



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 9, 2015
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**DE BLASIO ADMINISTRATION ESCALATES EFFORTS TO CLOSE DIGITAL
DIVIDE AND DRIVE DOWN COST OF INTERNET FOR NEW YORKERS**

Formation of Broadband Taskforce, a first-of-its-kind “Call for Innovations,” and high-level appointments underscore Administration’s commitment to creating affordable, universal access

NEW YORK— The de Blasio Administration – led by Counsel to the Mayor Maya Wiley, Chief Technology Officer Minerva Tantoco, and Commissioner of the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (“DoITT”) Anne Roest – today announced a series of significant steps aimed at expanding universal access to the Internet and driving down the cost of broadband across all five boroughs.

These landmark initiatives build on the Mayor’s ongoing commitment to provide affordable broadband for all New Yorkers. The open Call for Innovations (“CFI”) is a first-of-its kind endeavor by the City to generate new approaches for reaching underserved communities. The Broadband Taskforce will work with the Administration to review ideas emerging from the CFI and explore how to connect them to larger broadband strategies. The Administration also announced appointments to two newly-created high-level positions focused on broadband and telecommunications.

“The digital divide creates a fundamental difference between those who have access to economic and educational opportunities and those who do not,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “Ensuring that all New Yorkers have affordable, high-speed Internet access is a top priority for this administration and a key strategy in our agenda to fight inequality. We are committed to using every tool we have to meet this goal.”

“From doing homework to finding a job, high speed internet access is as important as electricity to building opportunities for all of our people,” said **Maya Wiley, Counsel to the Mayor**. “In New York City, we are rich in experts and innovators who look like the city they are working to improve. By bringing together experts as advisors on the Broadband Task Force, building the City’s staffing and engaging the public in sharing information and ideas, we will build the bridge that crosses the digital divide and creates a 21st century road to opportunity.”

“Eliminating the digital divide is one of the defining issues of our modern age, one that requires ideas as big and bold as the problem itself,” said **Minerva Tantoco, Chief Technology Officer for the City of New York**. “The Call for Innovations presents an incredible opportunity to

deliver free or affordable Internet to millions of New Yorkers who don't have it at home. I call on our City's brilliant minds to join us and help us solve this problem which has existed for far too long."

"When it comes to tackling the City's broadband challenges, the de Blasio Administration has an approach and a team that's built to win," said **Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications Commissioner Anne Roest**. "From the Broadband Task Force to the Call for Innovations to the addition of expert staffers in the field, we're keeping the deployment and expansion of affordable broadband to more New Yorkers the priority it needs to be."

According to an analysis by the Center for Economic Opportunity, 22 percent of New York City households do not have Internet service at home and 36 percent of households below the poverty line do not have Internet access at home. Recent data on smartphone use, released last week by Pew Research Center, shows that one in five American adults rely on smartphones as their primary source for Internet access. According to Pew, half of all people with no or limited home Internet have had to cancel or suspend their phone service because of financial constraints.

Recognizing these challenges, the Mayor's Office of Technology and Innovation released an open solicitation for new ideas and proposals to provide affordable broadband in underserved communities, accessible online at <http://innovation.nyc>. The CFI is aimed at technology companies, entrepreneurs and smaller Internet service providers who have insight into the barriers to entry in New York City's telecommunications and Internet marketplace.

Respondents are encouraged to submit specific ideas relating to new uses for existing infrastructure, community-scale models of service provision, and deployment of new technologies. The deadline for submissions is June 30, 2015 at 8 pm EST. Responses will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

The Broadband Task force is comprised of a diverse group of industry leaders from the private, academic, and nonprofit sectors who will partner with the City's technology leadership and advise on the development and implementation of a citywide broadband strategy. Spearheaded by Counsel to the Mayor Maya Wiley, the Taskforce members include:

- Majora Carter, Founder of Majora Carter Group and CEO of StartUpBox, SouthBronx
- Susan Crawford, Co-Director of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard
- John Gilbert, EVP and COO at Rudin Management
- Jalak Jobanputra, Managing Partner at Future Perfect Ventures
- Thomas Kamber, Founder of Older Adults Technology Services
- Jared Kushner, CEO of Kushner Companies
- Jessica Lawrence, Executive Director of New York Tech Meet Up
- Bruce Lincoln, Executive Producer of Silicon Harlem
- Andrew Rasiej, Co-Founder of Civic Hall and Personal Democracy Media
- Reshma Saujani, Founder of Girls Who Code
- Tony Schloss, Director of Media Initiatives for Red Hook Initiative
- Elisabeth Stock, Founder of Computers for Youth
- Hank Williams, Founder of Platform Summit
- Fred Wilson, Partner at Union Square Ventures

The Administration also created two new positions focused on broadband and telecommunications, underscoring the Mayor's fundamental commitment to prioritizing the tech growth and accessibility.

