

UC2B Marketing and Outreach Update

May 13, 2011

Overview

At the request of the Policy Committee, the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee has provided this document as an overview of its activities and an initial set of recommendations to move forward with developing and delivering UC2B's message to the community. This document contains 3 general recommendations for the Policy Committee to consider regarding marketing and outreach activities. The 3 general recommendations each have specific recommendations that explain the general recommendations. These are described in detail in the remainder of this document. There are also numerous attachments with relevant information that has been prepared by or referenced by the subcommittee.

It is important to note that our recommendations follow concepts and specific items outlined in the grant proposal. Any recommendation, or component thereof, that runs counter to the grant proposal is identified. Furthermore, we do not address the critical need for the consortium to determine its governance structure and incorporate as a legal entity in its permanent form. The reason this is not addressed in this document is due primarily to the fact that everyone involved with the project understands the importance of resolution on this matter. However, it is important to note that the lack of a governance structure and the existence of a legal entity with the authority to make and execute agreements, implement business decisions (e.g. business plan and long-term marketing plan), assess fees and collect revenues, etc. has a trickle-down effect of delaying activities of specific, targeted activities of the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee.

The most time-sensitive of our recommendations is the need to hire a team of canvassers to acquire easements and obtain service commitments from residents within the FTTP service areas as well as a Program Coordinator to, among other things, assist in training and supervising the canvass team. Both of these positions were proposed as part of the grant application. Initial steps were taken by the University to hire a Program Coordinator in December 2010 but were put on hold indefinitely while one of the two cities explored options for dedicating resources to support this effort. See General Recommendation #1 below for more information about canvassing.

General Recommendations

- 1. Initiate door-to-door canvassing to obtain easements and subscribers.**
- 2. Review and approve the new roles of the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee and the Open Access and Offered Services Subcommittee.**
- 3. Continue to conduct general community awareness until the specific costs, speeds, and timing/availability of UC2B services are known.**

Once approved, the re-purposed Subcommittee intends to proceed quickly to implement these recommendations.

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Detailed Recommendations

1. Initiate door-to-door canvassing to obtain easements and subscribers.

Specific Recommendations

- a) Identify which agency or agencies will 1) lead the hiring and oversight of the program coordinator and canvassers and 2) develop training and a timeline for canvasser deployment.
- b) Complete the hiring process for a Program Coordinator for easements and canvassing and canvassing staff.
- c) Approve materials and timeline produced by the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee needed for the canvass effort.
- d) Consider securing the services of an Internet service/telecommunications marketing consultant to provide an ongoing marketing plan during operations with the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee as liaison; and identify a lead agency and budget to obtain these professional services.

Job creation and preservation is a point of emphasis of the ARRA and the grant funds made available within the legislation. As a result, employment opportunities have become an expectation of the residents of the 11 grant-funded FTTP areas. The grant application laid out a plan to hire a team of canvassers to acquire construction access and utility easements for each of the properties within the FTTP service areas that will be passed during grant-funded UC2B construction.

Canvassing involves traveling and walking throughout neighborhoods and either speaking to people directly, placing flyers on their doors and/or cars, putting up posters and so on. UC2B can benefit from all of these elements. The canvassing team can strategically select specific neighborhoods to distribute flyers, go door-to-door, etc. It is a proven method of education through immediate, one-on-one engagement, and for building project awareness by providing information about the project.

The Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee believes that, in addition to the federal objective of job creation stated above, canvassing is one important component that is critical for accomplishing a project-specific goal of obtaining easements and subscribers during the grant. The canvassers and the coordinators are expected to have a familiarity with the neighborhoods and its inhabitants, as well as a thorough knowledge of UC2B's retail service offerings. This grassroots marketing effort of utilizing existing familial relationships to engage in intimate, one-on-one conversations has the mutual benefit of increasing the collective comfort level of UC2B among FTTP area residents while increasing the uptake rates of UC2B service within these areas. The following paragraphs present a strategy for utilizing the canvassing staff to secure easements and subscriptions.

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As part of the construction process, UC2B canvassing staff will visit every household in the 11 Census Block Groups. During that canvass they will have the opportunity to explain the benefits described above and seek signatures on easement and subscription documents. Prior to the door-to-door canvass there will be meetings and events held to educate multiple people at once about the benefits of Big Broadband. By the time canvassers get to their homes, most of the “sales” work should be complete. However, the canvassers will also be expected to take time to answer any questions or address any concerns of the residents while they are going from door to door to increase the comfort level with the upcoming construction and technology.

In addition to going door-to-door, the canvas staff would be utilized to conduct more comprehensive marketing and outreach activities. The canvass team could also engage Anchor Institutions for the same purpose and perform follow-up activities such as respond to email and phone questions from potential customers or property owners in the UC2B service area; attend community events to hold technology demonstrations or for question-and-answer sessions; and make phone calls to potential customers; among other activities. A coordinator position was also identified to supervise the team and submit executed easement agreements with the County Recorder. This is dialogue also presents the opportunity for UC2B to get a better understanding of the broadband and general technological needs and desires of the digitally underserved community.

