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# viNGN Divulges Plan to Provide Wifi Internet Across Territory in Public Spaces, Housing Communities, Schools, Beaches, Parks and More

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Elesha George **July 27, 2022**

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In the next six to eight months the Virgin Islands Next Generation Network (viNGN) says it will begin to facilitate a list of projects that will improve digital literacy and expand high speed internet access throughout the Virgin Islands.

Residents and visitors are expected to benefit from greater access to free wireless internet (WiFi) installed in public spaces and direct fiber connection at public and subsidized housing units in the territory. The program will also facilitate U.S. Treasury's Affordability Connectivity Program (ACP) which helps to ensure that lower-income households can afford the broadband they need.

“Right now, in all three islands we have 60 locations with a total of 176 hotspots. There will be hundreds more coming. The goal here is to be able to put WiFi in all the public housing, schools, libraries, government, medical, community centers, parks, beaches, shopping centers and docks,” said Stephan Adams, president and CEO of viNGN who was speaking during a Senate hearing Tuesday.

The overall investment will also integrate Governor Albert Bryan’s ‘WiFi for All initiative’, which is funded through other federal grants.

“The first is for free WiFi deployment throughout the territory under a \$582,000 CARES Act grant for distance learning. The second is a “pending” \$10.8 million ARPA grant to deploy WiFi in support of telemedicine. Both initiatives have a secondary purpose of providing general community Wi-Fi,” he shared.

The initiative is being administered and implemented by the U.S. Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and is a hallmark of the Biden-Harris Administration’s billion-dollar ‘Internet for All initiative’. The Internet for All program consists of three NTIA grants for fund planning, infrastructure, and adoption effort that promote digital equity and inclusion.

Mr. Adams told the Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications that \$7 million has been provided under the Digital Equity Act Program (DE), for viNGN to support the promotion of digital equity and inclusion and as such viNGN will partner with nonprofit organizations to repurpose community centers into Public Technology Centers (PTC) within the next six to eight months.

Mr. Adams said this component not only includes building PTCs on all three islands but it will provide tech training for ex-convicts, encourage collaboration with education stakeholders to improve learning tools and STEM programs as well as train senior citizens in computer literacy.

According the viNGN CEO, the aim is to ensure that “all people and communities have the skills, technology, and capacity needed to reap the full benefits of the digital economy.”

“When we increase digital literacy, we have a digital native community that actually can participate in the global technology economy which is all around us,” he said, adding that a greater digital divide is being created when the senior population is not included.

This however is only part of three major projects and another \$24 million has been allotted to the USVI government to improve internet infrastructure in the territory through a Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program which funds projects that help expand high-speed internet access and usage. It also supports infrastructure deployment, mapping, and adoption of new technology.

The USVI Broadband Office will use those monies to enable the expansion of internet access in unserved locations (i.e areas with no access to 25/3 Mbps upload/download speeds) and underserved locations (i.e areas with no access to 100/20 Mbps upload/download speeds).

The third and final NTIA grant opportunity is called the Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program (MM) where funding will be provided to reduce the cost of building this high-speed Internet to unserved and underserved communities.

Mr. Adams, who is also the director at the USVI Broadband Office, said the goal is to achieve 100mbps up and down internet speed. “MM is a competitive grant program. The USVI Broadband

Office will compete for at least \$8 million to expand viNGN's middle-mile network. Our office will support relevant private sector middle mile competitive grant project applications," he said.

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