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N.C. Commerce Is Now Accepting Applications for a New Downtown Free Public Wi-Fi Access Pilot Grant

Raleigh, N.C. – North Carolina Commerce is now accepting applications for the *Downtown Free Public Wi-Fi Access Pilot Grant Program*. Eligible applicants could receive financial resources to expand and enhance free, public Wi-Fi access in downtown business districts throughout western North Carolina. Investments will range from \$10,000 to \$50,000 dollars. The program seeks to enable communities to create vibrant main streets that allow both visitors and businesses to be digitally connected. The deadline for applications is July 29, 2016.

“This new program has the potential to help western North Carolina towns recruit new business and offer job opportunities for younger workers who would prefer to remain in their home communities,” said Commerce Secretary John E. Skvarla, III.

The *Downtown Free Public Wi-Fi Access Pilot Grant Program* is a new effort from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Program of North Carolina Commerce. The program was developed in collaboration with the North Carolina Information Technology’s Broadband Infrastructure Office.

“This grant program furthers the State Broadband Plan by putting in place supportive community efforts to address the growing broadband needs of our citizens,” said State Chief Information Officer Keith Werner.

Selected projects will receive awards from the ARC. ARC has allocated to North Carolina \$300,000 in federal funds for this program. All projects are required to provide a match based on their community’s level of economic status as determined by ARC. The North Carolina General Assembly has provided \$253,956 in matching resources that is available to ARC Distressed Counties.”



Municipalities and non-profits located in one of the 29 counties in western North Carolina designated by the ARC are eligible to apply. Eligible non-profits must demonstrate their role in supporting their downtown business district. Priority will be given to projects in ARC Distressed or At-Risk counties, within municipalities of fewer than 5,000 residents, that will provide enhanced service to currently underserved downtowns

The *Downtown Free Public Wi-Fi Access Pilot Grant Program* application and guidelines are posted on the NC Commerce website at www.nccommerce.com/rd/arc/about-arc/documents. Completed applications must be postmarked by 5 p.m. on July 29, 2016. Electronic applications will not be accepted. Project recommendations will be announced in late August of 2016.

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