Broadband Planning in the State of Maryland: A Strategy to Remove Regional Disparities in High-Quality, Low-Cost Broadband Service

Introduction

In his report, *Bringing Broadband to Rural America* (2009), the Acting Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission Michael J. Copps, made the case that America's rural areas have largely been left out of the global community due to their lack of connection with broadband services. Access to broadband services is seen as critical to enhance the efficiency and productivity of agricultural activities, to provide a level playing field for economic development, to create extended educational opportunities, provide for improved healthcare services, and more. He calls for a robust effort to both assess the broadband needs in specific rural areas since "every rural area presents its own special challenges (pg. 6)," and develop a plan to begin overcoming the challenges to rural broadband deployment.

In Maryland, the US Bureau of the Census determined that in 2000, 13.93% of the population overall is considered rural. However, the rural population is not evenly distributed:

Census Region	% Rural
Baltimore Region	8.73%
Suburban Washington	5.40%
Southern Maryland	45.65%
Western Maryland	36.36%
Upper Eastern Shore	61.30%
Lower Eastern Shore	39.96%

This disproportionate clustering of population and infrastructure in the central part of the state has been a fact long known. Indeed, preceding the Copps report by 5 years, the State of Maryland commissioned a study to create a strategic plan for implementing a broadband network on the Eastern Shore. The document, *The Maryland Eastern Shore Broadband Network Strategic Plan* (2004), showed that rural Maryland's private sector lagged behind in broadband use, discussed the impacts on economic development that such a lag creates, and explored strategies to overcome this lag. In the five years since this strategic plan was written, there has been no attempt to revisit its findings or evaluate its progress toward bringing the opportunities of low-cost, high-quality broadband to rural Maryland. The Maryland Broadband Cooperative's proposal for the Broadband Infrastructure project included a preliminary map of broadband service areas and those areas that are underserved or unserved still today demonstrates a noticeable geographic pattern. It remains true that the Eastern Shore, Southern Maryland, and Western Maryland have a disproportionate amount of area that is underserved

1

have been completed in Maryland in the past. In this way, we can define the current situation, denote the success or failure of previous proposals, and prudently develop plans for the future.

To accomplish this goal, local technology planning teams (LTPTs) will be established for each of the following regions, designated by the US Census Bureau:

> Lower Eastern Shore: Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties
> Upper Eastern Shore: Caroline, Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot Counties
> Southern Maryland: Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's Counties
> Western Maryland: Allegany, Garrett, and Washington Counties

The LTPTs will consist of 15 to 20 people selected as a representative sample of the key broadband/technology stakeholders listed above. These LTPTs will meet quarterly over the 3-year proposed period. Each team will seek to set the agendas and identify the participants for the Broadband Summits (see below), evaluate the results of those summits in relation to current and future trends in broadband, and craft a set of reports for their region that will be concatenated into a statewide document for steering broadband development. To support this collaborative effort, an interactive website will be established at the outset to create a forum for both inter-region and intra-regional collaboration. This will enable the sharing of ideas, best practices, meeting minutes, contact information, and related documents as they are collected and/or written. A portion of this website will be public-facing so that the process of broadband planning can be as transparent as practical.

The organizations that are best suited to facilitate the creation, organization, and leadership of these LTPTs are the regional councils. As each council has economic development as a key function, each is already concerned with identifying important business, government, and non-profit contacts in the region. The councils were also instrumental in the launch and continuing operation of the Maryland Broadband Cooperative and therefore have additional insight into the challenges and barriers to the extension of broadband service into underserved and unserved areas. Finally, each council has an executive director and secretarial support that are instrumental to the success of this effort. For each area, the following regional council will be responsible.

> Lower Eastern Shore: Tri-County Council of the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland
> Upper Eastern Shore: MidShore Regional Council (TCCMSRC)
> Southern Maryland: Tri-County Council of Southern Maryland
> Western Maryland: Tri-County Council of Western Maryland

Over the 3 years of the planning project, each LTPT will hold a set of broadband/technology summits, approximately one every few months. The focus of these summits will change as the project progresses. In Year 1, each summit will have the goal of reviewing any broadband

implementation strategic plans that were created in the past for their effectiveness and their current value, identifying the barriers to broadband adoption, creating a list of possible solutions to overcome those barriers, and categorizing those solutions into those that can be enacted immediately with very little upfront costs and those that will take more strategy and perhaps a funding source. At the end of Year 1, a summary report of any plan reviews, the identified barriers and the potential solutions will be completed and sent to the Maryland Broadband Cooperative for compilation and distribution. In Year 2, each summit will evaluate the progress made on those solutions that were implemented in the past year and will focus on the creation of strategy for those more complex solutions. A final report will be complied by each region and statewide. In Year 3, the summits will evaluate the efforts to-date and make their final recommendations regarding the removal of barriers for broadband/technology adoption.

