



Community Connection

The Knight Center of Digital Excellence Newsletter

June 8, 2009



Smart Infrastructure starts with smart planning for smart stimulus proposals



By William "Garn" Anderson III, the Knight Center of Digital Excellence

If you are trying to understand how economic stimulus funds can turn your community into the futuristic society depicted in Steven Spielberg's "Minority Report," or better yet, "The Jetsons," it's easy to get lost in the complexities of what Smart Grids and Smart Infrastructure have to do with any of this.

Instead of going to Hollywood to see what the future may hold, go to Cleveland, Ohio. It's here you'll find an example of a community with five years of experience in creating a regional fiber-optic network that connects more than 1,000 organizations – hospitals, school districts, governments, museums, libraries and other public and nonprofit organizations.

The success in and around Cleveland demonstrates not only the benefits of Smart Infrastructure – but also the reality that local communities are best equipped to implement today's fundamental need for infrastructure that empowers innovation.

A Smart Infrastructure looks at the big-picture and end goals. If a road project is in progress, smart planning might mean going an extra mile to lay fiber optic cables while the road is open.

Or, if cameras are being installed downtown to improve public safety, it might mean you connect the cameras to not only the police station, but also to local hospitals so that doctors, nurses and medics can respond more quickly to accidents and injuries.

This kind of smart planning is happening in Cleveland, with the help of technology nonprofit OneCommunity. Since 2004, OneCommunity has been operating one of the world's largest and fastest fiber optic networks, initially established from a network of dormant fiber cables running under the city. Since then, community organizations, working through a coalition, have built more than 220 miles of new fiber connections. Today, Cleveland is one of the nation's largest fiber hubs, with lines running to Chicago, New York, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta.

So what?

A free wireless network covering Case Western Reserve University now links a Cleveland high school and a community center serving senior citizens, bridging the digital divide between those who had high-speed Internet and who didn't.

Educators in Cleveland now have access to a Digital Resource Library that allows them free retrieval of aggregated educational content from organizations such as the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, Discovery Channel, the Cleveland Zoo, and WVIZ/PBS ideastream.

With \$11.3 million in federal funding, a regional health organization is currently creating a centralized system that will allow 49 hospitals to share medical information over a common network. This means that if a small community hospital needs a world renown doctor in Cleveland to help with a diagnosis, medical images can be moved from one hospital to another with broadcast speed. It takes a high-capacity network to handle the mass movement of such high volumes of information and data.

For communities, the test of where you'll be in five years is where you are today. Is your community planning holistically? Are you leveraging assets by working together with local, regional and state planning organizations?

A recent report from the Center for American Progress, titled "Smart Grid, Smart Broadband, Smart Infrastructure," points out that with a "bit of imagination and coordination" among federal agencies and federal stimulus money can be used to achieve two-fers and three-fers – an updated electricity system, for example, that is coordinated with the deployment of broadband networks.

Federal agencies indeed play a role. Yet community leaders, in their requests for federal stimulus money, must lay the groundwork on a local level for such comprehensive infrastructure to happen.

Smart Infrastructure starts with smart planning for smart stimulus proposals.

Garn Anderson is Vice President for Business & Community Intelligence of the Cleveland-based technology nonprofit OneCommunity, which operates the Knight Center of Digital Excellence in partnership with The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. To learn more about the Knight Center, go to www.knightcenter.org or e-mail info@knightcenter.org.