CPLC Economic and Workforce Development in Rural Arizona through Digital Inclusion
EDA Build Back Better Project Narrative Phase I

Chicanos Por La Causa, Inc. (CPLC), as lead applicant has gathered a coalition of highly committed government, economic development, non-profit, community stakeholders and engines of economic development working on common goals for a shared theory of change to advance the economy of our regional growth cluster.

CPLC Southern Arizona Digital Inclusion and Economic Council will use its collective experience, outreach and advocacy capabilities to support a regional growth cluster in our target rural areas of Pima, Santa Cruz, Yuma and Cochise counties in Southern Arizona to benefit of individuals and businesses highly impacted by Covid-19 including low-income, marginalized and high needs individuals particularly black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC).

We seek funding from EDA under its FY2021 ARPA BBRC Phase 1 for a planning and technical assistance grant to plan the transformational change strategies and activities of our *Economic and Workforce Development in Rural Arizona through Digital Inclusion* program to be submitted for implementation funding under Phase II of this grant. Program is in alignment with Counties and State Economic Development Plans, EDA Build Back Better program objectives and investment priorities and CPLC mission of empowerment.

CPLC would like to use this unique opportunity, to develop and expand the regional ecosystems empowering it with sustainable infrastructure for economically impacting the diverse, marginalized, rural community in Southern Arizona Counties, Pima, Santa Cruz, Yuma and Cochise in the development of a regional industry cluster to enable job creation, business, and economic development and recovery, and a strong global competitive workforce in priority industries such as transportation/logistics, agriculture, telehealth, broadband infrastructure installation and maintenance, cybersecurity, information technology, elder care, ecommerce, commerce involving international trade , mining, defense and small business entrepreneurship identified as identified as current trends in those communities. Other industries may come to light following targeted workforce research that will be completed. The project will also address the broadband infrastructure, digital inclusion and healthcare needs in these communities. The project will have immediate economic impact in diverse, marginalized rural communities in Southern Arizona Counties. Special emphasis will include small business digital transformation support featuring digital inclusion strategies, technical assistance, training, cyber security, online and social media marketing, technology systems and networks, international business growth opportunities through E-trade, and other technology solutions.

Project Summary: Proposal aims at fast-tracking systemic change and industry growth in digital inclusion and access to rural and remote digital and broadband universal service; develops local digital inclusion plans to facilitate sustainable, systemic change from outdated approaches of communication and broadband technology. Business development, technical assistance (TA) and support for growth and recovery from the impact of covid-19; Development of a strong global competitive workforce; Enhances existing or establishes new navigation and referral

systems to available services and community resources and engages in active digital inclusion and economic development advocacy.

CPLC Southern Arizona Digital Inclusion and Economic Council vision is to (1) Address rural digital equity, establish a regional Digital Inclusion Plan, Digital Inclusion Teams and support centers to promote, lead and support rural municipalities, education, businesses and workforce with adoption of digital technologies by capitalizing on existing/future strategic plans, federal/state-funded broadband internet infrastructure deployment poised to interconnect with urban/suburban/cross-border and opportunities; (2) Assist in developing a highly skilled, competitive workforce to meet the needs of quality 21st century jobs, stimulate growth and economic success by strengthening and building workforce capacity with advanced training and wrap-around services preparing for future market employment needs; (3) Create a healthy business community for growth and success in global markets by providing business development advisement and TA to new and existing entrepreneurs to build resiliency and mitigate covid-19 impact, (4) To build a sustainable cadre of trust-worthy local Navigators to assist the population navigate and find digital/community resources in a trustworthy manner.

CPLC Southern Arizona Digital Inclusion and Economic Council members and community partners offer a very diverse composition of race, function and multi-sector representation. They align with our work efforts in the areas of digital inclusion, healthcare services including telemedicine, economic growth and investment, business growth and international trade, public libraries, local government, universities and colleges, workforce development, social service agency and other representatives who collaborate to ensure that the project aligns with local plans to meet the needs of the underserved and BIPOC population. CPLC/CSADIEC have read and understand the requirements of the NOFO including use of funds limitations and agree to comply with guidelines and regulations noted.

Council members support the project with access to talent, expertise and potential partnerships of local government, community leaders, public, private & non-profit in the proposed service areas of this BBB request. These advocates also share information, best practices and lessons learned.

Members included are: Arizona Covid-19 Digital Access Taskforce: Promote Digital Inclusion and access for the state of Arizona; Arizona State Libraries; Southwest Telemedicine Resource Center and Arizona Telemedicine Network; Digital Inclusion Community Activist; Southeastern Arizona Governments Organization; July Ann Wrigley Global Institute of Sustainability at ASU; Sun Corridor Network; Karen Ziegler Consulting; Prestamos CDFI.

