Spotlight City: Kansas City, MO

About Kansas City’s Broadband Work

In May 2011, Google Fiber announced that Kansas City, Missouri would be joining sister city, Kansas City, Kansas, as the first Google Fiber cities in the country. To date, Google Fiber has laid over 7,000 miles of fiber and passed over 210,000 households including 440,375 residents. Google Fiber is providing symmetrical gigabit broadband plus television service in this Fiber to the Home (FTTH) deployment. Google Fiber is a game-changer in our economy. The project is also a lightning rod for startup entrepreneurs from across the country – attracting talent from both coasts and retaining local talent within our community. The City of Kansas City, Missouri supported the project with waivers of permit fees, access to right-of-way and City-owned property and coordinated project management. In exchange, Google Fiber is providing 300 City-owned buildings, community centers and schools with free gigabit Internet services. Initially announced as a test, our partnership has assisted Google Fiber in proving the concept as a viable business model and in changing the national broadband conversation. Google Fiber is nearing completion of the fiber to the home portion of the project and is implementing a pilot program for small and medium business class services.

What Drove Kansas City’s Decision?

When the Google Fiber Request for Information was published in February 2010, our local entrepreneur community jumped on the opportunity immediately. The City of Kansas City, MO joined the effort to facilitate the response through a collaborative community effort that included a diverse group of community representatives of 117 people sharing a Google Doc. We were driven to undertake this project by our community who felt empowered to take on this amazing project.

What Challenges Did Kansas City Have to Overcome?

We have benefited greatly by the investment that Google Fiber has made in the Kansas City metro-area. Unlike many cities seeking to build broadband networks, we were not encumbered by the legal, financial and regulatory burdens many have or are encountering across the country. Our challenges have been in determining the best ways to leverage and identify the opportunities ubiquitous gigabit Internet speeds can bring to the community. KC Digital Drive was launched by Kansas City, MO and Kansas City, KS through the Mayor’s BiState Innovations Team, with support from the Mid-America Regional Council, and it is responsible for facilitating the recommendations of Kansas City's Digital Playbook.

How Has Broadband Benefitted Kansas City?

Google Fiber is in the process of building out their gigabit FTTH broadband network in 20 cities in the KC bi-state metro area. This makes Kansas City the first gigabit region in the country and enables us to market the region in a much broader way to the burgeoning technology sector. Google Fiber’s recognition of the Kansas City metro area as the first market for their project has brought an international spotlight on our city. Since the project announcement in 2011, myriad public and private initiatives have grown in the region. Most notably, the Kauffman Foundation’s 1 Million Cups entrepreneur networking program, Kansas City Startup Village, Sprint Accelerator powered by Techstars, Cisco’s Internet of Everything project with the City of Kansas City, MO, Connecting for Good’s digital literacy initiatives, the aSTEAMvillage collaboration of public, private and charter schools.
with Google Fiber networking connections and their participation in NASA’s Student Spaceflight Experiment Program with missions to the International Space Station; and, the Digital Inclusion Coalition’s Digital Inclusion Summit that attracted 250 participants. We are also well on our way to achieving the Greater Kansas City Chamber’s Big 5 Initiative “Making Kansas City the Most Entrepreneurial City in America.”

**What Lessons Has Kansas City Learned?**

Be prepared for the business and talent attraction affordable gigabit Internet brings to your city and get ready for international attention on your project. In KC, we have received visitors from across the globe and we have received continuous positive media coverage for the last 3 years. The power of collaboration has been shown to great benefit across community sectors that may not have worked together in the past.

**What Does the Future Hold for Kansas City?**

We are currently in the process of developing a Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan to guide the City’s participation in the growing number of digital inclusion efforts underway. Along with the Digital Inclusion Coalition and KC Digital Drive, we are working to ensure that the City’s participation is coordinated and collaborative with our community partners. Digital inclusion is the next logical step in driving utilization of the gigabit network. Where geography no longer matters in the digital age, we are seeking to ensure our residents have access to distance learning, distance working, home-based business and small business opportunities for economic mobility. We are fostering the growth of the entrepreneur community by supporting startup accelerator programs. We are considering additional means of driving small-, medium-business broadband utilization through awareness campaigns and business support programs.