

## **Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation (SKED): Feasibility Study for Economic Development Projects, 2016-2017**

**Opportunity:** SKED is a regional economic development organization that serves 45 counties in east and southeast Kentucky. It provides assistance with recruiting new businesses, making direct loans, providing training and assistance to entrepreneurs, and giving economic development services to local communities. Within SKED's service area, there are 26 Eastern Kentucky counties.

With varying topography and limited resources, SKED was interested in determining the best projects and locations in the 26-county area. It applied for and received a \$100,000 grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) in 2016 to complete a feasibility study to identify economic development projects to best leverage the emerging broadband infrastructure.

**Process:** Instead of conducting a solely data-centric study, TPMA designed a community engagement strategy to generate interest and detailed projects for investment consideration. A structured Request for Proposals (RFP) process was developed with SKED and was targeted toward private businesses, economic development organizations, education institutions, and communities in the 26-county region. Because the region generally has fewer resources, organizations, and dedicated staff for economic development, we designed the process to help local officials and organizations develop tools and analyses to better position their projects for successful investment.

**Solution:** TPMA received fifteen proposals. Ten were selected as being the best candidates for further study. TPMA conducted site visits to understand each project, coordinated with an economic impact analysis, broadband analysis, and, where applicable, engineering analysis and cost estimates provided by a Kentucky-based engineering firm. Based on these analyses, we reduced the project pool to eight finalist projects.

**Results:** Representatives of each of the eight projects assembled in April 2017 for a panel discussion and trade show-style event to promote their projects. Representatives of federal and state organizations with potential funding interests attended, including the EDA, Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development, Department of Local Government, Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR), and others. We provided each finalist with a project profile with key information and all the analyses, including a list of potential funding opportunities. SKED also committed to continue to assist each finalist as much or as little as desired in moving the projects forward.



“TPMA staff is a great force multiplier...TPMA can tackle a bigger project, get it done on time and on budget.”

Brett Traver,  
Executive Director, SKED