

North Carolina Broadband Rigor in Mapping and Planning:

\$2,023,876 grant requested from NTIA (\$1,589,077 - mapping, \$434,799 - planning)

Match from the e-NC Authority totals \$521,017 (\$404,568 - mapping, \$116,449 - planning)

Mapping Summary:

Since 2001, the e-NC Authority has acted on its legislative mandate to develop and maintain a map that depicts the status of broadband availability in the state (<http://www.e-nc.org/disclaimer.asp>). Over time, this map evolved from an annually updated, static county-based representation to its current interactive format. While advances in the technology used to develop, display and update the map have made it more useful, problems in the collection and verification of underlying provider-supplied information continue to limit its true value.

The e-NC Authority has requested a grant to test and validate an alternative approach to broadband data collection through a highly structured experimental protocol. Three types of data collection will be reviewed in this multi-modal research project: data collected and requested from providers (fall 2009), data collected independently through Web-enabled data mining (fall 2009), and data collected directly from citizens and businesses through telephone surveys and/or field census that will begin in the fourth quarter of 2009. By Nov. 1, 2009, promising third-party Web-enabled data mining methods will develop and deliver a map and underlying data to the NTIA. Data collected using this method will be augmented with wireless access data gathered using GIS-based technology and field sampling.

Web-enabled data mining results will be tested and validated through comparisons between the two approaches that are more conventional: new or existing data supplied by providers noted above, and data collected directly from citizens and businesses through telephone surveys and/or field census that will begin in the fourth quarter of 2009. Monthly meetings between the e-NC Authority and its corporate, university and nonprofit partner organizations will facilitate information exchange and data assessment. Expert outside evaluators skilled in mathematical modeling will also assist the e-NC Authority while later joining partner organizations by April 2010 to evaluate the results of this experiment. Collectively, they will recommend an optimal method or combination of methods providing states the most cost effective way to supply the NTIA with requested state access to broadband data.

Planning Summary:

In its planning work, the e-NC Authority proposes outreach again to businesses and households with a multi-pronged program further stimulating demand for broadband, economic growth and job creation. Awareness training and support will target community anchor institutions and organizations serving vulnerable populations. Simultaneously, a statewide interactive virtual forum will directly target and engage these populations. Outreach to state leaders will focus on the development of a Broadband Idea Group (NC BIG) – a leadership development initiative expanding intellectual undergirding for creative projects that will capture the promise of broadband for all North Carolina citizens. An action-focused report will measure usage of broadband by businesses, institutions, households and organizations, while identifying barriers and gaps useful in defining local or regional broadband initiatives. These survey results will guide design of a new Last Mile Broadband Project to reach unserved/underserved communities.

Having previously assisted in development of 137 public access centers, the e-NC Authority will revisit this effort to determine costs and plans for refurbishment of these centers. An effort to plan and pilot the transition of FCC's LifeLine Program to a Lifeline Online Program will be facilitated by centralized training centers established at the revitalized public access centers. Citizen surveys will track and inform our progress as we move through the planning processes.