

## the **CHALLENGE:** broadband access for all

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (the Recovery Act) was signed into law by President Obama on Feb. 17, 2009. The FCC is currently working in coordination with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to perform the FCC's role under the Recovery Act.

In conjunction with the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program established by the Recovery Act, the FCC has been tasked with creating a National Broadband Plan by Feb. 17, 2010. The Recovery Act states that the plan "shall seek to ensure all people of the United States have access to broadband capability and shall establish benchmarks for meeting that goal."

The Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) established by the Recovery Act will provide \$4.7 billion in grants to support the deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved area. BTOP's goal is to enhance broadband capacity at public computer centers, and to encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service.

People need access to the Internet to find jobs, manage their finances, receive news alerts, apply to college, access public assistance and schedule immigration appointments. Yet for millions of U.S. residents, broadband access is either unavailable or unaffordable.

Whether under BTOP, or as part of the National Broadband Plan, community centers will play a vital role in ensuring access for poor, rural, and communities of color. Schools, libraries and community centers will serve as '**anchor institutions**' – providing access to the Internet for people across Minnesota.

## the **OPPORTUNITY:** anchor institutions that work for all

Main Street Project and our partners in the Minnesota Digital Justice Coalition believe that communication is an essential human need and a fundamental human right.

Together we are working to fulfill the promise of the Internet: to allow and encourage all people to connect and collaborate in new and unprecedented way, while also challenging the Internet's potential to reinforce existing inequalities. We prioritize working with communities that have less access to the online world, and people whose voices are often silenced in public discourse – including people with low incomes, rural residents, those who don't speak English, (im)migrants, and communities of color.

To ensure that all community members have access to free Internet, we have developed a list of recommended standards for the places and organizations that will serve as 'anchor institutions.' It is our hope that these recommendations inform the National Broadband Plan and BTOP decisions.

***Main Street Project** is a grassroots cultural organizing, media justice and economic development initiative. We are committed to providing creative and practical tools that give residents of all ages, cultures, economic and immigration status the opportunity to more fully participate in all aspects of community life.*

*The **Minnesota Digital Justice Coalition** represents Latin@, African-American, Native American, Somali, Hmong, and Lao communities, as well as low-income and immigrant communities, and is focused on influencing Internet / broadband policy and implementation decisions toward access and inclusivity.*

## We see possibilities.

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# recommended **STANDARDS** for anchor institutions

*To serve people with low or no incomes, rural residents, those who speak languages other than English, (im)migrants, and communities of color, we recommend that anchor institutions meet these standards:*

## **HOURS**

- Regularly open beyond 9 – 5 business hours
- Also open on weekends and holidays (not limited to Christian holidays)
- Offer tiered time limits for computers:
  - Dedicated computers that can be reserved for 2 – 3 hours
  - Computers with one-hour, 30-minute, and 15-minute limits

## **TRANSPORTION**

### **Rural specific**

- Within walking distance where there's no public transportation
- Located on stops already serviced by PICA, Head Start, Community Action Agencies, Meals on Wheels, Metro Mobility

### **Urban specific**

- Located in 'zones' where people can transfer for 'free'
- Accessible by one bus/train ride (without multiple transfers)
- Located on stops already serviced by PICA, Head Start, Community Action Agencies, Meals on Wheels, Metro Mobility
- Have an existing relationship with a parks and recreation center, or an institution with existing after-school programming

## **FAMILY- AND YOUTH-FRIENDLY**

- Offer onsite childcare
- Have youth workers or counselors specifically trained to work with you and adolescents
- Have healthy and affordable snacks and meals available
- Have someone available to teach computer basics (regardless of how computer savvy the user is)

## **ACCOMMODATIONS**

- Offer computers dedicated specifically to job searches
- Offer computers dedicated specifically to e-government and public assistance services (such as Medicaid / Medicare; Food stamps SSI; HUD programs; TANF; Head Start; Social Security; Immigration)
- Provide free printing – especially for homework, resumes, welfare and Section 8 paperwork
- Offer computers dedicated to use in languages other than English
- Have special software and keyboards for non-Latin-language Vietnamese, Lao, Hmong, Somali
- Offer computers dedicated specifically to health and health-care-related searches (Web M.D., processing claims for prescriptions, insurance claims, etc.)
- Have carousels or docking-stations available for laptops (with free Internet and printing)
- Have computer hardware and parts that are child-tested and proven to withstand heavy use

## **SPECIAL NEEDS**

- Have multi-lingual staff
- Have specialists who can work with multiple literacy levels
- Handicap-accessibility; offer 1-2 terminals adapted for use by the blind, deaf and hard of hearing
- Provide workstations where users with disabilities have space/seating to work comfortably with assistance from PCAs and other attendants
- Offer hours specifically for seniors
- Have staff trained to work with homeless adults
- Provide workstations with phone access for homeless adults so they can store their belongings as they use the Internet