



Contact: Mildred Franco  
The Generator @GFPB  
870-939-6898  
francomildred@goforwardpb.org

July 202020

### *Team Working to Bring Fiber Internet to Pine Bluff Residents and Businesses*

Pine Bluff, AR—[Go Forward Pine Bluff](#), an organization working to improve education, government, infrastructure, economic development, and quality of life in Pine Bluff, is embarking on a USDA supported project to bring world class internet to Pine Bluff. Funded by a Rural Communities Development Initiative grant from the USDA and endorsed by Pine Bluff Mayor Shirley Washington, Go Forward Pine Bluff is partnering with [CTC Technology](#) and [Rural Innovation Strategies Inc.](#) (RISI) to determine the best path to connecting all Pine Bluff residents and businesses to fiber internet.

In early discussions about how to bring greater connectivity to the entire community, Go Forward Pine Bluff and Mayor Washington decided to pursue a fiber-based solution if possible. Fiber to the Premise (FTTP) networks offer speeds of up to 1 Gigabit for both uploads and downloads, allowing users to videoconference with great quality, run intensive internet applications, upload and download large quantities of data and information quickly, as well as participate fully in telehealth and remote learning. Because of its capacity to continually offer faster and faster speeds as demand increases, and its resistance to physical deterioration, fiber is also considered the most [“future proof”](#) technology.

“At The Generator, we know how important fiber internet is to economic development and entrepreneurship,” said Mildred Franco, Executive Director of The Generator, which is part of Go Forward Pine Bluff. “Not only does it enable cutting-edge businesses, but fiber internet makes it more attractive to move to an area; apartments fill faster, and housing values go up. This will help with attracting and growing our skilled workforce, and with our ability to attract tech entrepreneurs to Pine Bluff, grow existing businesses and especially *retain* entrepreneurs in the community.”

Mayor Washington noted how the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the need to bring better connectivity to the town, saying, " We have seen a big difference in our ability to teach students remotely based on whether they have access to quality broadband or not. Reaching everyone in the community is not just critical for learning and working during the pandemic, but for doing homework and working from home for years to come."

Go Forward Pine Bluff, CTC Technology, and Rural Innovation Strategies Inc will publish a recommended plan of action on how to best connect residents of Pine Bluff. The report will include a high-level engineering and design plan, construction cost estimates, public-private partnership opportunities, and potential financing strategies that look to leverage federal grant and loan programs for new construction. This process is expected to take 4-6 months with the hope that construction on a new network begins next year.

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