

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: The University of Texas at Austin

Project Title: Texas Broadband Best Practices and Dispute Avoidance Center

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

The Universities of Texas and Texas A&M, together with several non-profits, city owned electric utilities, electric co-operatives, and the Lower Colorado River Authority are submitting inter-related public interest grant proposals for National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and Rural Utilities Service (RUS) funding within the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP). We are also coordinating our mapping efforts with the Texas Department of Agriculture. Since the publication of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the University of Texas has researched how the public interest can best be served by the administration of this broadband grant program. Once the NOFA was published we have developed multiple grants of which the University of Texas is the lead requestor on four separate grants. Some of these grant request overlap multiple public interest goals and can potentially be funded from many of the categories. Our interpretation of the rules requires that multiple applications must be filed to be considered for funding from different categories, which we have done. When we have filed multiple applications we have internally ranked them based upon the “best fit” of the specific proposal. Below is a list of University of Texas filed grant requests ranked by best fit:

- Texas Open Pop (“TOPP”) – (1) BIP Middle Mile; (2) BTOP Infrastructure Middle Mile; (3) BTOP Innovative;
- Texas Greenline – (1) BTOP Infrastructure Middle Mile; (2) BTOP Innovative; (3) BTOP Community Centers
- Texas Build – (1) BTOP Infrastructure End User; (2) BTOP Innovative;
- Texas Broadband Best Practices and Dispute Avoidance Center – BTOP Innovative grant.

These projects represent the joint, and often interdisciplinary, efforts of the University of Texas's many specialized schools, particularly the schools of Law, Engineering, Technology, Communications, and Public Affairs all in partnership with community stakeholders in the targeted areas of need.

It is our hope that these applications are viewed as a model for other public and private institutions and their collective public interest aspirations. At the end of the day, we firmly believe that public monies and public subsidies must be used for public broadband infrastructure and not high-tech, private toll roads. The overwhelming common theme in all of the University of Texas' Grant requests is to create a useful broadband infrastructure for the people in Texas who need it, while also creating a model for transparency on how to build and operate an "Open Internet." Along the way, we will create an on-going education center that can serve as a touchstone and catalyst for innovation for future providers as well as policy makers.

This application pertains to the Texas Broadband Best Practices and Dispute Avoidance Center.

Years of experience with community leaders who are attempting to launch or manage broadband projects have led us to an appreciation of the widespread need for unbiased, comprehensible, well-organized information about broadband "best practices." The field of broadband telecommunications is replete with arcane jargon, contradictory claims, complex and constantly changing systems and technology, and a wide variety of approaches, all of which make the task of deciding how to deploy broadband a challenge for any policymaker or community leader.

We propose to create and maintain a Broadband Best Practices and Dispute Avoidance Center ("the Center"), as part of the University of Texas Broadband Center, which will serve the dual purposes of 1) serving as an unbiased resource center for information for the broadband services industry, and for community leaders who are part of the effort to extend high-speed broadband to all Americans; and 2) creating a model forum for dialogue, collaboration, and conflict management on broadband issues. The University of Texas at Austin is well qualified for this type of work, as evidenced by the operation of the LBJ School of Public Affairs' site www.lonestarbroadband.org, the Telecommunications and Information Policy Institute's broadband usage surveys for various Texas agencies, and the work of Dr. Strover and Professor Gary Chapman in 2001-2002, evaluating 36 communities in Texas that had received \$500,000 grants to develop community networks.

The first prong of the Center will not only serve as a clearinghouse of best practices, but also provide regional and local training sessions, workshops, and the means for industry participants to establish a

“learning community” of peers who help each other. The Center will also be the key “integrator” of the other components of the Texas Broadband Center, by serving as the “public face” of the other projects, as well as the repository for research data and analysis. The goal of the first prong is to create a nexus for interested parties to contribute, discuss, and utilize broadband resource information, which in turn can inform future policy decisions about the fate of programs like the Universal Service Fund.

The second prong of the Center will be a national forum for dialogue, collaboration and conflict management. When collaboration is the best approach to addressing or resolving an issue, such as establishing best practices, creating model contract provisions, or effecting dispute resolution contract provisions, the Center can provide a safe place with skilled professionals to facilitate the process. Additionally, the Center will foster conflict management through consultation, training, and the provision of third-party neutrals. When conflicts actually arise, parties need to know what options are available for resolving them, such as negotiation, mediation, or arbitration. The Center will offer education and training concerning these conflict management tools and will be ready to provide mediators and arbitrators as necessary