

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Taunton Municipal Lighting Plant

Project Title: Community ReadyNet

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

a) A statement of the problem or need your project addresses with regard to improving broadband service adoption rates.

The primary purpose of this application is to improve public safety through the adoption of broadband video technology by emergency management agencies and community anchor institutions. Southeast Massachusetts has a multitude of local jurisdictions, and coordination among police and fire departments in responding to emergencies is always a challenge. Our geographic location is somewhat unique in that we are vulnerable to both hurricanes and blizzards. There are regionally significant rail lines, drinking water reservoirs, and electrical and communications infrastructure that are vulnerable to both natural and man-made disaster.

Community ReadyNet will also link public schools and a major hospital. These community anchors serve vulnerable populations, and they are also important players in the event of an emergency.

Our region of the state is experiencing economic decline and problems more generally associated with urban areas. Meanwhile, our jurisdictions are facing shrinking tax bases. All agencies, including schools, are being asked to do more with less. This project seeks to use broadband in new and creative ways to meet health, educational, and economic development needs.

b) Your overall approach to addressing the need, and how your approach is innovative.

The needs outlined above will be addressed by establishing an integrated IP video telecommunications network among the local police and fire stations as well as schools and a hospital in four local jurisdictions. Video communication will enable much better coordination among the public safety agencies in responding to all kinds of emergencies.

Community ReadyNet will leverage previous investments in broadband infrastructure and encourage better utilization and innovation. It will also leverage previous investments in video surveillance systems, allowing the agencies to share live video from many locations that are not in this application.

Schools and hospitals represent vulnerable populations in the event of emergencies. They also represent key resources, such as the use of schools as emergency shelters. In this respect, the installation of video systems in these community anchors extends the public safety network.

Most of the time, of course, we are not in a state of emergency. On a day-to-day basis, the network will be used for distance learning, telemedicine, workforce development, and training. TMLP will open its videoconferencing facility for local businesses to help them partner and compete globally. Educators, healthcare providers, and first responders can all access new sources of training in order to further their careers and improve their employability.

This project is innovative in several inter-related respects. It is led by an unusually progressive not-for-profit municipal utility, which has existing partnerships with all the players. It involves unusual levels of cooperation among agencies of multiple jurisdictions. It addresses many community needs by using an emergency management infrastructure for non-emergency purposes.

c) Area(s) to be served; population of the target area(s), including demographic information; and the estimated number of potential broadband subscribers your project will reach

Community ReadyNet will provide public safety benefits to all residents of four jurisdictions: City of Taunton, pop. 57,000; town of Berkley, pop. 5,700; town of Raynham, pop. 11,700; and town of Lakeville, pop. 9,800. The total population directly impacted is approximately 84,200. However, the project will provide benefits to a much wider area by virtue of protecting the electrical and communications grid, transportation routes, water supply, and other key regional infrastructure serving hundreds of thousands.

We estimate that over 1,400 students per year will benefit directly from video distance learning. The number of health care workers, patients, public safety personnel, and other residents receiving direct benefits is of a similar magnitude.

d) Qualifications of the applicant that demonstrate the ability to implement the project and achieve its intended results.

The Taunton Municipal Lighting Plant is uniquely qualified to lead this project. In addition to being a municipal electrical utility with deep historic ties to the community, it is also an ISP, currently providing data transport to area businesses and all the parties represented in this project. TMLP knows the communications infrastructure because it installed a large portion of it. Some sites in this project will require short “last-mile” connections. TMLP will provide these connections using other funding sources.

e) Jobs to be saved or created.

Most of the economic impacts of this project will be less direct than “jobs saved or created,” but they are nonetheless real. Teachers, healthcare workers, and first responders will pursue continuing education, enabling them to obtain promotions and boost their earning power. This additional training actually comes with reduced costs for their employers in the form of avoided travel and time off. These savings can be reinvested in the workforce.

Public school students will have new opportunities to take advanced classes and get a jump on college. They will also have opportunities to have live video interactions with people in interesting walks of life, stimulating their career interests and ambitions. Schools with such opportunities have seen reduced dropout rates and increased college attendance.

Local businesses will have additional opportunities to grow by virtue of video access to partners, suppliers, and markets, essentially enabling them to compete globally without the cost of travel.

f) Overall cost of the proposed project.

The total budget for our project is \$3,653,372.48.