Texas Open POP Project ' Austin to Houston The Middle Mile problem is the problem of building adequate network connections between the Internet's backbone pipes and the last mile local loops that go to an end-user. Rural Americans end up being the victim of this Middle Mile problem and are often in the awkward position of having local connections being potentially available but no (or inadequate) means of connecting those local loops back to the greater network. The Texas Open POP Project (TOPP), is prepared to solve this problem by building a series of points of presences (POPs), giving rural and innovative providers (many of whom have now filed support letters) an accessible connection to the Internet backbone. This project seeks to connect 11 rural unserved communities, with at least 15,751 households, 2860 businesses, 146 community anchor institutions and public safety entities. Differentiating the TOPP is a set of public interest goals that will drive the project every step of the way: 1) Open Access. The TOPP will be operated with clear open access guidelines in terms of making connections, daily operations, and non-discrimination of packets. We will strive to exceed the standards of openness set by the FCC, and set the bar in the broadband industry for fairness and transparency. USFON, a 501(c)(3) non-profit designated as a charitable organization which is also a fully certified CLEC in the State of Texas, whose board of directors includes UT professors and a former Texas Public Utility Commissioner, will administer the necessary operations which require any type of state certification, additionally they will operate the POPs and will require that each participant of, and customer of the TOPP also adhere to Open Access standards as they develop. USFON will also be a charter member of the Texas Broadband Best Practices Center. 2) Non-profit and promoting competition. Our goal with the TOPP is not to create a revenue machine but to build infrastructure designed to improve the quality of life for rural Americans. As such, the project's POPs will be available at a price designed to offset the costs of operations and maintenance, with no eye towards profit. We will also provide a discounted rate to anchor institutions that are city owned and/or are non-profits. Our model assumes a rural gig-e will be priced at $1,800 per month to for profit entities, and $1,000 to non-profits. Further we encourage for profits to establish their own networks which can even lower prices further. For Profit companies such as Internet America that opposed the UT Austin project in round 1 now support the project. Attached as a supplemental document is a filing UT Austin School of Law made that outlines the support of such companies. Additionally other companies, such as Worldcall Interconnect, have already 'pre-ordered' the middle mile solution in the event UT Austin is successful. This overt policy will encourage multiple providers of broadband and anchor use. 3) Maximum rural penetration. Understanding the balance between the costs of building middle mile infrastructure and reaching the greatest number of people possible is key to successful implementation and sustainability. To maximize rural penetration, TOPPs
utilizes its extensive knowledge of existing fiber, conduit, and electrical transmission pole infrastructure capabilities and partners, to designing a system that provides direct fiber connectivity opportunities to as many rural communities and facilities as possible at reasonable costs. Our core partners in this project are Level 3 (a round 1 grant winner), Alpheus Communications and LCRA. With a grant request of $13,733,823 we have built a matching infrastructure of more than $3,504,860 being provided by multiple different entities (all non-profit, educational, or muni/co-op owned electric utilities). Our request of grant monies is to complete connectivity of seven intersecting rural long-haul routes. The resulting network will initially connect 11 unserved communities to 3 major anchor points of interest where additional educational and medical institutions, as well as other University-related entities, will be connected. 4) Sustainability. The Middle Mile problem can be solved without the need for major technological advances or continuing subsidies. We believe that our detailed request for a one-time grant is all that is economically required to build a sustainable model. However, what is also required is a clear vision of implementation and the technical expertise to execute it. In this case, such expertise and vision comes from the joint cooperation of the University of Texas, the LCRA, USFON and Alpheus. Thus, the TOPP is uniquely equipped to solve the Middle Mile problem and bring the benefit of open broadband to the largest rural population in American. THE BOTTOM LINE.