The grant proposal to NTIA outlined a process in which UC2B would seek a deposit equal to two months service charges, so that the customers would have some “skin in the game” and some commitment to using and paying for the service. We also suggested some ways to perhaps collect that deposit over time, but that it would be required to be paid in full before we built fiber infrastructure into a home.

To reduce costs, the construction of the fiber from the curb into the homes will be grouped. There will be a deadline for the residents of the 600 block of X Street to subscribe by, and then all the construction of fiber from the curb to the buildings on that block will be scheduled at the same time. This is a “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity, and in order to stretch our dollars as far as possible, we will have to enforce deadlines for subscribing.

Attendees at the May 7 eBlackCU community forum reiterated the need for community education about the UC2B project as well as a desire to see community residents employed to tell their fellow community members about the project by spreading the word from person to person via established relationships built on trust. While it's only minimally economically empowering, utilizing canvassers has the potential to be a socially empowering tool that also can maximize uptake rates on the UC2B network. It will help re-establish three critical empowerment elements within the community: trust and civic engagement, and communication.

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Lead agency

The CITES unit within the University initiated the hiring process for the Coordinator position by selecting three candidates to be interviewed by a committee made up of representatives from the three consortium members in December 2010. The job title was Program Coordinator for Technical Community Outreach (Attachment 1). The hiring process was postponed indefinitely while the two cities explored options for leading this effort as well as hiring canvassers separately or jointly.

As it is understood generally, representatives from the City of Champaign verbally stated their intent to act as interim lead agency for operations-related activities during the grant period. Marketing and outreach activities apparently fall within a scope of responsibilities agreed to by this lead agency. Specifically, the City of Champaign can take a lead role in working with the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee to conduct marketing activities including, but not limited to, preparing the materials needed for the canvass effort and a realistic timeline for these steps. There are several different scenarios to deploy canvassers, and the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee will provide recommendations. However, the lead agency designation hiring process specifics need to be answered.

Canvassing funds

The grant budget identifies roughly \$500,000 for the purpose of hiring this team for two summers (Summer 2011 and Summer 2012). In addition to personnel costs, that dollar amount anticipates some costs for preparing and recording easements and purchasing supporting material and equipment costs (such as printing and field data collection equipment) as long as these are grant-eligible expenses that are necessary for acquiring easements to facilitate construction. A proposed budget presents one potential picture of canvassing personnel costs (Attachment 2).

Responsibility for ongoing marketing activities

The Marketing and Outreach Committee made an initial effort to create a flyer, print newsletter, and poster. The committee has also created numerous FAQ documents with common questions and answers about UC2B service. As UC2B transitions into full operations phase, it would benefit from marketing and graphic design professionals – possibly using what the Subcommittee has created and compiled so far as a guide – in order to create the specific materials needed for the canvass effort and for marketing this service to the community. Both in-house marketing and design and contract consultant options should be considered.

Ideally, the UC2B operational entity will be responsible for day-to-day oversight of marketing activities such as hiring personnel and managing the marketing campaign; any steps taken by the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee in the mean time should be compatible with this plan to the extent possible. The Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee should be a liaison between marketing staff and the Policy Committee.

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Specific Recommendations

- a) Identify which agency or agencies will 1) lead the hiring and oversight of the program coordinator and canvassers and 2) develop training and a timeline for canvasser deployment.
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2. Review and approve the new roles of the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee and the Open Access and Offered Services Subcommittee.

Specific Recommendations

- a) The Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee recommends that the Policy Committee approve the merging of the Open Access and Services Subcommittee and the Marketing Outreach Subcommittee with the subcommittee retaining the name “Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee.”
- b) The Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee recommends that the Policy Committee approve the re-purposing of the merged Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee from comprehensive marketing and design activities to 1) limited marketing and design activities, 2) communicate regularly and frequently with Anchor Institutions, IRU customers, and potential corporate partners, 3) recruiting additional service providers, and 4) developing recommendations on service and pricing offerings.

Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee

The membership of the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee is represents a relatively professionally diverse cross-section of the C-U community. The subcommittee does have marketing and design competency, but it is on a limited basis given the volunteer basis of the subcommittee. This volunteer level of involvement, along with many conflicting schedules, may also contribute to inconsistent attendance among Subcommittee members. It definitely has contributed to the reduced frequency of its meetings. Furthermore, the lack of a clear message for UC2B to deliver delays the activities of the Subcommittee as it goes between proactively trying to develop a message and reactively waiting for critical decisions from consortium members that will expedite Policy Committee decisions. Another limiting factor is yet unknown firm construction timeline. This information will help inform decisions and recommendations of the Subcommittee.

