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Corporate Help Growing

AT&T, NCTA Sign On to Digital Education Campaign

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AT&T and NCTA said Tuesday they would join forces in a two-year nationwide digital education campaign organized by non-profit One Economy, a group supported by a wide range of technology firms, public advocacy and political leaders.

Presidential candidates Sens. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Barack Obama, D-Ill., are cochairs of one of the campaign's central projects, a public Internet channel to deliver programming to explain technology and its link to education and employment opportunities.

The group plans to bring broadband service to 500,000 households through a variety of public-private programs, said One Economy CEO Rey Ramsey. The organization plans to hire 5,000 youth to work as "Digital Connectors" who will teach low-income and seniors how to use computers and make use of the Internet resources.

One Economy is building on the experience it gained two years ago when it developed a portal, called Beehive, which supplies information on education, job placement and health care information. Beehive, available in Spanish, enables low-income taxpayers get free help with their tax returns.

The group also has worked with local housing authorities to encourage them to wire new low-income housing for broadband.

The project helped get full broadband deployment in North Carolina's Greene County, where 20 percent of the population live below the poverty line, said One Economy Executive Vice President Alec Ross. One Economy will be the largest recipient of "AT&T largesse" by the end of the campaign, with an anticipated \$36 million in support, said AT&T Senior Executive Vice President Jim Cicconi. AT&T is committing \$1 million to the new campaign.

"If we expect rural communities in West Virginia and other states to prosper in the global economy, broadband access is as important as water and sewer infrastructure," said West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin. West Virginia was one of the first states to "put computers in every classroom," Manchin said.

Nearly 80 percent of the state now is connected to the Internet, and it hopes to get full deployment with the help of the digital campaign, he said.