

BEFORE THE NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Nebraska Public Service)
Commission, on its own motion, seeking to)
administer the Nebraska Universal Service)
Fund's Broadband Program: Application)
to the Nebraska Broadband Program)
Received as a RLEC Joint Application)
Consolidated Companies)

Application No. NUSF-92.44

DIRECT TESTIMONY OF BRIAN THOMPSON IN SUPPORT OF APPLICATION



Q. Please state your name.

A. My name is Brian Thompson.

Q. Please state your position with and the name of your current employer and provide a summary of your duties.

A. I am the Vice President of External Relations for the Consolidated Companies ("Consolidated"). My duties include maintaining Consolidated's relationships with regulatory agencies, including providing information regarding the operation and deployment of Consolidated's communication network. Further, I participate in the development and implementation of long range and short range plans to provide internet access services to customers located in our service area in Western Nebraska.

Q. Please describe the Applicant and its business.

The Consolidated companies that are included in this application are incumbent local exchange carriers subject to the jurisdiction of the Nebraska Public Service Commission ("Commission"). The Consolidated Companies each hold a certificate of public convenience and necessity issued by the Commission and provide wireline

telecommunications service and Internet access service in counties located in Western Nebraska. The Consolidated Companies presently serve approximately 4,701 access lines and around 2,932 broadband customers.

Q. What is the purpose of your testimony?

A. My testimony is provided to support Consolidated's application filed with the Commission for funding under the Nebraska Universal Service Fund Broadband Adoption Program ("Application").

Q. Can you describe the Application and its objectives?

A. Yes. Our application is a joint application with five other RLECs in Nebraska. One of our main objectives is to meet the criteria as listed in the NUSF-92 Order that was entered on January 26, 2016. Specifically, the Commission allocated monies for projects which include adoption and availability projects designed to reach low-income consumers and non-adopters. In addition, the Commission stated its desire to see proposals designed to bring broadband availability to community centers or public facilities where low-income and elderly consumers can obtain public access to free broadband service and digital literacy training. Our goal is to reach out to non-adopters, including the elderly and low income by providing them with digital literacy training in community centers and public facilities, as well as company facilities.

As we stated in our Application, research has indicated that major barriers to broadband adoption include relevancy and usefulness. Research has also indicated that many subscribers of broadband lack a sufficient level of digital readiness to use online applications. Our application is designed to train individuals in our communities that may not understand the relevance and usefulness of the Internet

and may lack the basic digital literacy skills to feel comfortable accessing the Internet. Through proper training, it is our goal for those who attend the training will be able to overcome these barriers.

The training programs for this application are designed to increase individuals' knowledge of the Internet and provide the relevant skill set in an easy to understand, non-intimidating format. By increasing the confidence and digital literacy in current non-adopters, including the elderly and low income populations, we believe the objectives of increased adoption and utilization can be achieved.

In addition, we believe providing digital literacy training to those with low income could in fact enhance the value of the FCC's Lifeline for broadband program. We believe individuals who qualify for the program are more likely to apply for the program if they have the knowledge to use broadband to enrich them personally and professionally.

Q. How will the availability of the training be maximized?

A. To maximize the availability of this training, our training partner, Consortia Consulting, will utilize a "train-the-trainer" model. Consortia will train individuals from each local exchange carrier including Consolidated, and will provide all necessary materials and resources needed for each local provider to offer successful workshops in their communities. By training individuals from Consolidated and providing us with the requisite skills, tools, and materials, we can be the "go-to" place for training and supporting our community members in the use of the Internet with on-line skills and knowledge. We can repeat this training at multiple locations and at multiple times depending on the relevant needs of those individuals in the communities we serve.

Q. What is Consolidated's current broadband penetration rate?

A. Our broadband penetration rate is approximately 72%.

Q. What proportion of the population located in your service area are considered elderly and what proportion are low income?

A. Approximately 22% of the population in our service area is 65 and older and approximately 13% of our population are low income.

Q. Where and when will your training sessions take place?

A. Our training will take place at schools, libraries, community centers, and other anchor institutions. Training could occur in Curtis, Eustis, Brady, Merna, Dunning, Thedford, Mullen, Hyannis, Arthur, Paxton, and Wallace. Training sessions will occur during the day and in the evening as well as on weekends in order to attract as many individuals in the communities as possible.

The sessions will most likely occur in the Fall of 2016, probably over three to four months. Additional sessions could occur outside of the grant based upon the outcome of the training sessions.

Q. How many training sessions are you planning to have?

A. We plan to conduct five or six training classes with individuals from our company providing the training to the public. Our goal is train ten individuals in each course.

Q. Will those attending the training be expected to bring their own device?

A. No. Consolidated will have desktop computers and Chromebooks available for training purposes for those individuals who do not have their own device, choose not to bring their own device, or are unable to bring their own device.

Q. How will you inform the public of your training sessions?

A. Consolidated plans to advertise the availability of the training sessions through the newspaper, bill inserts and through direct mail.

Q. Will you offer incentives to current non-adopters?

A. Consolidated will consider having a free install and a special introductory rate for new customers that have attended the broadband classes. In addition, we will offer lifeline for broadband in accordance with the FCC's Lifeline Modernization Order.

Q. Are there additional details and supporting information in the Application?

A. Yes. The Application filed with the Commission contains a more detailed description of the proposed Consolidated training program project, along with all required supporting information.

Q. Does this conclude your testimony?

A. Yes.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned hereby certifies that on this 9th day of August, 2016, the original, five copies and an electronic copy of the foregoing pleading was delivered to:

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