



Smart Rural Community Collaboration Challenge Report

July 2016

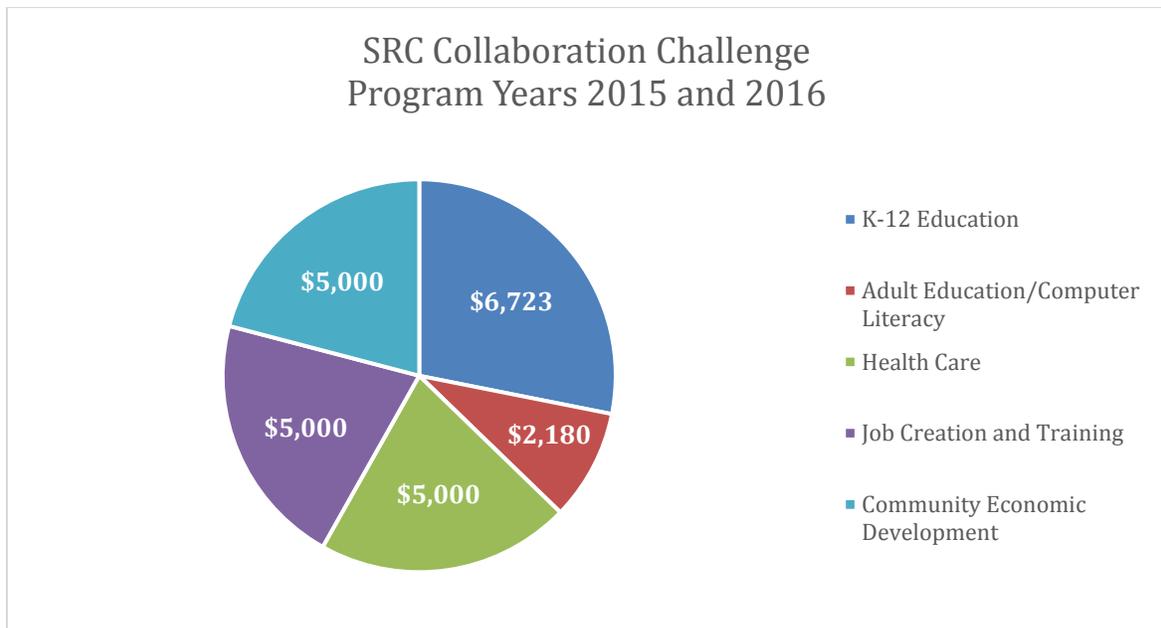
Introduction

The Smart Rural CommunitySM (SRC) Collaboration Challenge is an opportunity for rural broadband providers to obtain grants to deploy broadband-enabled solutions. The program encourages collaboration among community leaders to identify and implement broadband-enabled solutions. Matching-fund obligations in the program require local communications providers to recruit the participation of other local leaders.

Since its inception, the SRC Collaboration Challenge has awarded \$23,891. As described below, these funds support broadband access for financially-challenged students in Alaska; telehealth equipment for hospice patients in Minnesota; job training access on tribal lands in Montana; a network of community Wi-Fi across several towns in Vermont; and other applications.

Fund-recipients in the SRC Collaboration Challenge are obligated to provide regular update reports to NTCA over the course of the funding. These reports reveal that the matching-fund requirements have been successful and have inspired collaboration among rural broadband providers and other local leaders. Moreover, the blending of SRC Collaboration Challenge awards with third-party resources will enable two grants to extend beyond the anticipated one-year cycle. And, a third grant has been applied to a wider geographic region than originally anticipated due to a vendor's favorable reaction to the collaboration among the broadband service provider and its business customers.

This report provides a summary of recipient reporting as of July 22, 2016. It is intended to demonstrate recipients' stewardship of the awards; the implementation of technological solutions from coast-to-coast; and the positive impact borne of community leaders working together.



Smart Rural Community is supported by Mapcom Systems, National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC) and National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative (NRTC).

For additional information, please visit www.ntca.org/smart, or contact smartrural@ntca.org.

