



City of Greensboro Project Update

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Background

In February of 2014, North Carolina Next Generation Network (NCNGN) launched a high-speed broadband initiative in the Triangle. This initiative attracted Google and AT&T to start building fiber to the premise (FTTP) networks in the Triangle area. Google announced that it would also build FTTP in Charlotte.

Fiber communities have an advantage in attracting everything from advanced manufacturing to contact centers to data centers. They can nurture tech start-ups and home based businesses that will provide tomorrow's jobs. They can provide better education and health care, deliver government services more efficiently, and engage residents in government. Fiber is infrastructure that will be as vital to cities as roads and highways. The internet is the next utility and fiber is the highway that will provide high-speed internet connectivity.

The Triad was in danger of being left behind in the race for gigabit connectivity. This led to the formation of TriGig, a collaboration between the City of Greensboro, City of High Point, City of Burlington, Guilford County, UNC-Greensboro, NC A&T State University and the Piedmont Triad Regional Council.

The purpose of this initiative is to leverage existing assets to assist internet service providers with building and deploying high-speed broadband networks (speeds of 1Gps and higher) in Greensboro and surrounding areas. This includes providing affordable high-speed access to underserved and low-income residents.

Since the inception of the TriGig project in 2014, AT&T and North State Communications have started installing fiber networks in some areas of Greensboro. Most Greensboro residents have Spectrum (formerly Time Warner Cable) for internet services. Spectrum is a cable provider. Spectrum is not installing fiber in Greensboro.

The TriGig collaborative is working to bring pervasive gigabit internet services to the Triad. The initial focus of the project is to close the gaps where high-speed broadband services are not available.

In November 2016, North State Communications was selected to partner with the requesting entities in the TriGig project. The TriGig collaborative team began working with North State to identify initial pilot projects that could be accomplished in the short term with longer-range projects to follow.

Proposed Greensboro Pilot Projects

The initial pilot projects were identified based on meeting the goals of TriGig (stated in the RFP) and finding projects that could be implemented quickly at little or no cost by leveraging existing assets.

Digital access and digital inclusion is a primary focus for the initial projects. This led us to consider the Family Success Center, which emerged as a strong candidate for meeting all of the criteria for a pilot project.

The Family Success Center provides solutions that reduce poverty in Greensboro neighborhoods. This innovative approach brings together partners across nonprofit, business and government sectors to provide integrated servicing that meets the needs of each member of a family. Currently, 100 families are working through the program to develop their own self-sufficiency plans supported by workshops, trainings, and individual coaching sessions.

Providing high-speed internet service to low-income families provides opportunities to take action on issues such as education, safety, mobility, energy efficiency, health care, and community services.

The Greensboro TriGig pilot project proposes to bring gigabit internet service to the Family Success Center (located in the Guilford Childhood Development Center) and provide high-speed wifi service in surrounding neighborhoods. The Family Success Center could become the neighborhood hub for deploying and managing wifi services. There are also integration points with InnovateGSO to provide Navigator services and opportunities to tie into the innovation culture that is building around Union Square, The Forge, HQ Greensboro and Co//ab.

Our goal with this pilot is to develop a model that can be replicated for deploying similar services in low-income neighborhoods and underserved areas of Greensboro. The Greensboro Housing Authority is interested in the potential to leverage this model in neighborhoods with public housing. There is also the possibility for federal funding through GHA to expand the program.

The second pilot project will provide fiber connectivity to the Nussbaum Center, which is also in the vicinity of the Family Success Center. This pilot project seeks to connect a diverse culture of start-ups and entrepreneurs to gigabit internet services.

These pilot projects will foster the creation of an emerging inclusive innovation district that spans from Co//ab, HQ Greensboro, The Forge and Union Square, to The Family Success Center and the Nussbaum Center.

Proposed Model for Digital Access and Digital Inclusion

A digital investment in human and social capital opens the door to participation in services and communities among residents who lack digital literacy or specific client devices necessary in order to participate. The TriGig pilot project at the Family Success Center will bring gigabit service into the Guilford Childhood Development Center providing high-speed broadband access to programs in the Center. Additional fiber at the building (or close by) will be leveraged to provide a targeted wireless service into the surrounding neighborhood.

A partnership between the City of Greensboro, TriGig, the United Way, the Greensboro Housing Authority, Launch Greensboro, and Innovate GSO will provide the foundation for developing and expanding a Digital Access and Digital Inclusion program.

The City of Greensboro will facilitate the availability of computer equipment for the program. City computers are leased on a rolling three-year refresh cycle. At the end of the lease period, City desktop and laptop computers can be purchased from the leasing company at a greatly reduced rate. The opportunity to purchase

this equipment will be provided in a Digital Access and Digital Inclusion Program and paired with educational and technology-training programs offered at the Family Success Center and Guilford Childhood Development Center.

Wireless services for neighborhood residents will require an investment in equipment (approx. \$100 per household) and installation services. Managing, installing and supporting the wireless services can provide jobs and job-training opportunities in the community. The wireless program in partnership with local universities can offer service learning and/or paid internship opportunities for students to help with planning, support and training. There are potential funding opportunities through the Greensboro Housing Authority along with federal and state grants.

Connecting the underserved population with high-speed broadband services will enable access to Innovate GSO Navigator Services. A satellite office for the Navigator Services would be a perfect complement to the Digital Access and Digital Inclusion Program proposed with this pilot project.

Recommendation

The TriGig project team requests approval to move forward with these pilot projects. There are no plans at this time to expend any non-budgeted funds on this project.