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US IGNITE SELECTS WESTCHESTER COUNTY ASSOCIATION TO LEAD A COMMUNITY BROADBAND PILOT IN YONKERS AS PART OF *PROJECT OVERCOME*

*An Innovative Internet Access Project In Yonkers, New York's 4th Largest City,
With A High-Level, Urgent Need For Low Income Residents*

White Plains, N.Y. (March 30, 2021) – [The Westchester County Association](#) (WCA) is one of seven lead organizations to have been selected by [US Ignite](#), a national non-profit accelerating the smart city movement, to participate in Project OVERCOME. Project OVERCOME, a \$2.7 million effort is designed to expedite the delivery of broadband services to underserved communities across the United States. The [U. S. National Science Foundation](#) (NSF) conceived of and is providing \$2.25 million in funding for the project, with [Schmidt Futures](#) joining as a financial and strategic partner to extend Project OVERCOME's geographic reach with an additional \$450,000. The project explores novel approaches to connectivity in both rural and urban communities with an eye on replicating these efforts on a national scale.

"We were immensely gratified by the quality of proposals we received," said Joe Kochan, CEO, US Ignite. "It's a challenge to combine creative technology solutions with strong partnership and community engagement strategies. Yet we had enough proposers meeting both criteria to allow us not only to select a stellar lineup of winning projects, but also to ensure we could reflect a mix of environments, demographics, housing types, and geographic regions. We couldn't be more pleased with the results."

As part of Project OVERCOME, the WCA will spearhead a 12-month pilot program, for which they have been granted \$450,000 in funding. Named for the community it will serve, the Yonkers Zone (Y-Zone), is designed to pilot a digital equity solution in the underserved community of downtown Yonkers, New York. In order to accomplish this innovative and ambitious endeavor, the WCA has partnered with the [City of Yonkers](#), [STEM Alliance](#), [Yonkers Partners in Education](#), [Fordham University](#) and [Westhab](#). These partners will be working hand in hand and each will bring contributed resources to the project to make it a success.

Y-Zone is a digital opportunity zone (DOZ) that will provide free or affordable internet access to at least 250 need-based households, up to 1,000 people, in downtown Yonkers by utilizing Citizens Broadband Radio Service (CBRS) spectrum. Y-Zone is more than an affordable new connectivity solution, and incorporates three core principles: 1) Establishing a digital equity ecosystem driven by a coalition of committed local stakeholders, including local residents and program youth; 2) Achieving widespread adoption through community input and engagement; 3) Advancing digital fluency by providing device ownership and tech education as well as connectivity. For potential clients, the message is simple: Get into the Zone! Get Connected! Succeed.

"Digital connectivity has been a key focus area for the WCA for several years. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly shed more light on the effects of a long-standing digital divide in our region. Instantly, real

time video platforms became the norm in work from home, remote learning, and telemedicine environments and those without broadband and wireless communications were left in real hardship,” said Michael Romita, President & CEO, Westchester County Association. “We are pleased to have been selected by US Ignite to take part in Project OVERCOME to test innovative approaches that connect people quickly, and that have the potential to expand not only to the rest of Westchester County, but set the standard for other communities nationwide.”

“We at the WCA started a business-led coalition four years ago to address critical digital infrastructure needs across Westchester County. Our goal from the outset was to stimulate creative and innovative broadband solutions that meet the needs of everyone in Westchester and address digital equity. Leading with our new partners to develop the Y-Zone and build a sustainable community based solution is truly ground-breaking,” remarked Christopher Fisher, managing partner of White Plains-based law firm, Cuddy & Feder and Chair of WCA’s Digital Connectivity Committee.

"The Westchester Community Association's Y-Zone presents an innovative technical and social broadband solution to the NSF-US Ignite Project OVERCOME competition," said Lee Davenport, Director of Community Development, US Ignite. "In addition to developing innovative CBRS networking solutions across dense urban residential settings and leveraging existing infrastructure and support from the City of Yonkers, partners will accelerate their efforts by empowering youth participation to ensure a community-wide approach to Internet access and adoption."

The WCA, Westchester County’s leading economic development organization, will serve as the grant project manager, leveraging the resources of its staff, prestigious c-level Board, Digital Connectivity sub-committee, and hundreds of member businesses. WCA has served Westchester for 70 years with a proven track record, including the recent, multi-year \$9.8 million federal ‘Ready-to-Work’ grant. WCA is nationally recognized for exceeding training and placement goals of the long-term unemployed into the healthcare industry.

