

New ideas for Northern Internet

Internet Society rep and former Inuvik resident talks community-owned networks

by **Tim Edwards**
Northern News Services
NWT

A pool of funding aimed at bridging the gap between rural and urban Internet service might be a boon for the North.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) announced the details of its \$750-million Broadband Fund on Sept. 27.

"The CRTC kind of turned (the traditional broadband project funding model) on its head," said Mark Buell, a former Inuvik community development officer who's now the Internet Society's regional bureau director for North America.

While an exact date hasn't been set, in the next few months people and groups will be able to apply for money to fund projects that help the CRTC deliver Internet speeds of at least 25 Mbps for downloads and 10 Mbps for uploads.

These speeds are half of what it originally required, which spurred Internet advocacy organizations such as OpenMedia and the Canadian Internet Registration Authority to issue statements decrying it compromising on higher-speed access, but that might make it easier for Northerners to enter the game, according to Buell.

He said the Broadband Fund's funding model will grant money to projects on their merit and the needs of the people the projects are serving, rather than previous models that fund projects that hook up the most amount of people for the least amount of money – which doesn't work for the sparsely-populated North.

"What that could do is open up fund-

ing for community networks and for communities to come together and deploy networks as a community as opposed to waiting for a telecommunications company to come in and deploy the networks for them."

He said special consideration will be given to projects that affect Indigenous communities and that consultation is required for projects that affect Indigenous communities.

"There may be a priority for communities in the North that have a majority Indigenous population," he said.

The Internet Society is co-hosting, with the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, the Indigenous Connectivity Summit in Inuvik this week. A major theme of the event is community networks – communications infrastructure built, managed and used by local communities.

Buell said the benefits of these networks are they can be reliable, are locally managed and serviced and they provide competition which he said may eventually help produce higher speeds.

While projects like these are not yet underway in the North, they've been successful elsewhere, such as Argentina and Mexico.

Buell said the North's Internet service is improving, with communities throughout the Mackenzie Valley now hooked up to fibre optic Internet and with a planned project to link that line at Inuvik with one coming up the Dempster Highway from the Yukon.

He said this success is part of the reason the Internet Society looked to Inuvik to host this summit.



The CRTC's \$750-million Broadband Fund could open up funding for community networks.

image courtesy Internet Society

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