



Scoping a Position Description with Lead For America: [Koochiching County, 2022]

Project Name: Koochiching Technology Initiative

Fellow's Role Title: Innovation Facilitator and Brainstormer

Hosting institution(s): Koochiching Technology Initiative

Position Description Summary:

The fellow will work with our dynamic team of stakeholders to identify and pursue the most promising opportunities to leverage internet resources to build a stronger community and increase quality of life in the county, with an aim towards developing a permanent position. Current and emerging possibilities include expanding broadband access to underserved locations, addressing equity by helping those in need address affordability of access and devices, tech skill development from basic user skills to internships and specific applications such as virtual reality in elder care facilities, home healthcare opportunities and more.

Central Question:

How might we build on recent momentum towards making broadband connectivity and technology part of how our community solves its problems and builds its future?

Key Goals + Outcomes:

The [Koochiching Technology Initiative](#) is seeking a Fellow interested in helping to refine and pursue the following goals as well as suggesting additional possibilities.

- Build local capacity for continued improvement in internet access, affordability, adoption and innovation.
 - Develop a proposal for a permanent broadband and tech innovation position in the county, possibly as an evolution of the precedent set by the LFMN Fellowship.
 - Develop a proposed annual county budget for that position and its activities. Identify potential funding sources to supplement the county's investment.
 - Expand and strengthen the network of stakeholders actively involved in innovation and advocacy for tech-related improvements in the county.
 - Develop and implement a communications plan to share information with the public and gather their input on current and potential improvements in the county.
- Increase the numbers of individuals with access to high-speed internet (broadband).
 - Map and document remaining locations in the county with slow or no internet access.
 - Emphasize hardwired internet connections where feasible and encourage cellular and satellite internet service in other areas.
 - Work with neighboring ISPs on options for expanding service.
 - Secure funding to expand infrastructure into those areas.
- Expand cellular voice and data service and quality throughout the county.
 - Map existing cellular towers and equipment for each provider and technology type (e.g. 4g, 5g).



- Gather cellular signal strength data through existing crowdsource sites and volunteer speed testers.
- Work with tower and cellular companies to identify areas with important coverage gaps.
- Work with landowners, regulators, and stakeholders to identify specific locations for new towers.
- Improve affordability of access to broadband and related technologies.
 - Identify and promote use of existing funding sources and subsidy programs for internet access in collaboration with existing organizations.
 - Establish a local volunteer program to refurbish computers and other devices to provide at low cost, similar to PCs for People, building off recent efforts.
- Increase basic end-user tech skills.
 - Partner with Koochiching Aging Options, the library, local schools and other groups to provide volunteer tech training to help our population become more comfortable navigating the evolving digital landscape.
 - Focus on intergenerational exchange of tech skills and information, such as a local reporting effort with youth partnering to record the knowledge and histories of our elders.
- Propose innovations for county and city governments using the internet for increased civic participation in local government.
 - Explore existing models of such innovations, especially from nearby, rural cities and counties.
 - Meet with local citizen and government stakeholders on perceived issues, needs, goals and opportunities related to governance, participation and communication.
- Increase professional tech skills.
 - Help local organizations build the tech skills they need on a daily basis.
 - Help recruit and train local technology professionals through internships and career development with partners such as the local community college and Minnesota's [SciTech internship program](#).
- Identify completed KTI projects worth further investment or followup to build on their success, including digital history, teleconferencing, and a coworking center.
 - Most in need of followup, our [WellnessVR](#) equipment and content was a big success in our pilot project at a local care facility and has a permanent home at our public library but hasn't been used sense, perhaps in part due to the pandemic. Advocacy work and in-person demonstrations could lead to this significant investment making a positive difference in our eldercare community.

Fellow Contribution in building capacity to achieve Key Goals & Outcomes:

Since its formation in 2018 the Koochiching Technology Initiative has been very successful in its mission “based on the recognition of the importance of internet access, integration and skills throughout Koochiching County”. Initially an informal and diverse group of advocates and now an official citizens committee of the County, we have helped secure and distribute hundreds of thousands of dollars of support from a wide range of sources in pursuit of our goals to help the county thrive. While we have excelled at identifying and prioritizing needs and opportunities, our primary limitation has been the limited time of our all-volunteer team.



We believe that the county would benefit greatly from a permanent, paid position and institutional support to facilitate these innovations in an ongoing, iterative process, leveraging volunteers and stakeholders, increasing several fold what KTI has been able to achieve thus far. KTI recognized that the LFMN fellowship program represents an excellent opportunity to begin that process by demonstrating what such a position could accomplish and developing the job description in the process.

Demonstrating that potential and establishing that precedent would be the primary contribution of the Fellow. The additional goals of specific projects would serve that end by showing in practice and here in our county what such a position can accomplish and thus increase the likelihood of future innovations as new needs and opportunities arise.

Community Impact:

KTI and the fellowship are fundamentally about improving the community. We work with existing organizations, institutions and individuals to facilitate their projects, identify new opportunities and explore how broadband, technology and innovation can build a strong community with a vibrant future.

Changing technologies are inevitable and will continue to transform our lives. We aim to make that something we harness and shape locally for our purposes, building on our traditions, rather than something that simply happens to us, beyond our control.

Additional Context

Once selected, a KTI Fellow would be walking into a wealth of opportunities and a network of inspiring individuals full of ideas and advice, yet ready to listen. The Fellow would also have significant latitude to shape the path of these efforts according to their own interests and skills, in coordination with the team.

Each of the specific projects mentioned above is either already underway or has established groundwork including coordination with stakeholders, feasibility, and other details. Many additional projects are not listed, already complete, or show potential but lack individual champions to move them forward at this time.

KTI coalesced from a loose network of like-minded individuals when the Blandin Foundation presented the opportunity to form a [Blandin Broadband Community](#). Along with the Blandin Foundation, we generally follow the [Intelligent Community Forum method](#), a holistic approach to community development that identifies 6 factors, labeled connect, sustain, include, engage, innovate, and work. KTI is also part of the [Arrowhead Intelligent Region](#), applying the same model at a larger scale.

Our individual projects make sense on their own yet are always developed with this larger framework in mind, making them part of a coherent strategy for the future.

The primary host contact for the fellowship:

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Fellow Name (for those in the applicant-driven host process):