

Broadband Funding: It's There for Those Who Know Where to Look

Colin Wood | October 23, 2015



Even in the lean times, hustlers get ahead. It's the communities with ingenuity that manage to fund beyond-the-budget projects like municipal broadband. And a new report — [Show Me the \(Hidden\) Money for Community Broadband](#) (PDF) — shows communities seeking broadband funding where to look.

The report taps into the experience of Craig Settles, host of live podcast Gigabit Nation and director of Communities United for Broadband.

"When we look at some of the stories of how communities got broadband, some of them found unconventional methods of finding money," Settles said, adding that he's been tracking these stories for years, and now hopes that condensing some of the lessons into a report can be of help.

The 34-page report guides communities toward the types of questions they should be asking when the coffers are low, Settles said, such as who shares common needs, and looks at examples of success stories, like that of Columbus, Ohio.

Columbus has been looking for a way to expand its broadband network for years, as they were unable to fund the project themselves, explained Columbus CIO Gary

Cavin. About 10 years ago, the city began conducting regular meetings between all the agencies with a stake in broadband, and it was only through that collaboration that the technology department was eventually able to find the funding it needed.

The public works department received a federal grant to upgrade its infrastructure for about \$30 million, Cavin explained. By contributing just \$750,000 for additional strands of fiber, the department was able to buy into the whole project, Cavin said.

"Had we not been having those meetings, chances are we would not have gotten that information," he said, "but because we were meeting on a regular basis to discuss all this, we were able to glean that information."

The technology department now has a fiber strand at every traffic light in the city, which can lead to further connectivity in the years to come.

That anecdote is a good example of one strategy communities can use to further their project goals, Settles said, which is to find other entities with shared goals and collaborate. A "needs analysis" is a central component of any broadband fundraising endeavor, he said.

Justifying the cost of a broadband project is another challenge that communities face, and Settles breaks those justifications down into six categories:

1. attracting new companies and organizations to your community;
2. making current businesses more competitive;
3. reviving depressed business districts;
4. increasing home-based businesses;
5. improving personal economic situations; and
6. reviving distressed or depressed residential communities.

The ultimate goal, Settles said, is to build as many networks as possible so everyone can be online. But that can't happen without funding, so this report aims to educate communities on funding strategies.

<http://www.govtech.com/network/Broadband-Funding-Its-There-For-Those-Who-Know-Where-to-Look.html>