



A Pennsylvania Local Development District

PRESS RELEASE

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April 15, 2009
For Immediate Release

Northwest Commission Pursuing Leadership for Regional Broadband Stimulus Dollars

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act authorizes up to \$7.2 Billion for broadband grants, loans, and loan guarantees. The Northwest Commission is working with local, state, and federal leaders to assure these funds address the needs of the region. The Commission anticipates that one of the most substantial challenges the region will face, in effectively accessing broadband stimulus dollars, is that there will be many different applications from many different sources. The goal of the Commission is to articulate an overarching context for all of these applications so that lawmakers and decision-makers see the value in all of them. The Commission has branded this effort, "IGET.IT."

W. Randy Rice, Director of Community Development and Planning at the Commission, is concerned that individuals and organizations within the region are at significant risk for tripping over each other in pursuing broadband stimulus dollars. He is convinced that the most effective way to address this risk is create a unifying 'brand' and context within which every application within the region can proceed. "We don't think it is practical or realistic to ask everyone to coordinate everything through the Commission, or any other single organization, in the form of a single application. The diversity of these projects, the time-frames for submitting applications, and the uncertainty surrounding precisely who will be responsible for what makes any sort of 'grand plan' impractical. What we need is a way for everyone's application to make sense in a regional context represented in terms that are easy for lawmakers and decision-makers to understand". That context, says Rice, is "IGET.IT".

IGET.IT stands for "Inter-governmental Excellence Through Information Technology". IGET.IT says that every municipality in Northwest Pennsylvania should be interconnected by a broadband network. The benefit of connecting every single one of the 265 municipalities in Northwest Pennsylvania is that by connecting each of these municipalities the path of the broadband network will fall within easily accessible range of virtually every existing business, every potential business, every home, every school, every hospital, and every utility. Currently, throughout much of Northwest Pennsylvania, these individuals and organizations don't have access to anything except antiquated dial-up technology.

There are several additional benefits to the IGET.IT model according to the Commission. These benefits include sustainability, inter-governmental collaboration and coordination, additional choices for consumers of broadband services, and opportunities for new businesses. Sustainability will be achieved by reducing operating expenses within county and municipal governments by enabling the sharing of software applications that are currently purchased individually. For example, the Commission estimates that a shared geographic information system (GIS) solution could save up to \$2 million dollars over five years in Northwest Pennsylvania. These savings could be applied to building additional broadband infrastructure, network operations, or other municipal and community projects. Consumer choice will be enhanced by enabling cable companies, Internet, and other service providers access to shared broadband infrastructure. And, new businesses will have opportunities to



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access the shared broadband infrastructure to develop and deploy services to markets that were previously inaccessible to them over existing networks.

The Commission has received very positive feedback in response to the IGET.IT concept. “It’s really evolving as a ‘brand,’” says Rice. “It works because it is catchy, and it works because it represents one of the most pressing infrastructure needs in our region. Broadband.” He emphasizes the bigger opportunity is to provide a common theme, a unified vision, a coordinated effort or project around which applications, appeals, and arguments that might otherwise compete can actually leverage each other, and represent a project with vast potential for impact. “Clearly, with any of the stimulus dollars, decision-makers are looking for regional impact. IGET.IT makes it easy to see that impact,” Rice concludes.

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Established in 1967, the Northwest Commission is a regional resource for business and economic development as well as community development and planning. The non-profit agency is composed of a team of skilled professionals dedicated to sustaining economic vitality and growth in the northwest Pennsylvania region by fostering local, state, and federal partnerships across public and private sector lines. The Northwest Commission provides programs such as business financing, government contracting, international marketing, grants, transportation, and technology assistance to eight counties in northwest Pennsylvania including: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, and Warren.

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