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Nebraska Association kicks off statewide Broadband Mapping Initiative

Project will identify gaps in internet service and speeds to close digital divide

LINCOLN, Neb. -Feb. 9, 2021- A statewide broadband speed testing initiative launched Tuesday by the Nebraska Regional Officials Council (NROC) and MAPA will provide a clearer view of the gaps in internet services, speeds and access across the state. NROC encourages every Nebraskan to take the one-minute speed test from any internet-enabled device, including cell phones. As part of the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro, residents in Iowa's Pottawattamie and Mills Counties are encouraged to participate too.

Speed data will provide decision makers a better understanding of where internet accessibility is limited or not available, and where speeds are not meeting the needs of today's users. The purpose of the initiative is to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas. The captured information will provide statistically sound data that can be used by communities, counties and key stakeholders as they plan for broadband infrastructure expansion or enhancement projects.

"Results from this study will give local and state officials a better understanding of where underserved and unserved Nebraska residents are located," said NROC President CJ Poltack. "Furthermore, it will allow the state to align with Governor Rickett's legislative priority of improving broadband services for the entire state."

Individuals can take the free test at www.speedtestne.org. Participation by everyone is essential. No personal information will be collected. Repeated speed tests by the same users are encouraged during the two-year initiative in order to better capture variations in internet speeds and collect more statistically valid data.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the need for broadband accessibility with students learning remotely and employees working from home. NROC's initiative will explore how these demands are affecting current providers' speeds and will find gaps in service. "I would like to encourage Nebraskans to participate in this initiative," said Ed Toner, State of Nebraska CIO and Rural Broadband Task Force Chair. "Speed test data can help identify areas which lack broadband so strategies and funding to connect these areas can be identified."

Data collected will provide the most comprehensive, validated, real-time reporting of actual upload and download speeds recorded in the state. GEO Partners, LLC – an independent, broadband data collection and analysis firm not affiliated with any internet service providers (ISPs) – is conducting the study.

NROC, the state organization of Nebraska Development Districts including MAPA, is a strong advocate for broadband expansion across the state and recognizes that high speed broadband is critical to economic development, education, business, emergency management and emergency services and virtual healthcare.

This project is funded through a U.S. Economic Development Administration CARES grant provided specifically to address COVID-19 pandemic recovery and resiliency efforts.