CSADIEC will work with Southern Arizona governments, higher-education institutions, local businesses, local community organizations, public and consultants to collect and assess data that will be used to develop the specific targets and goals of our Phase 2 proposal for the **Economic and Workforce Development in Rural Arizona through Digital Inclusion.**

Phase I proposed planning for the development of the local digital inclusion plans and digital inclusion teams will assist the implementation under Phase II. This includes and is not limited to conducting community and stakeholder engagement research, needs and landscape assessment (mixed research methods) to (1) identify gaps in broadband infrastructure, (2) understand the digital inclusion status and comfort level of residents in the region, (3) assess needs of hospitals, medical centers in outreaching their patients, (4) capture real-time data to assess the employment opportunities and needs within this regional cluster (5) assess and understand the

support available for small business recovery efforts from covid-19, for business development, access to capital, TA and growth opportunities basically a landscape assessment. Current trends show that Pima, Santa Cruz, Yuma and Cochise counties are in need of workers within growth industries such as transportation/logistics, agriculture, telehealth, broadband infrastructure installation and maintenance, cybersecurity, information technology, elder service and care, e-commerce, commerce involving international trade, mining, defense and small business entrepreneurship. Other industries may become known following targeted research results including the identification of data collection, evaluation and success metrics for phase II.

We propose the following potential initiatives that EDA could fund to support the cluster. The initiatives work in a synchronous fashion to create systemic economic change that will drive rural Arizona communities into future prosperity. They will ensure that the systems of change will continue long after EDA's BBB challenge dollars have been deployed. This will be done by creating equitable and inclusive economic drivers leading to healthy communities.

Digital Inclusion: The identified counties are disproportionately impacted by Covid-19, and have suffered the long-term consequences of the Digital Divide. They lack vital digital connectivity infrastructure, digital inclusion awareness, resources, support and the planning need of the community. The four counties and some communities are currently preparing federal and state grant applications for broadband infrastructure expansion. While broadband deployment is necessary to get everyone connected, our Coalition will not duplicate efforts. If critical gaps have not been covered by federal and state funds, we will propose such deployment in our Phase 2 proposal. Phase 1 will focus, substantially, on planning digital inclusion strategies and identifying resources that will enable our target population access to and adopt available and future broadband internet. Research shows that even when people have devices and access to the internet many still do not adopt the technology in a meaningful, effective way due to lack of digital skills and support. The Coalition concurs with the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) position that meaningful adoption of digital technologies for those lacking digital literacy requires all of the following elements: access to reliable, affordable broadband internet service, devices suitable for the specific needs of the user, support from digital navigators, high-quality digital skills instruction and continuous, high-quality tech support for learner-workers entering new industries or advancing in existing industries. **The Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan** will also provide digital access to government the FCC Emergency Broadband Program or EBB and other programs including devices such as computer, tablets, routers while addressing all of these elements as integral pieces of our theory of change.

Telemedicine: Our target geography faces a combination of factors that create disparities in health provision, health status and well-being with urban and suburban areas and are often magnified in Native American communities and along the U.S-Mexico border. These include economic, infrastructural, social, educational and geographical isolation in addition the density of aging population and lack of culturally competent care. This Collaborative will build collaborations with municipalities, partner hospitals, clinics, Federally Qualified Health Care Centers (FQHC), healthcare professionals, students, libraries and local community to identify needs and offer services where needed . We will also use available data collection and resources to build capacity for existing/new organizations such as libraries, schools and community centers to improve quality and outcomes in telehealth by using cutting-edge digital technology to equip mobile units, tablets and other technology. This will help facilitate to help, to facilitate access to

timely healthcare while reducing travel time, cost to patients and enhance the ability to better connect patients with medical providers and mitigate capacity constraints. These units will be used to provide technology in healthcare training to reduce shortage of qualified healthcare workforce. Our Council members from the Arizona Telemedicine Program and Southwest Telehealth Resource Center and the Arizona State Library will provide guidance, expertise to this project initiative team to identify the industry leaders and partners that can offer direct input in identifying rural needs and support the development of our service approach.

