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Moving Eastern Kentucky Forward with Broadband Project Finalists Announced; Projects Presented in Corbin

CORBIN, Ky. – Eight projects designed to give Eastern Kentucky residents the training and employment they need to improve their lives have been selected as finalists in the Moving Eastern Kentucky Forward with Broadband initiative.

Educators, utility company representatives and nonprofit leaders from across the region gathered at The Corbin Center on Tuesday, April 25, to present their projects before a panel of potential state, regional, national funding agencies and the public to give details on how they plan to implement their projects in the region.

These eight have been narrowed from a field of 15 proposals received through a solicited request for proposals earlier this year.

Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation (SKED) has spearheaded the project, with funding from the Economic Development Administration (EDA).

Along with key partners: Thomas P. Miller & Associates (TPMA), MSE of Kentucky and representatives from The Center for Rural Development, SKED has been working since October 2016 to identify short and long-term economic development projects in 26-coal impacted Kentucky counties that may be eligible for approximately \$500,000 to \$2,000,000 in funding from various sources.

Projects are required to leverage the Kentucky Wired I-Way and other broadband networks in the eligible counties. SKED and its partners prioritized the selected project finalists, sought resources, funding, and partnerships to see that the projects are realized, with the hope they would ultimately produce new jobs and investment for the region.

Among the eight finalists is Hazard Community Technical College (HCTC's) Medical Assisting/Telemedicine Program. This project will train students on cutting-edge equipment that



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will enable them to earn a degree in medical assisting and/or certificates in electrocardiograph, telemedicine technician and certified nurse aide. The College surveyed regional employers to determine their skill-set needs in these areas and designed the program around them, according to Melissa Vermillion, the project spokesperson. HCTC has garnered support from healthcare facilities, regional workforce entities and city and county leaders for the program that is projected to create 33 new jobs, fulfilling a need in the healthcare community and providing good wages to Eastern Kentucky residents.

“HCTC is pleased to be a finalist in the Moving Eastern Kentucky Forward with Broadband project, made possible by Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation,” said HCTC President Dr. Jennifer Lindon. “HCTC’s project focuses on the use of broadband in healthcare through medical assisting and telemedicine programs centered at our Leslie County Center.”

Jackson Energy Cooperative (JEC) is another finalist. The regional utility has developed a program to give residents in its service area the skills they need to work from their homes as customer service agents for regional and national companies.

Teleworks USA is projected to create 300 new jobs for a projected cost of \$480,000, in partnership with Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program (EKCEP), People’s Rural Telephone Cooperative and city and county leaders in all three counties.

This project is in keeping with the cooperative’s continuous service to its 51,000 members, according to JEC Manager of Member Services Karen Combs.

"Jackson Energy has a long history of using technology to improve the quality of life in the region we serve," she said. "Moving Eastern Kentucky Forward with Broadband provides our cooperative with the opportunity to leverage the latest technology and partner with other agencies to bring more jobs to the region."

Other finalists include:

- **Addiction Recovery Care LLC**’s Coalfields Treatment & Job Training Initiative designed to create substance abuse treatment and job training campuses in two abandoned schools in Harlan and Leslie counties;



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- **INTERAPT'S** Technology Ecosystem of Kentucky (TEKY) Satellite Office, a partnership with the Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and regional industries to develop a larger Technology Ecosystem of Kentucky. This plan includes a training and tech center to support technology infrastructure in one of the coal-impacted counties in Eastern Kentucky.
- **The Kentucky Innovation Network's** UpTech is a partnership between the University of Pikeville's Coleman College of Business, The Kentucky Innovation Network Pikeville office, the City of Pikeville Office of Economic Development, developed to create an accelerator for data-driven startups. Project plans include bringing companies to Pikeville to educate them and prepare them to open their businesses and create jobs in Eastern Kentucky. The accelerator is projected to attract tech-based companies using broadband and will provide high-paying salaries in the region.
- **The London Utilities Commission's** (LUC) US25 & Fariston Industrial Park Broadband Expansion is a partnership with the London Laurel County Industrial Development Authority that proposes to transform the newly developed Fariston Industrial Park into a "Gigabyte Broadband Technology Park." This project includes incremental upgrade of 9 miles of KYWired fiber and the extension of approximately five miles of 144-strand "last-mile" fiber from the endpoint of the proposed KYWired middle mile network to the Fariston Industrial Park in Laurel County.
- **University of the Cumberland's** Appalachian Institute for Information Sciences & Workforce Development includes: new internship opportunities, a certified testing center and virtual simulations for augmented reality (AR) experiences. Training will prepare high school students, displaced workers (including coal miners), and others for jobs in the technology sector (among the highest paying positions in the workforce).



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- **Eastern Telephone & Technologies’** Teleworks Digital Employment Zones (TDEZ) is a collaboration between EKCEP’s Teleworks USA and the Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone. Eastern Telephone & Technologies plans to identify broadband and employment-challenged areas where affordable broadband will create work-from-home opportunities. Upon designation, fiber-fed broadband systems will be deployed in 11 or more small communities. Teleworks USA will promote, train, and place jobseekers in digital work-from-home jobs.

Representatives from a number of state and federal agencies: including EDA, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Congressman Hal Rogers’ office and the Kentucky Department for Local Government were on hand for the project presentations and to meet with the project leaders about their funding needs.

SKED received a \$100,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) in September 2016 to conduct a feasibility study to identify short and long-term economic development projects leveraging broadband infrastructure.

The 31-year-old regional nonprofit economic development corporation has provided \$25,000 in matching funds for the project to identify economic development projects that can capitalize on the high-capacity telecommunications infrastructure to create jobs in the 26 Eastern Kentucky counties.

The counties include: Bell, Boyd, Breathitt, Clay, Elliott, Floyd, Harlan, Jackson, Johnson, Knott, Knox, Laurel, Lawrence, Lee, Leslie, Letcher, Magoffin, Martin, Menifee, Morgan, Owsley, Perry, Pike, Rockcastle, Whitley, and Wolfe counties.

The process consisted of data analysis on available workforce, business sites and buildings; broadband utilization plan; and other planned activities related to the KentuckyWired project and other broadband providers in the region. Projects were ranked based on number of created jobs, cost, timeline and local support and work in conjunction with other SOAR initiatives.



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SKED Executive Director Brett Traver says the initiative is designed to guide Eastern Kentucky business owners’ and leaders’ direction in the use of broadband infrastructure to create jobs in the region.

“We’re very pleased with the projects,” Traver said. “All the participants and partners put a lot of thought and effort into the process. Hopefully, this is the first step in making some of these happen in the region to create more and better job opportunities.”

For information about SKED, Moving Eastern Kentucky Forward with Broadband, its direct loan programs, Entrepreneurial SMARTS classes, visit: www.southeastkentucky.com.

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Formed 31 years ago by Fifth District Congressman Hal Rogers to create jobs in Southeast Kentucky, the economic development organization, based in Somerset, serves a 45-county region in Kentucky. Staff works with business owners, small and large, throughout its service area to identify financing solutions to fund their location, expansion and working capital needs.



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1 ADDICTION RECOVERY CARE

2 Hazard Community & Technical College
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3 JACKSON ENERGY COOPERATIVE
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4 LUC
LONDON UTILITY COMMISSION

5 Kentucky Innovation Network
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Projects within the area, but exact locations to be determined