Awards

Consolidated Telecommunications Company (Brainerd, MN)

Award: \$1,723.00 (2016)

Consolidated Telecommunications Company (CTC), in conjunction with other community organizations, constructed a 10G fiber ring around two communities. This ring connects all local hospitals, government buildings, and schools. CTC proposed a program that would leverage the fiber connectivity by deploying Raspberry Pi with associated technologies and peripherals to create “MakerSpaces” in the local district’s secondary schools. CTC requested funding to support the deployment of seven starter kits in schools servicing a total of 3,600 students. These technologies support “STEAM” (science, technology, engineering, art and math) curricula. Partners in this effort include the school district and Alpenglow Technologies, LLC. As of this Report, launch of the MakerSpaces in these schools is planned for the 2016/2017 school year.

Copper Valley Telecom (Valdez, AK)

Award: \$5000.00 (2015)

Partnering with the Copper River School District (CRSD), Copper Valley Telecom proposed to extend DSL broadband scholarships to financially-challenged students. Copper Valley Telecom serves the 7,884 square miles of the CRSD. CRSD has three schools and one correspondence program, with a total enrollment of 437 students. Unemployment rates in the four communities served by the CRSD range, respectively, from 6.05 percent to 26.4 percent. During the 2013/2014 school year, CRSD implemented an on-line learning program. This distance education product enables students to participate in a wide range of curricula and classes that were previously unavailable in their communities, including foreign language and vocational education courses. The CRSD noted, however, that some students without Internet service at home would encounter challenges. This would be especially prevalent in families enduring financial difficulties over the course of a year. In response to this challenge, Copper Valley Telecom in 2014 donated DSL modems, activation fees, and a 65 percent monthly service discount for eligible families; CRSD donated an additional 35 percent monthly service discount. During that first year, Copper Valley Telecom and CRSD provided 100 percent DSL scholarships to four families at a total cost of \$4,790. Copper Valley Telecom proposed that an SRC Collaboration Challenge grant in 2015 would enable it and CRSD to double the number of DSL scholarships for eligible students.

As of June 1, 2016, Copper Valley Telecom expended \$2,830.61 of the initial \$5,000 grant. The program provided service to eight recipients; service was disconnected on June 1, 2016, since the school year ended on May 28. Copper Valley Telecom will use the remaining funds in 2016/2017 to continue the program and provide DSL scholarships throughout the academic year for eight students.

Copper Valley Telecom (Valdez, AK)

Award: \$2,180.00 (2016)

Utilizing an SRC Collaboration Challenge grant, Copper Valley Telecom is working with Prince William Sound College (PWSC) to offer computer literacy classes. The sessions will be offered to people 50 years of age or older, or younger participants who are not familiar with computer and on-line usage. The courses will address basic computer operation; e-mail; use of social media; and Internet safety and security. Each session will be limited to 12 students, ensuring a close instructor-student ratio; additional sessions will be offered if warranted by demand. PWSC will manage marketing and registration for the series, while Copper Valley Telecom will provide instructors and

class materials. Sessions in Valdez, Alaska, are scheduled for September/October 2016, with an additional series planned for Glennallen, Alaska.

Gardonville Cooperative Telephone Association (Brandon, MN)

Award: \$5,000.00 (2015)

Gardonville Cooperative Telephone Association partnered with Knute Nelson, a faith-based hospice, to deploy small-form wireless MiFi routers to enable patient connectivity to the Internet. These devices support vital signs monitoring and social connectivity for patients who may otherwise be unserved due to demographic location or affordability. Knute Nelson was founded in 1948 to provide care to a 26-county area in west-central Minnesota. In support of the SRC grant, Knute Nelson provides a discounted maintenance fee in its GrandCare program, valued at \$2,400, and Gardonville provides discounted Internet service subscriptions valued at \$1,500. Customers are responsible for \$25 per month. The SRC grant supports MiFi router units.

Since receiving the grant in April 2015, Gardonville has deployed units to eight clients. During the first quarter of use, Gardonville and Knute Nelson worked through a “discovery process” to ensure the installations met the intent of the grant program. This included enhancing device security for users that ultimately improved quality of service (QOS) for GrandCare patients. The installations were particularly effective in areas where clients were not served by Internet service providers, or where the incumbent provider required a lengthy customer agreement that hospice patients were reluctant to undertake. Over the course of the past year, Gardonville and Knute Nelson have redeployed equipment in instances where, unfortunately, a patient passed away or experienced changes in medical status that rendered them unable to utilize the system. Gardonville and Knute Nelson created a patient satisfaction survey to track results of the program. Gardonville reports that the grant has helped numerous people in need, and that patients who were approaching the end of life benefitted greatly from the installations.

