PROJECT ISIZWE
Free Wi-Fi For Africa

Awards Category: **4. Most Innovative City or Government Program to bridge the Digital Divide**

Project Title: **Tshwane Free WiFi - an innovative partnership with local government bridging the digital divide in South Africa's capital city**

Project Description:

Vision *Tshwane 2055* is the intent to ensure that Tshwane becomes "liveable, resilient and inclusive whose citizens enjoy a high quality of life, have access to social, economic and enhanced political freedoms and where citizens are partners in the development of the African Capital City of excellence". Behind this remaking of South Africa's Capital City, stands the visionary Kgosientso Ramokgopa, Executive Mayor of the City of Tshwane. For Ramokgopa, Free WiFi is a key success factor in *Tshwane 2055,* with his personal vision being "to bring WiFi within walking distance of every citizen".

Project Isizwe is working alongside the City of Tshwane to turn this vision into a reality, forging a partnership with local government to bring the population of over 2.9 million people online. Since its inception in 2013, Tshwane Free WiFi - the collaborative partnership project between the City and Project Isizwe - has deployed 752 Free Internet Zones (FIZ) across the City's public spaces predominantly in the sprawling, low-income township communities of Soshanguve, Mamelodi and Atteridgeville, in a large-scale attempt to bridge the digital divide.

Tshwane is the first metropolitan municipality in South Africa to roll out Free WiFi and with 1.9 million users successfully connected to the internet, there is much to celebrate about the innovative way in which Project Isizwe has approached relationship building and partnership with the local government.

Project Isizwe's non-profit structure allows the organisation to pool bandwidth and utilise the capacity of local internet service providers without incurring the the traditional excessive mark-ups associated with enabling connectivity. The organisation's commitment to building collaborative working relationships with service providers in a way that facilitates development as a priority, has made the roll-out of connectivity affordable and possible for the City of Tshwane.

Oftentimes, the exorbitant costs associated with creating the purpose-built WiFi networks that are necessary for large-scale, city-wide implementation are unaffordable to municipalities that have to allocate and spend budget carefully across multiple priority areas. By creating a fresh business model, using innovative configuration techniques and working in collaborative partnership, Project Isizwe has created a scalable and

financially feasible solution for providing open access internet connectivity in previously disconnected, low-income communities.

The 752 FIZ locations have been carefully selected to best serve the Tshwane population. Aligning with national government priorities, the local municipality has worked with Project Isizwe to identify key sites where connectivity will best serve the City's citizens. Public spaces which have been prioritised include schools, healthcare facilities and community centres.

Another priority in South Africa is overcoming the unemployment challenges. Job creation and access to employment opportunities is very important in Tshwane - one of South Africa's youngest cities where 37% of the population are classified as youth. In an endeavour to more actively and directly enable this level of social impact, over and above the provision of internet access, Project Isizwe designs and delivers city-wide training and development programmes spanning various industries, that have at their core the intent to build capacity and develop skills in the young population enabling job creation, employment and facilitating entrepreneurship and contributing to helping young people become citizens who can viably contribute to the country's economy. To date these programmes have impacted directly on 694 beneficiaries.

The sustainability of the *Tshwane 2055* vision, lies in active citizenship to ensure ongoing City development. For the City of Tshwane, enabling and empowering citizens to increasingly participate in the City's development is a key indicator of progress towards the vision and ultimately a necessary component in facilitating the citizen engagement that will contribute towards fulfilling the democratic ideals of South Africa. Further to the provision of Free WiFi, the City of Tshwane and Project Isizwe have enabled key services to ensure that citizens are best served by the provided connectivity; able to utilise and take advantage of what the internet has to offer but also able to realise their collective voice and begin to authentically participate as active citizens.

WiFi Bus delivers a free experience to 350 000 connected commuters. This world-first mobile connectivity solution allows vehicular mobile units on the busses to connect to specialised high capacity base stations along the route, ensuring uninterrupted connectivity for users.

Tobetsa is Project Isizwe's specialised content portal which is available for unlimited access. Tobetsa aims to curate and whitelist some of the best content that the internet has to offer, giving Free WiFi users the opportunity to extend their online experience even once their daily 500MB cap is reached. The content is handpicked for relevancy to the user demographic with particular focus on providing educational information and opportunities for skills development geared towards enabling employment.

Also available via Tobetsa are key government and city-related resources. In this way, the Free WiFi service, extends to enhance social cohesion and facilitate e-Governmental services in the City by providing free access to constructive online content and tools.

The WiFi TV offering is a hyper-local, video-on-demand, low production cost service available for free, unlimited streaming on Tobetsa. This Project Isizwe initiative provides informative, engaging and entertaining video content to audiences who would otherwise not have access to content that is actively produced for them, in their communities by young, local citizen journalists. At the heart of WiFi TV is a training model which not only provides high quality local content, but also formally facilitates learning and skills development for the young media producers who have become employed and empowered. Furthermore, the localised City specific content has created a communication channel between the citizens of Tshwane and local government, resulting in an ongoing dialogue of interaction. WiFi TV has produced more than 500 original videos with the increasing viewership consistently above 20 000 video views per month. The citizen journalism model central to WiFi TV is another innovative approach to helping citizens have a voice and assisting them in communicating to and with their local government.

High data and airtime costs in South Africa continue to inhibit communication between citizens. Leveraging off of the Free WiFi, Project Isizwe and the City created two services which help the people of Tshwane connect with each other. WiFi Voice and WiFi Chat allow users to talk to each other, chat among themselves and connect directly with City stakeholders.

With an additional 700 FIZs planned for the Capital City before the end of 2016, Project Isizwe is committed to a long-term partnership with the City of Tshwane. The organisation's capacity to deploy large-scale WiFi infrastructure at city level is showing people what is technically feasible and financially viable. The innovative approach to working with City stakeholders and local government, showcases the feasibility of relationship building and partnership with government that is necessary to scale wider and bring more areas of South Africa online.