In order to adequately address the concerns of the different primary constituent groups, we propose that the broadband/technology summits be focused on the primary constituencies they serve. Two summits, one early in the year and one late in the year, will specifically invite the general public as well as non-technology businesses to give their concerns about broadband access and seek solutions. In the middle of the year, one summit will specifically invite and address the concerns of information technology companies and economic development agencies that seek to attract high-technology businesses and one summit will focus on the needs of government and non-profit users such as hospitals, schools, etc.

Anticipated Outcomes

The anticipated outcomes for this project, by project year:

Year 1:

1. Website for inter-regional and intra-regional collaboration established

2. Local Technology Planning Teams (LTPT) organized.

    a. Meetings in each region, 4 times a year: 16 meetings

    b. Meeting minutes, presentations, and other supporting documents all distributed via Broadband Planning website

3. Broadband Summits in each region, 2 times a year: 8 meetings

    a. Video of summit presentations

      b. record of public comments, statements by public officials, presentations, and other supporting documents distributed via website

4. Existing Broadband Plan Review (if appropriate) for each region

5. Regional summary report on barriers to broadband adoption, short-term solutions, and immediate implementation plan for each region

6. Summary report for the State

Year 2:

1. Local Technology Planning Teams (LTPT) conduct,

      a. Meetings in each region, 4 times a year: 16 meetings

      b. Meeting minutes, presentations, and other supporting documents all distributed via Broadband Planning website

2. Broadband Summits in each region, 2 times a year: 8 meetings

      a. Video of summit presentations

      b. record of public comments, statements by public officials, presentations, and other supporting documents distributed via website

3. Review of immediate implementation efforts from Year 1.

4. Author summary report regarding long-term, complex solutions to rural broadband adoption problems

5. Summary report for the State

Year 3:

1. Local Technology Planning Teams (LTPT) conduct,

      a. Meetings in each region, 4 times a year: 16 meetings

      b. Meeting minutes, presentations, and other supporting documents all distributed via Broadband Planning website

2. Broadband Summits in each region, 2 times a year: 8 meetings

    a. Video of summit presentations

    b. record of public comments, statements by public officials, presentations, and other supporting documents distributed via website

3. Review of all efforts to date and develop forward-looking predictions to potential problems and solutions in the future

4. Summary report for the State for the year and the Planning Period as a whole.

Cost of Proposal

We propose that the cost of this proposal may be organized in the following manner:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Website Development	$10,000	-	-
TCC LS			
Labor	$20,000	$20,600	$21,218
Supplies	$2,000	$2,200	$2,420
Meeting Costs	$5,500	$6,050	$6,655
Travel	$2,000	$2,200	$2,420
TCC Mid-Shore			
Labor	$23,000	$23,690	$24,401
Supplies	$3,000	$3,300	$3,630
Meeting Costs	$7,000	$7,700	$8,470
Travel	$3,000	$3,300	$3,630
TCCSouth			
Labor	$18,000	$18,540	$19,096
Supplies	$2,000	$2,200	$2,420
Meeting Costs	$4,750	$5,225	$5,748
Travel	$2,000	$2,200	$2,420

TCC West

Labor	$18,000	$18,540	$19,096
Supplies	$2,000	$2,200	$2,420
Meeting Costs	$4,750	$5,225	$5,748
Travel	$2,000	$2,200	$2,420

MdBC

Labor	$16,000	$16,480	$16,974
Supplies	$2,000	$2,200	$2,420
Meeting Costs	$2,500	$2,750	$3,025
Travel	$1,500	$1,650	$1,815
Grant Management	$7,550	$7,423	$7,822
Annual SubTotals			
	$158,550	$155,873	$164,268

Total Direct:	$455,895
Grant Management (5%):	$ 22,795
Grand Total:	$478,690

Budget Justification

In Year 1, the website cost refers to the amount to be paid to a vendor to create the collaboration website, which will be maintained by the regional councils after it has launched. The labor for each regional council offsets approximately 10 – 15% of the Executive Director's time and approximately 25% of the administrative assistant's time. The cost for Supplies represents printing and copying of promotional materials, meeting materials, and end-of-year reports. Meeting costs include equipment and facility rentals and refreshments. Travel costs include both mileage and hotel costs of the Executive Directors and the administrative assistants to LTPT meeting sites, broadband summit sites, and to the MdBC in Salisbury for final collaboration. The travel cost is slightly higher for the Mid-Shore since their region represents the largest number of counties. The MdBC's expenses relate to the labor, supplies, and travel

necessary to support the initiation, project management and day-to-day administration of the effort, perform federal cost administration and reporting, and to oversee the authoring of the final annual report.

In Years 2 and Year 3, the costs are held the same except that the labor costs increase 3% per year and the other costs increase 10% per year to cover expected rising expenses. Finally, the 5% annual grant management rate for the MdBC, the grant administrator, is a conservative and prudent instrument for recovering the organization's hidden costs from administering the grant.