Given its membership constitution, the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee is best equipped to 1) develop engagement and messaging strategies, 2) communicate regularly and frequently with Anchor Institutions, IRU customers, and potential corporate partners, 3) begin engagement of service providers to offer services over the UC2B network. Certain members of the Subcommittee also have connections to business owners who can act as project partners and advocates with whom the Subcommittee can interact to further the project. A fourth group capability is discussed in detail under “Review and approve the proposed UC2B Service Offerings” in this section.

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Note: Once UC2B is in its operations phase, it will be best to secure the professional services of a marketing firm and maybe a design firm – either on an in-house or contractual basis – to develop and implement a long-term marketing plan with the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee acting as liaison between it and the Policy Committee, which is discussed in General Recommendation #1.

Open Access and Services Subcommittee

When the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee started meeting on a regular basis in November 2010, it was agreed that there was some overlap between issues and activities of it and the Open Access and Services Subcommittee. The two areas of overlap are 1) pricing and speeds offered and 2) how to engage ISPs to provide services over the network. Though the two subcommittees were addressing these issues from slightly different perspectives, the two groups agreed that it would be a good idea to meet to discuss the idea of merging into one group, with the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee subsuming the Open Access and Services Subcommittee. A joint meeting was held in March 2011, but action was taken to recommend merging the two groups. Currently, the two groups continue to meet and operate separately.

Review and approve the proposed UC2B Service Offerings

The grant proposal clearly identifies that UC2B will be a data service provider only – providing access to a local community network and to the Internet. The proposal includes the initial schedule of fees based on level of service for both retail and wholesale customers (Attachment 3). Solutions offered by the winning FTTP electronics bidder may elicit a need to review and revise UC2B's data service offerings. In order to create specific marketing materials (brochures, flyers, door hangers) and communicate with residents, it is imperative that we know the speed and prices available as these are the most frequent questions regarding UC2B.

Other services include private VLAN services for organizations or businesses or organizations with multiple sites across the area to offer connectivity to all of their sites based on a centralized “main” connection to the UC2B network also will be available. One interesting potential offering that has been put forth but not discussed by the Policy Committee in any significant detail is the possibility of UC2B deploying residential wireless (Wi-Fi) access points that can serve effectively as neighborhood LANs that would allow rate-limited and/or bandwidth-restricted access by non-UC2B neighbors for a price below that of even the most basic level of service for a wired/fiber-optic UC2B connection.

With this in mind, the Policy Committee needs to review and approve a schedule of fees for UC2B services in fairly short order. This is a necessary step before we can create any marketing materials or communicate specific service offerings to the community. As mentioned above, a fourth responsibility of the two merged subcommittees is to offer pricing and level of service recommendations to the Policy

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Committee once information from the FTTP electronics information is made available.

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3. Continue to conduct general community awareness until the specific costs, speeds, and timing/availability of UC2B services are known.

Specific Recommendations

- a) Work through appropriate departments of each consortium member to promote UC2B via all means available to the consortium members.
- b) Establish partnerships with organizations that can advocate for the UC2B project, donate equipment and software, and sponsor UC2B activities.

The Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee has actively promoted UC2B in an effort to build public awareness about the project. The group has had representatives at the job fair hosted by the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission in February. At the job fair, we collected names and resumes and have distributed business cards and literature about UC2B. Members of the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee have also been available to provide project information and updates for eBlackCU. Also, a UC2B poster is on display at the Parkland College Job Training Center. Public access television is also an option that needs follow up by the Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee.

As decisions are made by the Policy Committee and the construction timeline is firmed up, critical pieces of information such as the beginning of operations, service levels and pricing, etc., the group can take the lead on developing a more refined message for potential customers. The group also has considered several other ideas to increase public awareness about the project and about fiber optic technology in general (Attachments 4 - 10).

The Marketing and Outreach Subcommittee intends to continue to engage in the following activities even without key policy decisions and without having professional marketing materials or expertise on board:

- Maintain email lists for interested community members and anchors; provide periodic updates.
- Create a YouTube channel for all the videos that discuss the community impact and opportunity of UC2B.
- Create a Twitter and Facebook presence for UC2B.
- Ask anchor institutions to post signage/flyers or yard signs or brochures or quarter-page handouts.
- Ask MTD (one of the investing partners in UC2B) to provide space for poster ads inside buses.
- Coordinate and attend community events.
- Connect interested parties with digital literacy and equipment training resources.

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Attachments

1. Program Coordinator job description
2. Proposed canvassing budget
3. Service offerings and pricing schedule
4. October 11 workshop notes
5. Key questions (original list from 12/14/2010, plus additional)
6. Anchor Institution marketing and outreach messages and strategies
7. Business and Residential property owner and manager marketing and outreach messages and strategies
8. Promotional poster
9. Promotional flyer
10. Newsletter layout