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**COMMERCE AWARDS RECOVERY ACT BROADBAND EXPANSION GRANTS
TOTALING \$63 MILLION**

Funds Will Expand Broadband Infrastructure and Access in Massachusetts, Michigan and North Carolina

WASHINGTON – The Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) today announced grants totaling \$63 million to expand broadband access and adoption in Massachusetts, Michigan and North Carolina. Funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, NTIA’s Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) provides grants to support the deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas, enhance and expand public computer centers, and encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service. These investments will help bridge the technological divide, boost economic growth and create jobs.

“High-speed Internet access is the lifeblood of today’s economy,” Commerce Secretary Gary Locke said. “Having access to the Internet’s economic, health and educational benefits should be as much of a fundamental American right as attending a quality school. Our best minds should be able to talk to one another, create and innovate regardless of where they come from. These grants are an important step toward expanding high-speed Internet access into the unserved and underserved areas of the country.”

NTIA received nearly 1,800 applications during the first BTOP funding round and is currently awarding grants on a rolling basis. Including today’s announcement, NTIA has now awarded 15 grants totaling approximately \$200 million under the program.

“The level of interest in this program has been extraordinary, and is yet another indicator of the critical role broadband plays in achieving durable, sustainable economic growth,” said Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information and NTIA Administrator Lawrence E. Strickling. “Like the grants announced today, the strongest proposals are the ones that have taken a truly comprehensive view of the communities to be served and have engaged as many key members of the communities as possible in developing the projects.”

BTOP grants fall into one of three categories. Infrastructure grants build and improve connections to communities lacking sufficient broadband access. Public computer center grants

expand computer center capacity for public use in libraries, community colleges and other public venues. Sustainable broadband adoption grants fund innovative projects to increase broadband subscription levels in areas or among population groups where the technology has traditionally been underutilized.

The following grants were announced today:

Massachusetts, University of Massachusetts-Lowell: \$780,000 broadband adoption grant with an additional \$196,000 in applicant-provided matching funds to promote broadband awareness and computer literacy among vulnerable populations, including the nation's second largest Cambodian population, low-income and at-risk youth, the unemployed, residents without college degrees, and seniors in Lowell and Merrimack Valley. As part of the program, University of Massachusetts-Lowell students will work in local computer centers with at-risk youth and seniors to develop appropriate training and outreach materials.

Michigan, Merit Network, Inc.: \$33.3 million infrastructure grant with an additional \$8.3 million in matching funds to build a 955-mile advanced fiber-optic network through 32 counties in Michigan's Lower Peninsula. The project also intends to directly connect 44 community anchor institutions and will serve an area covering 886,000 households, 45,800 businesses, and an additional 378 anchor institutions.

Michigan, Michigan State University: \$895,000 public computer center grant with an additional \$235,000 in matching funds to expand 84 existing library computer centers and establish four new computer centers. Computer center sites were selected by targeting underserved and high-unemployment population areas and then focusing on those libraries with the greatest need for additional computing capacity. The project will add 500 new workstations at these targeted public computer centers throughout the state and serve nearly 13,000 additional users per week.

North Carolina, MCNC: \$28.2 million infrastructure grant with an additional \$11.7 million in matching funds and in-kind contributions to build a 494-mile middle-mile broadband network passing almost half the population of North Carolina in 37 counties. The network will build new rings in the western and eastern regions of the state, which will connect to 685 miles of existing infrastructure in the urbanized central region, expanding the reach of the North Carolina Research and Education Network (NCERN), an established broadband service for community anchor institutions in the state.

NTIA recently announced that a second round of BTOP applications will be accepted through March 15, 2010. The rules for applying to this funding round have been modified to make the application process more user-friendly and better target program resources.

"I encourage prospective round two BTOP applicants to study the grant announcements we are currently rolling out for guidance as they put together their own project proposals," added Strickling.

NTIA and the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS), which is administering a companion broadband expansion grant and loan program, will hold a series of public workshops to review the new application process and answer questions from prospective applicants. The workshops will be held starting on January 26th through February 12th in

Portland, Ore.; Reno, Nev.; Denver, Colo.; San Antonio, Tex.; Eureka, Mo.; Sioux Falls, S.D.; Detroit, Mich.; Blacksburg, Va.; Fayetteville, N.C.; and Atlanta, Ga. Interested parties can register for the workshops and find more information on rules for the second round of funding at <http://www.broadbandusa.gov>. NTIA and RUS have also provided a new online tool, BroadbandMatch (at <http://match.broadbandusa.gov>) to facilitate partnerships among prospective applicants to the agencies' broadband grant and loan programs.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided a total of \$7.2 billion to NTIA and RUS to fund projects that will expand access to and adoption of broadband services. Of that funding, NTIA will utilize \$4.7 billion for grants to deploy broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas in the United States, expand public computer center capacity, and encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service. RUS will use \$2.5 billion in budget authority to support grants and loans to facilitate broadband deployment in primarily rural communities. NTIA plans to announce all grant awards by September 30, 2010.

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U.S. Department of Commerce's NTIA serves as the executive branch agency principally responsible for advising the President on communications and information policy. For further information about NTIA's BTOP grants, please visit <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants/>.