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Texas Connects Coalition receives

\$9.6 million Recovery Act grant

Austin Free-Net, MAIN and Technology For All will work together to create broadband technology opportunities for underserved and vulnerable Texans

HOUSTON, September 13, 2010 – Today, U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke announced 35 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act investments to help bridge the technological divide, boost economic growth, create jobs, and improve education and healthcare across the country. The new BTOP grants included one to Technology For All for the Texas Connects Coalition (TXC2). Leaders of TXC2 confirmed the award of the \$9.6 million Recovery Act grant to support the collaborative work of the coalition. Other key partners in the coalition include Austin Free-Net (AFN) and the Metropolitan Austin Interactive Network (MAIN). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act) grant is from the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) of the U. S. Department of Commerce.

Through the grant the Texas Connects Coalition will support the development and enhancement of 70 public computer center sites in Austin, Houston, San Antonio and across rural Texas.

The coalition, which will be focused on creating broadband technology opportunities for underserved Texans, brings together the strengths of three premier organizations that have been involved in creating technology opportunities across Texas for over forty years combined. Together with the grant, cash and in-kind commitments from the coalition and others, the project will be an investment in Texas of over \$12.3 million.

Many residents of Texas do not have access to or the knowledge and resources required to take advantage of the opportunities that broadband technology can provide. Some of these persons are Texas' most vulnerable population groups and face socioeconomic pressures or disabilities that make it difficult for them to access the technology tools that many Texas residents take for granted, while others live in rural areas with limited broadband connectivity because of cost or infrastructure limitations.

The Texas Connects Coalition was formed to begin to develop a collaborative plan to address these issues across Texas. By working together, the coalition brings together the complimentary expertise, knowledge, skills, and abilities of each of their organizations.

Organized in the early 1990's Austin Free-Net is one of the nation's premier providers of technology education to low-income and underserved communities. Today, AFN works directly with fifteen (15) Austin area community organizations by providing computer labs and training that serve an estimated twenty thousand (20,000) persons each year.

For almost 20 years the Metropolitan Austin Interactive Network and its partner organization the TeleCommunity Resource Center have been leaders in the encouragement and support of efforts across rural Texas to utilize the tools of Internet technology to address the needs of under-served and under-resourced population groups. MAIN hosts Internet sites for over three hundred (300) organizations in rural central Texas as well as the greater Austin region.

Since its organization in 1997, Technology For All has become a national leader in the development of technology solutions to address the needs of low-income communities across Houston and in other urban areas across the United States. In the Houston area alone, TFA has worked with and/or assisted over 180 community organizations develop public computer center sites. Today, in cooperation with Dr. Edward Knightly of Rice University, TFA has developed one of the largest wireless mesh research networks of its kind, which provides free wireless Internet access to over 4000 users in one of Houston's lowest income neighborhoods.

Dale Thompson of Austin Free-Net, Gene Crick of the Metropolitan Austin Interactive Network and Will Reed of Technology For All began developing the coalition earlier in 2009 as a natural extension of their organizations' long standing working partnerships. Ms. Thompson notes, "For many years FreeNet, MAIN and Technology For All have been friends and informal allies, frequently sharing ideas and support for community technology in Texas. The BTOP program was our stimulus to establish a more formal collaboration. We are already seeing the benefits (and savings) of sharing information and resources among our own organizations and others across the state and nation."

In working together, the Texas Connects Coalition will share knowledge, resources and expertise as it seeks to serve the needs of Texas' most vulnerable population groups by working directly with over 70 grass roots community based organizations, libraries and workforce centers in Austin, Houston, San Antonio and rural Texas to establish enhanced public computer center sites to serve their communities. TXC2 seeks support for its endeavors from a variety of sources including foundations, government, and

other organizations as well concerned individuals across Texas. In addition, the grant will create 68 new jobs over the two year grant period. For more information, go to www.txc2.org.

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Austin Free-Net (AFN) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization focused on providing technology training and access for the community, fostering skills that enable people to succeed in the digital age. AFN computer labs are open to all; our focus is on underserved communities. The knowledge we offer helps people obtain jobs, improve their lives and participate as active citizens. AFN's office is located at 2209 Rosewood Avenue, Austin Texas 78702; phone: 512.236.8225 . For more see www.austinfo.net.

Metropolitan Austin Interactive Network (MAIN) & its partner organization the **TeleCommunity Resource Center (TCRC)** are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations created to advocate and help develop benefits of Internet technology for all communities, especially those in rural and underserved areas. MAIN and TCRC also work to assist 'virtual communities' of people with shared interests. MAIN and TCRC share offices in rural Texas at 1091 Highway 71 West, Bastrop, TX 78602 mailing address: PO Box 328, Bastrop, TX 78602; phone: 512.303.6246 . For more see www.main.org and w3.tcrc.net.

Technology For All (TFA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization focused on empowering low-income and under-resourced communities through the tools of technology. In the Houston area, Technology For All has helped create and develop over 180 community technology centers (CTCs) in collaboration with community-based organizations across the region. Since 1997, TFA has also provided supportive services with public computer center sites and community technology organizations in 56 U.S. cities. TFA's offices are located in Houston's East End at 2220 Broadway, Houston, Texas 77012; phone: 713.454.6400 . For more see www.techforall.org.