Working with a Broadband Provider

Broadband services can be achieved through community-provider partnerships as a result of careful planning and mutual understanding.

This document is intended to guide community leaders as they consider entering into a partnership with a broadband provider.

1. Know your goals

Before exploring a partnership with a broadband provider, work within your community to identify your broadband goals and prioritize what your community needs out of a potential partnership.

Questions to consider when identifying your community's broadband goals:

1. Who do we need to involve? If you're not sure where to start, check out this toolkit[1] from Fiber Broadband Association for guidance on who should be at the table.
2. What geography are we concerned with? Is it the same or different than the CAF II-eligible area[2]?
3. What do we currently have in place?
4. How well are current internet needs being met?
5. What are our community's future needs?
6. Is there competition? If so, how can the competition help us? If not, how can the lack of competition hurt us?
7. What is available for anchor institutions and/or key customers currently?
8. What is available in downtown areas or industrial parks?
9. How is wireless factored into our community's current broadband landscape?

Questions to consider when prioritizing your partnership goals:

1. What is the level of financial risk our community is prepared to take on?
2. What level of control does we want over the internet service offerings?
3. What areas must be part of the plan and what areas are negotiable?
4. What's more important to our community – speed or affordability? From there, determine what type of technology would be the best fit (fiber, wireless, DSL, etc.)

2. Know your partner

Researching your potential provider can help you build your partnership case and avoid surprises. Some questions you might think through include:

1. What is the provider's reputation for service?
2. What types of technology have they used in past projects? Is there a pattern that points to a technology preference?
3. Have they partnered with other communities on past projects? If so,
   a. How was the partnership structured?
   b. Did the community end up with the network they wanted?
   c. What did the network's long-term ownership plan look like?
4. From what you already know, do you think your community and the provider have compatible goals or the potential for compromise?

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3. Know how you want to partner
Depending on your community's broadband needs, and what you know about the provider, there are multiple ways to partner. Here are some potential types of partnerships your community could enter into with a provider.

Financial Partnerships	Non-Financial Partnerships
- Sell bonds to finance network - Offer a capital lease to finance the network - Reduce/eliminate Right of Way and permit fees - Prepay for services through long-term contract - Submit a joint application for additional funding (state grants, etc.)	- Organize and aggregate demand of major customers - Provide free or low-cost office/facility space for start-up operations - Implement community marketing events - Ensure prompt permitting and inspections

4. Plan for a successful partnership
Before contacting a provider, do some initial planning that will help the partnership be successful. Work through these with a provider before the terms of the partnership are set.
1. How will the provider share information with community representatives and vice versa?
2. How will decisions about the project be made?
3. If there are disputes or disagreements between the partners, how will they be settled?
4. If the partnership is not progressing as hoped, how should partnership dissolution be addressed?

5. Schedule a meeting with your provider
What to bring:
- Feasibility study (if you have one)
- Background materials on market demand, the community's broadband goals, and potential partnership avenues
- Good questions

If your community is interested in technology consulting or convening assistance as you embark on this process, consider applying for a grant through Blandin Foundation's Community Broadband Resources program.

Information about Blandin Foundation broadband grants is at http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org.

1   https://toolkit.fiberbroadband.org/page/consumers
2   http://map.connectmn.org/