Smart Communities Broadband Adoption Program
A Partnership between Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and Sprint Nextel

Broadband: A Critical Challenge for America’s Cities
America’s mayors have long recognized broadband Internet connectivity as “critically important for the economic, social and civic growth of individuals and families” and as an essential tool for delivering high-quality public services to community residents (U.S. Conference of Mayors Resolution, 2008). Following cities’ leads, federal policymakers are placing a renewed focus on broadband, culminating in the development of a National Broadband Plan and provision of nearly $7 billion in Recovery Act funds aimed at expanding broadband infrastructure and adoption.

Despite these changes, significant barriers stand between urban Americans and the Internet. For example, a 2008 academic study found that 31 percent of Chicago households were completely disconnected and another eight percent lack the broadband speeds required to fully utilize the Internet. Underserved residents cite a range of reasons for not adopting broadband: lack of training, concerns about privacy and safety, low relevance and high costs. Federal grants to cities aimed at providing training and access to computers will help address several of these barriers, but the lack of support for urban infrastructure projects means that prices of broadband services will remain prohibitively high for the vulnerable residents and business that could benefit most.

Smart Communities: Bringing Broadband to the Underserved
Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley’s Smart Communities Program has created a unique partnership that drives broadband adoption by building on the complementary strengths of government, community organizations and the private sector. The City of Chicago – with support from the federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program – provides funding for computers and other hardware and software tools, eliminating some of the costliest barriers to home Internet use. The community development organization LISC/Chicago and its network of New Communities Program partners deliver targeted, culturally appropriate digital skills training programs, grassroots outreach and hyper-local content. Sprint Nextel will offer free or low-cost wireless broadband services through Virgin Mobile USA’s Broadband2Go to avoid financial barriers faced by vulnerable families. The partnership is structured as a pilot program with an impact that grows exponentially over three phases:

*Phase One – 60 “digital youth” and hundreds of community members*

Nearly 60 youth aged 14 to 17 from five underserved Chicago neighborhoods participated in this year’s inaugural Digital Youth Summer Jobs program, receiving digital media training, paid
internships in high-tech work environments and free notebook computers at the conclusion of the program. By providing free 3G wireless broadband services for the next six months, Sprint Nextel will help these youth continue their learning during the school year and apply online for college. Without this generous partnership, many students would be unable to connect their new computers to the Internet. Sprint is also supplying its Overdrive mobile hotspots for launch events in each of the Smart Communities, exposing hundreds of residents to new broadband technology.

**Phase Two – 1,300 low-income families and small businesses**

As an incentive for completing training on “everyday digital” skills at six Family Net Centers, more than 1,200 residents will receive netbook computers loaded with links to local online content and equipped with embedded wireless broadband cards. One-hundred small businesses participating in local Business Resource Networks will also receive new computers. Sprint Nextel will offer both groups reduced-price 3G and 4G wireless broadband services, helping to connect residents with critical public services and businesses to new customers and opportunities.

**Phase Three – 270,000 underserved residents in five neighborhoods**

Even if they never set foot in training classes or receive free computers, the nearly 270,000 Smart Communities residents will benefit from efforts to create a broad “culture of use” across the five neighborhoods: neighborhood web portals will host local news and event listings, media advertisements will tout the benefits of broadband and Tech Organizers will conduct one-on-one outreach to potential users. Through the Sprint Nextel partnership, all residents will have access to new affordable broadband options, and those meeting certain means tests will receive extremely low rates.

**Chicago and Sprint Nextel: A New Model for Partnerships**

Mayor Daley’s Smart Communities Program has received support from many private sector companies; Mayors Business Council members Cisco and Microsoft have alone donated millions of dollars in hardware and software. But the partnership with Sprint Nextel breaks new ground. With the City of Chicago and its partners assuming the “customer acquisition” costs – hardware, software, training, awareness and content – Sprint Nextel is able to offer its services at the lower prices required to connect with a previously unseen market of residents and businesses that have traditionally been underserved by the telecommunications industry. This model of economic sustainability and social benefit is one that Mayor Daley hopes to bring to other Internet service providers and that Sprint Nextel likewise hopes to scale to other cities.