Native New Yorker Alphonso Jenkins was named as the new Deputy Commissioner for Telecommunications Planning at the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT). The Administration also named New Yorker Joshua Breitbart as Special Advisor for Broadband in the Office of the Mayor. Together, Jenkins and Breitbart bring with them a proven record of success planning, designing and implementing innovative solutions in the private sector for building broadband infrastructures in low-income communities.

“If we want to address economic inequality head-on, it's critical that we expand access to low-cost, high-speed internet for all New Yorkers,” said **Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development Alicia Glen**. “We're calling on the city's tech ecosystem to contribute their most innovative ideas to fuel this process, which in the long term will be a major asset not just to individuals, but to the city's businesses and the broader economy.”

“Lowering the cost of Internet, especially for low-income or underserved families who lack access in their homes, is the first step towards bridging the digital divide in New York City” said **Kyle Kimball, President of New York City Economic Development Corporation**. “Enlisting the tech sector and our city's entrepreneurs to come up with creative solutions that connect more New Yorkers to educational resources, health care, and job opportunities online helps to both foster emerging businesses and create a more fair and equitable city. We are committed, as an administration, to expanding broadband connectivity, fueling economic growth and ensuring New York City remains competitive on a global level.”

“From the classroom to the work space to families' living rooms, broadband access is a critical service in today's digital world,” said **Council Member James Vacca, Chair of the Committee on Technology**. “This City needs to stay at the forefront of the changing digital landscape to create opportunities of success for all our residents. I am excited by the Administration's creation of the Broadband Taskforce that has been charged with developing meaningful solutions to building up the broadband infrastructure across the five boroughs. I look forward to working with the Mayor and the Broadband Taskforce on this amazing endeavor.”

“NYC residents and small business owners are talented, creative and have a lot to say. We can't allow them to be left out of any conversation or opportunity because of a lack of access. Increasing broadband in residences, businesses and communities will enrich our city as a whole by connecting more New Yorkers to one another and to conversations and information across the globe. I applaud the administration for this vision and commitment,” said **Council Member Robert Cornegy, Chair of the Committee on Small Business**.

These actions mark the latest escalation in the de Blasio Administration's ongoing work to close the technology divide in New York City and make New York the most tech-friendly and innovative city in the world. Previously announced steps include the development of LinkNYC, the world's largest and fastest municipal Wi-Fi network; expansion of the City's library hotspot program to lend Wi-Fi devices to New Yorkers; and ongoing leadership by the Mayor to promote a free and open Internet through protection of net neutrality and competition in the telecommunications market.

The New York City tech ecosystem has experienced dramatic growth, now directly employing nearly 300,000 people and indirectly generating another 250,000 jobs, altogether accounting for 12.6 percent of the city's workforce. Through programs including Digital.NYC, the Tech Talent Pipeline, and NYC BigApps, the de Blasio Administration is working to support this growth and deliver on its commitment to connect New Yorkers to opportunities generated by the expanding tech ecosystem.

"From Net-Neutrality at the FCC to local business development here in the Bronx, broadband is becoming as essential as running water and electricity," said **Majora Carter, President of StartUp Box**. "I am proud to represent MWBEs and my borough and to improve the economic health of our city!"

"With his extraordinary launch of universal pre-K in 2014, Mayor de Blasio demonstrated both his vision and effectiveness as a leader of this complex and challenging city," said **Susan Crawford, Professor/Co-Director of the Berkman Center, Cardozo School of Law**. "I'm delighted to see that he is now turning his attention to the high-speed Internet access crisis in New York City, and proud to be of service as his terrific team works towards implementing long-term policy and operational changes designed to bring world-class access to the residents and businesses of all five boroughs."

"Broadband connectivity is a crucial and necessary ingredient to enhance New York City's economic future," said **John Gilbert, EVP/COO of Rudin Management Company**. "This task force can and will create policy recommendations designed to bridge the digital divide and bring the power of connectivity to all of NYC's neighborhoods and residents."

"It is an honor to serve on the Mayor's Broadband Taskforce," said **Jalak Jobanputra, Managing Partner of Future Perfect Ventures**. "High speed broadband connectivity and access to educational, civic, service and commerce capabilities that broadband connectivity enables is essential for each NYCer to realize his or her full potential. I look forward to contributing to the administration's efforts to ensure that all New Yorkers participate in establishing NYC as the world's center for innovation, diversity and connectivity."

"Broadband is vital to the needs of older New Yorkers," said **Thomas Kamber, Founder, Older Adults Technology Services**. "It's a lifeline to friends and family and a critical tool for financial independence, health management, and staying relevant in today's society. I'm looking forward to helping the committee extend broadband service to all seniors, regardless of income, and also explore innovative programs to increase broadband adoption rates among seniors."

