

Program Excellence Award for Innovations in Local Government Management

POPULATIONS OF 50,000 AND UNDER



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ICMA's Program Excellence Award for Innovations in Local Government Management recognizes a local government that has successfully applied the concepts of reinvention, reengineering, TQM, customization, or other cutting-edge organizational tool. This year's award in the 50,000-and-under population category goes to the City of Glenwood Springs, Colorado, and City Manager Michael S. Copp for the Glenwood Springs Community Broadband Project.

The lack of broadband services—which provide greater efficiencies for government agencies, businesses, health care organizations, and educational establishments—was hindering the ability of local businesses in Glenwood Springs, Colorado (population 7,700), to compete against companies in major metropolitan areas. The city was also finding it difficult to attract new businesses and was witnessing an exodus of its young people as they sought better jobs and more competitive salaries elsewhere.

Since neither the incumbent telephone local exchange carrier nor the existing cable providers planned to upgrade their plants to provide high-speed Internet or data services, the city decided to build a broadband network. Through its electric utility agency, it had placed additional spare conduit to many businesses and agencies throughout the community, which it now used to place fiber-optic cable to many locations. The ability to use existing conduit dramatically reduced both the cost of building the telecommunication infrastructure and the need to close off roads in the process.

Fiber is currently installed at several critical community locations, including city hall and other key city offices; the police, fire, electric, and water department facilities; Valley View Hospital; and the community center. The city is in the process of connecting the public school system, three of the community college's primary facilities, the public library, and several businesses. To make the network available to residents and small businesses, the city purchased and installed additional wireless antennae and receiver equipment at no charge to customers.

Glenwood Springs's community broadband network serves as a lifeline, boosting the city's economic base and piping in quality education, health care, and residential and business services that were previously unavailable. In addition to meeting the needs of K–12 students, the network offers more alternatives for nontraditional students, such as distance learning and continuing education. It benefits health care professionals and patients as well, enabling physicians to review patient records, X rays, and medical images from home and to conduct remote patient monitoring and consultations.

Glenwood Springs Public Works Director Robin Millyard, Information Services Director Bruce Munroe, and Electric Superintendent John Hines inspect fiber connections routers and switches.

The network has also provided a valuable connection among city staff and other Colorado government offices, saving the city about \$100,000 in annual costs for its internal telecommunications network and creating more efficient systems. Broadband services enhance e-government services and facilitate ongoing access to databases and information; road and weather reports; automated collection, investigation, and distribution of accident, citation, and other incident reports; and real-time dissemination of traffic and road-use statistics.

To avoid competing with the local telecommunications, cable, and Internet Service Providers (ISPs), the city invested in infrastructure that allows existing ISPs to use the network and provide more robust services. To recover implementation costs as well as reduce operational costs, it implemented a noncompetitive, wholesale strategy whereby the ISPs pay the city to use the network. Lacking sufficient staff to build a telecommunications subsidiary, it outsourced the design, engineering, and implementation of the network as well as all business facets. The city also took advantage of the expertise and experience of schools, government agencies, and telecommunications and high-tech companies in the area, while at the same time training city employees on fiber splicing, site surveys, and network operations.

In meeting the needs of its residents and business community, Glenwood Springs became the first city in the state of Colorado and one of the first in the nation to adopt a city-owned community network, thereby setting the course for others to follow. ■

