



BERKSHIRE CONNECT, INC.



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Maggie Bergin

Phone: 509-998-5930

E-mail: maggiianne@mac.com

Underserved Communities Encouraged to Apply to Connects Beta Test Program

Berkshire Connect, Inc., and Pioneer Valley Connect (the Connects) today announce the availability of the Connects Beta Test Program as part of the *Underserved Communities Project*. The Connects are regional initiatives devoted to creating a more competitive and robust telecommunications landscape in Western Massachusetts.

Currently, one-third of municipalities in Western Massachusetts have no access to basic broadband technology, such as Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) or cable television broadband. For many other communities, there is only limited access to these technologies. The lack of access to affordable, reliable broadband telecommunications impacts economic development, public health and safety, government efficiency, and education in the region. While pursuing a sustainable, long-term solution, the Connects are also pursuing implementation of short-term options to address the problem. The Connects Beta Test Program is one such effort.

The goal of the Beta Test Program is to evaluate the process and technologies to create wireless networks in underserved areas of Western Massachusetts. The Connects want to use their resources to help at least three communities implement a wireless broadband network. Selected communities will work in collaboration with the Connects to implement a village- or neighborhood-based wireless network available to municipal buildings, businesses and residences. The process of implementing these networks and the evaluation of them will be documented and available online for reference by other communities who may want to implement similar efforts.

These wireless networks will not be a town-wide solution, but will focus on a specific area of the community that has a sufficient cluster of participants to test the technology. The Connects will provide technical assistance and some broadband network elements for a minimum one-year period. The specific technology and the level of technical assistance will vary depending on the network implemented.

Individuals and community representatives in underserved areas of Western Massachusetts are encouraged to apply to the Beta Test Program. The application period is open from February 26 to March 20, 2007. The application form may be viewed and downloaded from both Connect websites:

www.bconnect.org

www.pioneervalleyconnect.org/projects.html

The application deadline is March 20, 2007.

According to Linda Dunlavy, Co-Chair of Pioneer Valley Connect, “I’m thrilled that through the Beta Test Program, we are able to increase our knowledge for developing a sustainable solution to the problem of underserved communities.”

Maggie Bergin is the new Project Manager for the Underserved Communities Project, which includes the administration of the Connects Beta Test Program. Applicants with questions about the Beta Test Program can reach Ms. Bergin at 509-998-5930 or maggieanne@mac.com.

The Underserved Communities Project is funded by the Connects and by a Regional Priority Grant award from the John Adams Innovation Institute. The Innovation Institute, a division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, supports technology-based economic development initiatives in the Commonwealth.

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