"I commend the administration for making broadband infrastructure improvements a priority," said **Jared Kushner, CEO of Kushner Companies**. "Access to high speed internet is crucial to creating equal access to job opportunities, education and economic growth. By focusing on this issue, I am confident the administration will make advancements to make the lives of all New Yorkers better and New York more competitive in the global economy."

"We know that access to high-speed internet is essential for engagement and involvement in all aspects of the technology economy," said **Jessica Lawrence, Executive Director of NY Tech**

Meetup. “The Broadband Task Force brings together the core resources and focus necessary for tackling the challenge of getting high-speed internet access into the hands and households of all of New Yorkers.”

“It is a true honor to join such esteemed professionals on the Mayors Broadband Advisory Taskforce,” said **Bruce Lincoln, Executive Producer of Silicon Harlem.** “As the Co-Founder of Silicon Harlem, I am excited to bring advanced engineering expertise and be in service to the goal of attaining ubiquitous community broadband and creating a digitally inclusive City.”

“In today's world, ubiquitous and affordable broadband has become an essential infrastructure goal as critical to the future of New York City and its citizens as water and electricity,” said **Andrew Rasiej, Founder of Civic Hall.** “It is a privilege to support Mayor de Blasio’s vision to achieve it and make our city and its people the most connected in the world.”

“As the founder of Girls Who Code, I am proud to be a part of this task force to ensure that our girls have access to technology to prepare them to be the leaders of New York City’s future work force,” said **Reshma Saujani, Founder of Girls Who Code.** “We can't get serious about college and career readiness for all students until we are providing equal access to the basic tools needed to succeed in the new economy.”

“Since 2012, Red Hook Initiative has been working to bring Internet access and the resources and opportunities it provides to residents of Red Hook, ensuring our underserved community members have access to the rapid pace of innovation,” said **Anthony Schloss, Director of Community Initiatives for Red Hook Initiative.** “We are encouraged by the Mayor's commitment to broadband access for all communities in New York, and are honored and excited to work with the highly qualified and diverse group of individuals that make up the Broadband Task Force.”

“The important role that broadband is now playing in K-12 education cannot be underestimated,” said **Elisabeth Stock, CEO and Co-Founder of nonprofit CFY.** “As part of the Taskforce, I look forward to sharing what we’ve learned at CFY over the past 15 years, working with tens of thousands of students, families, and teachers in New York City and across the country.”

“The Broadband Taskforce will help drive city government strategy and policy towards creating a new digital fabric that will help maintain New York as one of the leading cities in the world,” said **Hank Williams, Founder, Platform Summit.** “I hope to be able to provide insights gleaned from my many years as a tech entrepreneur as well as my more recent activities as a tech advocate and activist.”

“Broadband connectivity to the global Internet is the essential resource of 21st century life, business, discourse, and development,” said **Fred Wilson, Partner, Union Square Ventures.** “The great cities of the world were created by their investment in and support of the critical resources of the eras they developed in. So all great cities of the 21st century will rise and fall based on their investment in and support of broadband connectivity to the Internet for ALL. If the citizens of NYC want our home to remain the greatest city in the world, we must do much, much more to ensure broadband connectivity to the Internet for everyone and everything in NYC.”

“High speed internet access is critical to our city's economic, educational, and cultural health,” said **Colin O'Donnell, Founding Partner at Control Group**. “Sparking new businesses and opportunities that increase competition and drive high speed access creates a powerful virtuous cycle that will drive New York forward.”

“Internet access is no longer a luxury – it’s a necessity,” said **Sean Parker, chairman of Brigade**, a startup founded last year to tackle the problem of declining citizen power and engagement in our democracy. “Through this Call for Innovations, Mayor de Blasio is taking a huge step toward his goal of high-speed and affordable Internet access for all New Yorkers. We need the city’s best and brightest to answer the call – our economic future depends on it.”

“This is an important step forward in continuing to establish NYC as a major technology city,” said **Kevin Ryan, Chairman and Founder of Gilt, MongoDB, Business Insider, and Zola**. “This will continue to be one of the fastest growing industries in NY.”

“NYC's Call for Innovations initiative could not have come at a more critical time,” said **Eric Veksler, CEO, Brooklyn Fiber**. “Brooklyn Fiber has been working to connect underserved and neglected communities in New York to our high capacity broadband network for years. Now more than ever is the moment to invest in the infrastructure and resources necessary to ensure that all New Yorkers have unfettered access to high speed bandwidth, regardless of their location or financial wherewithal.”

“A vibrant democracy depends on open and accessible internet — it is a cornerstone for building a more fair and just world,” said **Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation**. “Bringing the transformative power of the internet to all New Yorkers requires bold, decisive commitments from leaders across sectors. The Ford Foundation commends the continued efforts of the de Blasio Administration to address issues of inequality by eliminating barriers to opportunity. We look forward to continuing our work with the Mayor's Office to make affordable, universal broadband access not just a priority, but a reality.”

###