Triangle Communications, Inc. (Havre, MT)

Award: \$5,000.00 (2016)

In late 2015, Triangle Communications entered into an agreement with Island Mountain Development Group (IMDG) a tribally-owned economic development agency that is charged with cultivating growth in the Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC). IMDG is one of the largest employers in the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. IMDG supports a call center that employees about 50 loan processing agents.

As the call center prepared to move to a new facility, Triangle Communications proposed to work with IMDG to create a Virtual Workplace Suite and Training Center (VWS/TC). This center will rely upon Triangle Communications’ provision of fiber optic broadband. The VWS/TC will provide access to onsite, online digital training and education opportunities. Occupancy is anticipated for fall 2016. IMDG will provide 50 percent matching funds to support the VWS/TC; IMDG is underwriting construction costs of the new \$600,000 facility. The SRC grant will be applied to a smart board, interactive projector, conference phone system, microphone kit, and wiring and installation. IMDG will apply its matching funds to complete the VWS/TC, including furnishings and other miscellaneous equipment. It is anticipated that this center will assist in the creation of an additional 50 jobs in the community.

Waitsfield & Champlain Valley Telecom (Waitsfield, VT)

Award: \$5,000.00 (2015)

Waitsfield & Champlain Valley Telecom (WCVT) applied to obtain support for a free downtown WiFi network intended to support tourism and local commerce. The company serves four ski areas in Vermont, and attracts summer and fall tourism, as well; Champlain Valley in particular maintains a strong summer focus with many summer homes and camps along Lake Champlain. The Mad River Valley region served by WCVT is composed of four communities. The SRC grant focused on Mad River Valley, and has since been deployed elsewhere, replicating the initial deployment.

Working with the local chamber of commerce and downtown businesses, WCVT designed a deployment intended to keep people in the downtown shopping areas. Sites where service is now available include a store that has an outdoor deck overlooking the river; a farmer's market; public gathering spaces; and complete downtown areas.

Upon learning that the deployment was community-focused and supported in part by a grant, the equipment vendor offered more favorable pricing to WCVT. The first deployment came in under budget, and WCVT combined the leftover funding with a state grant to deploy in a second downtown area.

WCVT has leveraged its experience deploying this network to enhance its service to the police department, the town office, and the fire department. Local commercial partners have provided site and website development support. Community citizens benefit from the downtown access, both from using the network but also from reaping the benefits of tourists who use it and stay longer; WCVT reports that it benefitted by sharpening its skills and offerings, and that its customers benefit as the experience WCVT gained implementing SRC grant enabled the company to expand the offerings it provides to them.

Program Guidelines

The SRC Collaboration Challenge provides up to \$5,000 to support the development and deployment of innovative broadband-enabled solutions that enable rural commerce and economic development, education, energy, health care, public safety and other community-oriented initiatives. Successful applicants are required to demonstrate how the broadband-enabled technology will generate improvements to community strength and growth consistent with the goals of the SRC program.

Applicants are requested to describe collaborative efforts undertaken with other local interests to develop the proposal and the anticipated impacts of implementation. Applicants must provide a detailed budget and schedule of anticipated expenditures, and demonstrate at least 50% (fifty percent) in matching funds from third-party sources; preferences are given where matching fund commitments are obtained from parties with whom the Applicant is collaborating. The matching funds requirements may be satisfied by third-party in-kind contributions of goods or services at fair market value.

Proposals are evaluated by the SRC Advisory Council (SRCAC) using the following criteria: (1) demonstrated experience, qualifications and expertise to perform the services described; (2) local interests to be supported by the proposal; (3) services to be initiated and provided pursuant to the proposal; (4) anticipated quantifiable impacts, including economic, of the proposal; (5) anticipated qualitative impacts of the proposal; (6) collaboration with community leaders; and, (7) other factors deemed relevant by the Review Board, including schedule for completion.