committee that will refine the scope of the proposed project and to consider committing additional staff time towards the implementation of the project should the grant request be funded; and 2) Sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Merced County Community Action Agency and other "Connect Merced" partners.

The deadline for submission of the TOP proposal is March 21, 2002, and award announcements are expected September 30, 2002.