Austin Community Technology & Telecommunications Commission

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Date: August 13, 2012

To: Mayor and Council Members

From: Lemuel Williams, Chair, Austin Community Technology &
                    Telecommunications Commission

Subject: Recommendations on FY 2012-13 Austin Free-Net Funding

At its June 8th meeting, the Austin Community Technology & Telecommunications Commission adopted a resolution to support existing funding levels for Austin Free-Net. On August 8, 2012, the Commission further deliberated and now has passed a recommendation on the status of the City of Austin's partnership with Austin Free-Net. The Commission passed the following motion:

The Commission recommends approval of the Fiscal Year 2012-13 Austin Free-Net Funding Resolution, but also recommends that the Austin City Council increase General Fund support for administrative and operational expenses in the amount of $36,330 required for continued services by Austin Free-Net.

Austin Free-Net receives $4,484.67 per month from its contract with the City of Austin and $62,515.33 from the federal broadband technology funds (BTOP), $42,000 supports administrative and operational expenses including 17.5 FTE's. The federal BTOP grant funding ends on July 31, 2013, funding from BTOP provided the following benefits to the Austin community:

- A 40% increase in number of public computer centers (15 to 26)
- A 76% increase in the number of computers deployed in the field (89 to 157)
- A 41% increase in monthly user sessions (7,300 to 10,000)
- A 3,947% increase in monthly training hours offered (18 to 1,700)
- An 878% increase in number of training participants per month (47 to 460)
- A 263% increase in the number of volunteers participating each month (11 to 40)
- Austin Free- Net has deployed 157 computers at 26 sites.

Austin Free-Net provides more than 1,700 training hours and their labs provide an average of 10,000 user sessions per month. Operating costs vary per site based on the services provided: staff, training hours, open clinic & access, and or training classes. Austin Free-Net is requesting gap funding for two months (August and September 2013) to ensure continued services to the following critical-need six (6) sites serving Austin's most underserved communities. Highlights to the current Austin Free-Net programs and accomplishments with the current level of support:

- ARCH (Austin Resource Center for the Homeless- males)-78701
- Casa Marianella- Housing / ESL classes/Job search-78702
- DeWitty Center (jobs labs) -78702
- DeWitty Center (open access) -78702
- Spring Terrace- Community housing center- 78752
- Trinity Center- (Homeless Center-females) 78701

These sites on average cost $3,027.50 per month or $18,165.00 for all six critical-need sites, for a total of $36,330.00 for the two months of additional funding being requested.

While Austin Free-Net will continually work towards sustainability through donor support, grant funding, and revenue generating enterprises, without BTOP or other funding to sustain their current offerings they will begin "ramping down" of all programs in mid 2013. This will result in site closures, reduction or elimination of training hours, reduced public computer center availability and staff layoffs. With the support of individual donors, grant funding and small revenue streams, AFN will aim to minimize the impact.

The Commission enthusiastically recommends that Council approve $36,330.00 in one-time funding to Austin Free-Net in the FY 13 budget. With the contract between the City and Austin Free-Net coming to a close on September 30, 2013 the Commission will begin a scope of work process for the next contract to address the sustainability of this important service.

If you have any questions or require additional information you may reach Chair Lemuel Williams at lemuelwilliams@yahoo.com.

cc: Rondella Hawkins, TARA Officer
       Ray Baray, Acting Chief of Staff
       Marc A. Ott, City Manager