DIGITALLY CONNECT BIRMINGHAM AL
REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

Project Title:
Phase I - Digital Broadband Connectivity Project for Collegeville and Woodlawn Communities

Issuing Organization:
Woodlawn United, a 501(c)(3) economic development agency committed to the transformation and revitalization of the Woodlawn community, envisions a vibrant and sustainable neighborhood where residents thrive. Our mission is to create a safe and healthy environment where children can learn and play, families reside in quality housing, parents secure stable employment, businesses flourish, and every individual contributes to the growth of the greater Birmingham community.

Introduction:
Woodlawn United, in partnership with Prosper and IGNITE Alabama, is seeking proposals from qualified digital broadband connectivity providers to improve and/or provide internet access in the Collegeville and Woodlawn communities within the City of Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama. Included in this RFP are additional milestones and considerations to ensure a comprehensive and realistic project timeline. Included in this document are added elements that aim to address potential gaps and provide a more thorough approach to planning and implementing the digital connectivity project.

Jefferson County faces significant challenges in expanding broadband access. Limited interest from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in serving low-density areas results in inadequate coverage in underserved communities. Additionally, affordability barriers pose significant obstacles for many residents, preventing them from accessing internet services and acquiring necessary devices. This particularly affects low-income households, exacerbating the digital divide within the county.

This project aims to bridge the digital divide and enhance opportunities for economic development, education, healthcare, and community engagement. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure equitable access to digital opportunities and foster socio-economic development across Jefferson County.

Background:
Community Overview:
In phase 1, we will focus on two locations in Jefferson County. The following information is meant to provide some highlights about these two communities to ensure the RFP pays particular attention to the specific challenges and opportunities to bring these much needed services to the residents.
Collegeville:
- Demographics: Collegeville is a predominantly African American community with a population of approximately 1,906 residents. The median household income is $24,870, with a significant portion of the population living below the poverty line. The community has a high percentage of children and elderly residents, making digital connectivity crucial for education and telehealth services.
- Historical Significance: Collegeville has deep roots as a segregated Black community and is home to the Bethel Baptist Church, a National Historic Landmark in the Southern Civil Rights Movement.
- Educational Institutions: The community features Hudson K-8 School and G.W. Carver High School, both of which play critical roles in the education of local children.
- Current Connectivity: The area currently suffers from inadequate broadband infrastructure, with limited ISP options and average internet speeds significantly below the national average, highlighting a need for improved broadband infrastructure (ZipDataMaps).

Woodlawn:
- Demographics: Woodlawn has a population of approximately 10,000 residents, with a median household income of $30,000. The community is also predominantly African American, with a significant number of low-income households. Similar to Collegeville, with a mix of young families and elderly residents.
- Historical Significance: Woodlawn holds a rich history from its post-Civil War boom town origins to its vibrant working-class community of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, the area has faced social and economic challenges due to industrial decline and urban neglect.
- Educational Institutions: Woodlawn High School and several elementary schools serve the community, emphasizing the need for reliable internet access for students.
- Current Connectivity: Similar to Collegeville, Woodlawn faces significant broadband connectivity issues, with many residents lacking access to high-speed internet access (ZipDataMaps).

Broadband Coverage Data:
- Existing ISPs: The primary ISPs serving the area include AT&T, Spectrum (formerly BrightHouse), and HughesNet. However, coverage is inconsistent, and service quality varies significantly.
- Internet Speeds: The average internet speed in these communities is approximately 80 Mbps, though advertised speeds by ISPs can be up to 1,000 Mbps. Many residents experience speeds well below the advertised rates.
● Affordability Barriers: Broadband services start at $35 per month, but many residents cannot afford these rates. Additionally, credit requirements for service accounts further limit access for low-income households.

● Digital Divide: Over 80% of residents in these communities lack reliable broadband connectivity, impacting their ability to participate in remote work, online learning, and telehealth services.

Objectives:
The primary objectives of this project include:
● Enhancing broadband access and affordability for residents and businesses in Collegeville and Woodlawn.
● Increasing internet speeds to support digital activities such as remote work, online learning, telemedicine, and e-commerce.
● Fostering community development and inclusion through technology.

Scope of Work:
The selected provider will be responsible for:
● Assessing existing broadband infrastructure and identifying areas for improvement.
● Designing and implementing a comprehensive broadband network to serve the Collegeville and Woodlawn communities.
● Providing reliable high-speed internet connectivity to residents, businesses, and community institutions.
● Collaborating with local stakeholders to ensure alignment with community needs and priorities.
● Offering options for affordable service plans.

Key Considerations:
Based on insights from previous proposals, the following considerations are essential:
1. Community-Owned Network:
   Establish a Smart City through a community-owned network that leverages data for crime prevention, economic insights, and community safety.