Partner Quotes:

Mike Spano, Mayor, City of Yonkers

“The last year of remote learning has shed a shining light on the digital divide that exists among our communities. The Y Zone alliance provides an innovative opportunity to address digital equity in Yonkers and bring new technology to at-risk families to support their learning. Thank you to all our partners for further enriching the lives and education of Yonkers students.”

Bob Cacace, Commissioner of Information Technology, City of Yonkers

“The City and Board of Education are extremely excited and hopeful about what can be achieved through this project. Mayor Mike Spano has been working on ways to lower the cost of broadband access to Yonkers residents, particularly those residents who cannot afford broadband in the home. This grant provides the City with an opportunity to test a new technology that has the potential to drive down the cost of broadband in the home, which would be a game changer for many of Yonkers’ students and their families. We believe that the creation of the Y-Zone in Yonkers is the first step toward bringing together resources from the City and the Yonkers School district, and those from the Y-Zone partners, the Westchester County Association, Fordham University, Yonkers Partners in Education, the STEM Alliance and Westhab to create a sustainable model to address the need to have anyone and everyone get access to a broadband network for schoolwork, job advancement, and social equity.”

Dr. Jane Bolgatz, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Fordham Graduate School of Education

"We are excited to be partnering with YPIE, STEM Alliance, and others in this initiative. Fordham Graduate School of Education faculty and students will help evaluate the Y-Zone pilot project by

facilitating Youth Participatory Action Research (Y-PAR). In Y-PAR, the participants identify the issues and possible solutions, and engage in actions to solve the problems. We have already started meeting with youth in the community and we are looking forward to having young people take the lead in making this project a success."

Margaret Kaufer, President & CEO, STEM Alliance

"The success of the Y-Zone initiative is an innovative approach to solving the complex problem of the digital divide. The Y-Zone partners understand that internet adoption requires not just access and affordability but also tech education and support. This initiative is truly groundbreaking because it combines infrastructure work with trust building, device access, grassroots outreach and digital skills training - a wraparound approach that we call a "Digital Opportunity Zone."

Richard Nightingale, President & CEO, Westhab

"In an effort to create the most robust Wi-Fi network possible for our new Dayspring Campus and the entire Nodine Hill community of Yonkers, Westhab is thrilled to contribute a recently awarded \$300,000 Community Development Block Grant to the Y-Zone initiative. In addition, Westhab's Dayspring Campus will serve as a second CBRS site and a hub for community education and empowerment, furthering the impact of the project to serve 250 households. Westhab has been *building communities* and *changing lives* in the Yonkers community since its founding, and we're so excited to take our outreach to a new level with both our Dayspring Campus and Project OVERCOME."

Sam Wallis, Executive Director, Yonkers Partners in Education

"Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE) is committed to building a community of young people prepared to succeed in college and become the next generation of leaders. The disparities in digital connectivity have been brought even more to the forefront in the recent year. YPIE is proud to be part of the Y-Zone initiative and to have our YPIE students involved in the research of digital gaps in the downtown Yonkers community. Being part of this initiative will provide a hands-on opportunity for students to learn about a challenge in their community and to be a part of the solution."

Supporter Quotes:

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins

"There has never been a more consequential time for investments to be made in education and the technology that enhances it. Students in the City of Yonkers have been particularly hard hit by budget cuts and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is why I was pleased to support the call for grant funding to help the Westchester County Association make a difference in the lives of many students and families impacted by a very real digital divide in Yonkers. Now, this innovative and collaborative initiative can provide more accessible and affordable Internet, while establishing services to address tech support and device ownership."

New York State Senator Shelley Mayer

"I was so pleased to support Westchester County Association's (WCA) successful collaborative application to develop a pilot program to solve the digital divide. Thank you to WCA and all the local and national partners for their vision that a strong economy depends upon all young people and adults having access to the basic tools necessary to participate in the economy. This innovative project will help identify the most effective paths to ensuring all residents have one of those basic tools -- connectivity."

Westchester County Executive George Latimer

"I am immensely proud of the work the Westchester County Association (WCA) does here in our backyard and congratulate them on this great honor. WCA has long been an advocate of the modernization of our digital infrastructure as a way to narrow the digital divide in unserved and

underserved communities; and advance smart growth policies and initiatives that enhance digital connectivity to benefit the County's education system as well as the business community. There has never been a more consequential time for investments to be made in education and the technology that enhances it – and this prestigious grant opportunity with the City of Yonkers will serve as a blueprint of what can be possible.”

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