

# Choosing the Right Fiber Provider for Your Community

When evaluating potential providers to determine if they have the experience and expertise to successfully bring fiber connectivity to a town, asking the right questions is essential.

By Joe Pellegrini / *Great Plains Communications*

**M**unicipal leaders and government officials in communities of all sizes have come to appreciate the many ways fiber connectivity can improve quality of life for residents, foster the success of businesses, and promote economic development opportunity and advancement.

Remote work, telehealth, distance education and the subsequent dependence over the last few years upon reliable, fast internet access means that the availability of a high-speed broadband network has morphed from a nice-to-have to a vital utility.

High-speed fiber services are growing in popularity in part because of the connected household and its ecosystem of smart devices, from doorbells and security cameras to thermostats and more. So far, 2022 has been an outstanding year for fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) deployment.

However, I strongly feel that the U.S. is in only the beginning stage of rolling out fiber as an economic development tool. For 2023 and beyond, I believe the country is continuing on the path of the fully connected community.

Why is having a fiber-rich community so important? Fiber optic broadband transport is important today and can help position communities for the future with fast scalability to adapt as technology advances. When residents can access fiber services,

new opportunities develop in the form of remote working, online learning, smart-home enablement and more. Local businesses can increase their reach through e-commerce and strategic social and digital marketing. In addition, a fiber-rich community can attract new businesses and residents to accomplish future growth and prosperity.

More and more, local officials are reaching out, asking, “How do we make fiber more widely available to our residents? What makes a successful connected community?”

When evaluating potential providers to determine whether they have the experience and expertise to successfully bring fiber connectivity to your town, considering key factors and asking the right questions is important.

## HOW IS NETWORK PERFORMANCE?

Does the provider manage its own network or is it a reseller? How reliable is the network and the provider’s services? Does it provide true fiber connections to homes and businesses, or less-reliable wireless connections? Does it proactively monitor the network locally? Does it have redundancy and multiple paths for data transport if a need arises?

Is there ongoing, proactive monitoring of network traffic to ensure connectivity is not interrupted? Network-based security threats such as distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks



When choosing a broadband provider as a partner, one question to ask is if they have local technicians.

require continuous intelligent network monitoring, analytics and proactive mitigation services to avoid disruption.

### HOW IS CUSTOMER SERVICE?

Is the vendor a single-source provider with the ability to scale up quickly? A provider that can offer multiple fiber-driven services to residents and businesses, including internet, Ethernet, streaming video, voice, managed Wi-Fi, security and more with the ability to grow as the pace of technology continues to escalate, is ideal. These capabilities allow customers to make one phone call or send one message to discuss upgrade needs and new service additions and bundle discounts. This also allows for one convenient payment for all technology services versus making multiple payments to numerous providers. All of this adds up to a good overall customer experience.

Are there local technicians? Does the company value the community? Being immersed in the community and taking part in local events and recruiting local people as employees

demonstrates the provider cares and is going to be an ongoing partner and participant in the advancement of the community. A local partner is there for the long haul.

### WHAT IS PROVIDER'S EXPERIENCE IMPLEMENTING GOVERNMENT FUNDING?

Government funding programs can be a bridge to fiber *if* a service provider has a well thought out action plan. A set amount of funding is available and the amount of time to deploy fiber is regulated.

Communities should consider whether the provider is well-versed in applying for funding. What is its track record working within approved budgets? Is it experienced working with local utility providers? Is the marketing plan targeted to the specific needs of the community? What are realistic expectations for service rollout?

Best practices overall include mapping, staffing, timing of activities, local outreach and coordination and ongoing monitoring. Of course, there should be sufficient internal

and financial resources to successfully build out and implement the broadband program.

### NOT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL

Fiber to the community is not one-size-fits-all. A thoughtful, well-planned approach to bringing fiber to a community, as opposed to a growth strategy that simply targets high-population centers, is better for everyone.

What can fast, reliable fiber-based internet access do for a community? It will sustain it now and help it advance in the future. ❖



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