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Six finalists named for Greensboro's \$1M economic development challenge

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The City of Greensboro named six finalists in its Strong Cities, Strong Communities Challenge competition, with a top finalist proposing a publicly owned gigabit speed fiber optic network taking home a \$55,000 award.

The challenge grant program, with a total awards pool of \$1 million, is part of a national initiative by the U.S. Department of Commerce to promote innovative ideas for economic development at the local level.

The six finalists will now have the opportunity to expand their proposals to compete in the next phase, which will see the top idea taking home \$500,000.

"Thanks to the SC2 Challenge and our six finalists, the city of Greensboro will have a new road map for better leveraging its vast and dynamic array of resources in new ways," said Mayor Nancy Vaughan. "Greensboro can use these strategies to continue to create a climate for growing higher-wage jobs and fostering innovation, as well as paving the way for long-term sustainable growth."



THINKSTOCK

The top finisher in Greensboro's Strong Cities, Strong Communities Challenge program will take home \$500,000.

The top finisher in the first round was Gig G, a proposal submitted by Joel Bennett, Larry Cecchini and Michael Hetschel. The idea is to design and develop a publicly owned gigabit speed fiber optic network for community use, as well as establishing a 15-501C Gig-G Social Entrepreneurship Fund business model designed to foster business development and acceleration.

Two other ideas received cash awards in the first round.

The Gateway University Research Park Testing Center proposal, entered by representatives from Gateway University Research Park, would offer a product testing venue for technological companies and industries in the community. The proposal received \$35,000.

Third place and a \$10,000 award went to Global Greensboro, a proposal submitted by Massachusetts-based consulting firm Mass Economics that focuses on creating distinct local economic specializations.

Also named as finalists:

Cityfi, a proposal was entered by Andrew Brod and Roch Smith Jr. proposing the creation of a true citywide Wi-Fi network with public Wi-Fi access beyond the limited range of hot spots in public parks and buildings.

Lifelong Learning City, a proposal entered by The Merrick Group, with professionals and experts from N.C. A&T State University and Guilford Technical Community College, that would build upon Greensboro's educational assets and the new downtown university campus to create the Greensboro Union of Institutions for Learning and Development, called GUILD.

Global Opportunities Center, a proposal entered by UNC-Greensboro's Office of Research and Economic Development that would leverage the resources of local colleges and universities, corporations and community partners by connecting and educating students and businesses in innovative ways that result in new global business and career opportunities.

The competition received 20 strategic proposals, and focused on a range of themes including workforce development, transportation, alternative energy, technology, place-making and small business development.

In the second phase, the top finisher will receive \$500,000 with \$150,000 for second place, \$100,000 for third place, \$75,000 for fourth place, \$50,000 for fifth place and \$25,000 for sixth. The winner is expected to be announced in the spring.

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