
OFFICE OF GOVERNOR RONNIE MUSGROVE
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: BOYD
FROM: RILEY
SUBJECT: ARC MEETING TO DISCUSS DEVELOPING BROAD BAND ACCESS IN NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI
DATE: 11/18/00
CC: FILE

The ARC hosted a meeting yesterday at 1:30 p.m. in the CREATE Foundation board room in Tupelo to discuss regional interest in developing a technological environment conducive to economic development for the region, specifically broad band access. The following organizations were represented at the meeting: TVA, 3 Rivers Planning and Development District, Tupelo/Lee County Community Development Foundation, North Mississippi Development District, Oktibbeha County, City of Oxford, City of Corinth, CREATE, the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, Mississippi Technology Inc., ARC (state and federal), and the Office of the Governor. Phil Starre of TVA facilitated the meeting.

Starre started the meeting by having the group identify barriers to bringing broad band access to the region. Identified barriers included:

1. public awareness/education
2. lack of incentives from state
3. Bell South monopoly
4. lack of assessment of current infrastructure and lack of private sector to disclose such information
5. suitable equipment at local level
6. infrastructure (“the last mile” problem – how to get access out from deportation point to the communities?)
7. communication regulations (confusing, some allowable actions are reported to be non-allowable)
8. lack of technology within local, rural telecommunications companies
9. lack of master telecommunications or broad band plan for state or the region
10. maintenance/ongoing technical support
11. lack of pilot model
12. financial market

Starre then had the group classify the above barriers into topics, which were:

1. State Policy (including need for strategic plan on state or regional level)
2. Market
3. Infrastructure
4. Public awareness/education
5. Communications/cooperation between sectors

Starre then broke the group into smaller groups to develop action steps for each of the above topics. After reconvening and discussing action steps, the group decided that the most pressing action steps needed to be taken were to develop a prototype project, to develop a public awareness campaign and to develop a strategic plan, which would include an assessment of the current capacity and needs. TVA volunteered to conduct the needs assessment.

Harry Rush, Technology Director for ARC out of Washington, said that it will be critical to involve the private sector in these talks and activities. He reported that Bell South should be presented with several other telecommunication providers' plans to assist in this endeavor. He said that this will make Bell South or any other large stakeholder willing to play. Charles Gollata of Corinth's Chamber of Commerce/Economic Development organization said that the Governor needs to hold a "come to Jesus" meeting with these telecommunication companies to "encourage" them to divulge their resources in the state as far as infrastructure and to explain that there is an aggregated demand for broad band access.

The group decided to form the following small group to develop a strategy and scope, including whether the pilot will be conducted on a regional or local level:

Brenda Weeks, TVA, Market Research and Evaluation
Dr. Dan Brook, Cooperative Extension Service, MSU
Dr. Buster Clark, Director of Telecommunications, University of Mississippi
David Rumbarger, Tupelo/Lee County Community Development Foundation
Mabel Murphree, ARC
Dr. Angie Dvorak, Mississippi Technology, Inc.
Kelly Riley, Office of the Governor

This working group is to meet at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, November 28 at TVA's Tupelo Office. I explained to Mabel Murphree that I would advise you of developments and that you or I might attend the meeting on the 28th. The group was extremely glad to have a representative of this office attend Friday's meeting and was overly complimentary of the Governor's technology initiatives.

Please advise as to our participation.