2. Data-Driven Approach:
   Utilize industry-first proprietary infrastructure for data collection and analysis to drive safety and economic growth.
Infrastructure Requirements:
1. Address gaps in existing ISPs by providing affordable broadband to underserved areas.
2. Implement a hybrid system that can include SD-WAN functionality, WiMAX, mesh networks, and robust security measures.

Proof of Concept and Implementation:
1. Develop end-to-end telecom solutions with flexible technology options that are predominantly fiber-based, but may include WiMAX, mesh networks, or other novel solutions.
2. Initial testing followed by full installation to ensure a consistent and sustainable Quality of Service (QoS).

Community Benefits:
1. Higher property values, educational opportunities, new businesses, community Wi-Fi, and telemedicine.
2. The network should empower the community by improving safety, economic growth, and digital inclusivity.

Cost Breakdown:
Professional services, material costs, and implementation costs should be detailed, including technology consulting, site surveys, network design, software, equipment, installation, project management, and permits.

Technical Requirements:
● Preferred Technology: Fiber is preferred due to its ability to support robust applications such as streaming HD videos, online gaming, and supporting multiple devices simultaneously. Fiber-optic internet typically offers speeds ranging from 100 Mbps to 1 Gbps (1,000 Mbps), with potential for even higher speeds, making it ideal for both residential and business use-cases. However, proposals that include a backbone of fiber, and the utilization of WiMAX, mesh networks, and other innovative solutions will be reviewed for consideration.
● Minimum Internet Speeds: 100 Mbps download and 100 Mbps upload
● Infrastructure: Reliable and scalable infrastructure capable of supporting future growth and demand
● Compliance: Adherence to industry standards for security, privacy, and data protection

Key Milestones:
● Proposal Submission Deadline: July 12, 2024
● Review and Evaluation Period: July 12, 2024 - July 26, 2024
Vendor Selection and Contracting: July 29, 2024
Selection of Provider: August 2, 2024
Public Press Conference: August 7, 2024
Project Commencement: August 5, 2024
Project Estimated Completion: March 5, 2025

Additional Milestones:
To ensure thorough planning and implementation, the following additional milestones should be considered:

1. Stakeholder Engagement and Community Meetings:
   a. Timeline: Ongoing from project commencement to completion
   b. Regular meetings with community leaders, residents, and stakeholders to gather feedback, address concerns, and ensure the project meets community needs.

2. Site Surveys and Preliminary Design:
   a. Timeline: August 5, 2024 - September 5, 2024
   b. Detailed site surveys to assess existing infrastructure and develop preliminary design plans for the network.

3. Permitting and Approvals:
   a. Timeline: September 5, 2024 - October 5, 2024
   b. Obtain necessary permits and approvals from local authorities and regulatory bodies.

4. Detailed Network Design and Planning:
   a. Timeline: October 5, 2024 - November 5, 2024
   b. Finalize network design, including technology selection, equipment specifications, and installation plans.

5. Procurement of Equipment and Materials:
   a. Timeline: November 5, 2024 - December 5, 2024
   b. Purchase and prepare all necessary equipment and materials for installation.

6. Installation and Configuration:
   a. Timeline: December 5, 2024 - February 5, 2025
   b. Install and configure network infrastructure, ensuring all components are operational and meet performance standards.

7. Testing and Quality Assurance:
   a. Timeline: February 5, 2025 - February 20, 2025
b. Conduct thorough testing and quality assurance to ensure the network operates reliably and meets all technical requirements.

8. Training and Capacity Building:
   a. Timeline: February 20, 2025 - March 1, 2025
   b. Provide training for local technicians, community members, and stakeholders to ensure they can maintain and utilize the network effectively.

9. Final Review and Handover:
   a. Timeline: March 1, 2025 - March 5, 2025
   b. Conduct a final review with stakeholders and hand over the network to the community and local authorities.

Budget:
The total budget allocated for this project will be based on the winning proposal. Funding may be supplemented by public and private dollars, including grants, subsidies, and other sources.

Evaluation Criteria:
Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:
● Technical expertise and experience in deploying broadband infrastructure
● Alignment of the proposed solution with project objectives and community needs
● Cost-effectiveness and affordability of service plans
● Track record of reliability, performance, and customer satisfaction
● Commitment to community engagement and collaboration

Submission Guidelines:
Interested providers are invited to submit their proposals electronically to connectbhm@woodlawnunited.org no later than Friday, June 28, 2024. Proposals should be formatted as PDF documents and include relevant company information, technical specifications, project approach, pricing details, and any additional supporting materials.

Contact Information:
For inquiries or clarification regarding this RFP, please contact:
connectbhm@woodlawnunited.org
(205) 599-6963

Appendices:
● Map of Collegeville and Woodlawn communities.
● Sample service area assessment report.
● Any additional documents or references deemed relevant.