Development of a Skilled and Competitive Workforce: Southern Arizona Regional and rural communities have a demand for skilled workers in the construction, wholesale trade, healthcare, social assistance, transportation, logistics, warehousing, cyber security and technical support services. The targeted healthcare technology industry shows increased inequalities in healthcare workforce due to increased demand in urban metropolitan areas. This project will assess the rural disconnect between workforce supply and demand, the impact due to retiring "Baby Boomers" in the health workforce and available evidence based and best practice training programs to enhance skilled rural healthcare workforce. CPLC will leverage knowledge, skills and experience of its own Workforce Solutions division which also administers Pima County Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) - One Stop Center and other education entities to build capacity, meet training needs of local community agencies providing similar services.

Business Development and TA: Rural businesses have had to face the unprecedented economic impact of Covid-19 and government mandates on social distancing, and virus contagiousness preventive measures have created havoc on their business models, income revenue and sustainability. In Arizona, of the 592,485 small businesses, ownership by women is 20%, minority owned 15%, Hispanic 7% and by indigenous owners .05%. These underrepresented entrepreneurs, encounter challenges in accessing entrepreneurial opportunities, capital and support. Our Council member Prestamos Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI) has been providing business development, TA and small business loans since 2000. In addition to its CDFI certification it has maintained SBA certifications as women's business center and a small business social enterprise incubation operator and provider of PRIME, Community Advantage, Payroll Protection Program, Small Business Lending and New Markets Tax Credits. Prestamos the Council in collaboration with others will provide guidance and support for this project's initiative. Special focus on digital transformation support, featuring digital inclusion strategies, technical assistance, training, cyber security, online/social media marketing, technology systems/networks and international business growth opportunities through E-trade and other technology solutions. In many cases businesses need to transition to online engagement with their customers, while millions of employees are working from home and participating in online meetings with colleagues, clients and business partners. Many small businesses need to and are unable to provide telework opportunities for their employees.

Community Services and Referral Navigation: Our high need, women and BIPOC find themselves at a disadvantage when benefiting from available services and resources due to lack of knowledge of the services available, access to digital resources such as computers/devices, due to language, cultural and financial barriers. The proposed strategy to connect to community resources combat these barriers. Local Navigators will facilitate resource identification and

coordinate referrals and appointments in English/Spanish and in a culturally competent manner. For other language needs, Navigators will seek third party interpreter services.

Advocacy: Project leadership and CSADIEC will conduct distinct and deliberative community engagement in a collaborative advocacy effort to promote economic development, equitable access and multiple supports that impact prosperity and well-being inequities.

The CSADIEC planning success will be measured with the engagement of our strong and diverse collaborative, our partnerships and a vast stakeholder network that ensure systemic change efforts and investments remain sustainable beyond the transformation investment of this grant.

A key measure will be the submission of a quality, deliverable and sustainable Phase II project application. While Phase II's specific metrics of success, data collection and systems management will be identified during the planning process, we anticipate measurable and timely economic investment growth; the adoption of digital inclusion plans which will be the blueprint for closing the existing digital divide in our target communities; increase of business growth and sustainability while pivoting business models to recover from covid-19; increase quality job creation and a highly skilled workforce, higher expendable income rates due to saving and higher salary opportunities; increase local payroll and sales tax revenue; increase advocacy effort to create policy changes, drive economic investment, increase opportunities for healthier and sustainable lives for all including our minority and BIPOC populations.

Build capacity through new or existing local organizations to develop and implement a robust integrated Digital Resource Navigator system to facilitate urban and rural linkages, access to digital resource support, including broadband internet access, device acquisition, financial support, technical assistance and training. This navigator system will also serve as a rural-urban linkage, creating awareness of resources outside the local community but still available within the state such as computer refurbishing centers.

Barriers may include supply chain disruptions, lack or limited existing dark fiber and broadband connection points, a non-participatory or working in isolation attitude from municipalities key representatives. Pandemic gathering and social distancing mandates affective meetings and public forums. Project will take every measure possible to mitigate these barriers.

This project has gathered significant public support evidenced by the multiple letters of support included with this submission.

CPLC has experience budgeting for projects of the caliber and scale of this BBB Initiative. As a result, we feel certain that the submitted Phase I – Budget, Budget Narrative and Timeline, reflects the appropriate funds needed to successfully create the proposed jobs and complete the project. We have submitted a tentative match allocation and source as an attachment for your consideration and review.

Chicanos Por La Causa, Inc. and the **CPLC Southern Arizona Digital Inclusion and Economic Council** are well suited to design, implement and administer projects of this size and scope. CPLC is willing and capable to assume the responsibility of lead agency and fiscal administrator for this project. With 52 years of demonstrated experience, a current budget of over $393 million, oversight of large-scale programming and managing multi agency, multi state collaborative efforts.