

## The City of Minneapolis taking applications for free wireless for local nonprofits

Written by

Thursday, 09 April 2009 18:25

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Minneapolis City officials announced last week another benchmark in how the effort to make Minneapolis a wireless city is going to bridge the digital divide. The City is seeking applications for 100 "Wireless Community" accounts, which are free wireless Internet accounts intended for nonprofit organizations that provide free computer access to the public. The free "Wireless Community" accounts are one of the tangible community benefits that resulted from the City of Minneapolis' contract with USI Wireless, the company that is constructing a wireless network to blanket the entire city.

"Keeping Minneapolis ahead of the technological curve means not only investing in state of the art wireless Internet technology, but it also means making sure that more people than ever can have access to that technology," said Mayor R.T. Rybak. "Through our unique business model and public-private relationship with USI Wireless, we have been able to go above and beyond what other communities have done to deliver Internet access to our residents and businesses."

Agencies selected to receive the free accounts will also receive free monthly subscription vouchers that they can use to recruit volunteers who can assist with staffing and training in their community technology centers. In total, \$15,000 in free service vouchers will be distributed, in addition to the 100 free accounts.

These 100 free "Wireless Community" accounts are the latest examples of how Minneapolis City residents are benefiting from the robust community benefits agreement negotiated between the City of Minneapolis and USI Wireless, the company that built, owns and manages the wireless network throughout Minneapolis.

### \$400,000 In grants to bridge the digital divide

Since the contract was signed between the City of Minneapolis and USI Wireless, more than \$400,000 in grants have been distributed to 18 organizations throughout Minneapolis including the Minneapolis Public Library, Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, The Bridge for Runaway Youth, Casa De Esperanza and the PACER CENTER. The grants have been used to help these groups increase technology access and digital literacy learning to the various communities they serve. It is estimated that about \$11 million will be generated to fund digital inclusion efforts in the community over the 10-year contract.

### Free, online "Civic Garden" for all wireless users

The City of Minneapolis and USI Wireless have also created an online "Civic Garden" that provides a free level of service for anyone who can receive the USI Wireless signal. The Civic Garden offers free Web access to a wealth of public sector information about government, education, and community services at [www.wirelessminneapolis.org](http://www.wirelessminneapolis.org).

"We are very fortunate that the wireless network allows us the unique opportunity to fund programs to help bridge the digital divide," said City Council Member Elizabeth Glidden, who is a member of the Digital Inclusion Fund Advisory Board. "By providing increased free access to technology and educating more people on how to use it, we can give them the skills necessary to get a good job and access the information and services they need online to improve their

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lives.”

In addition to the free wireless accounts, and “Civic Garden,” there will be up to 5 percent of the Minneapolis area (including some parks and plazas) designated as free wireless zones.

The City of Minneapolis will distribute requests for applications for free wireless accounts to local nonprofit agencies. Applications will also be available online at [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/wirelessminneapolis](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/wirelessminneapolis).

Accounts will be given to agencies that provide public computer access, technology literacy training, and/or technology support for underserved communities. Applications are due by Monday, May 18. Applications will be reviewed by the City of Minneapolis staff and the Digital Inclusion Advisory Board, which will make recommendations to the City Council on which organizations will receive free accounts in 2009. The accounts will be good through 2010.

The City of Minneapolis’ public-private partnership with USI Wireless is being held up as a model for how cities and businesses can work together to make the notion of a “wireless city” a reality, and at the same time to improve government services and bridge the digital divide.