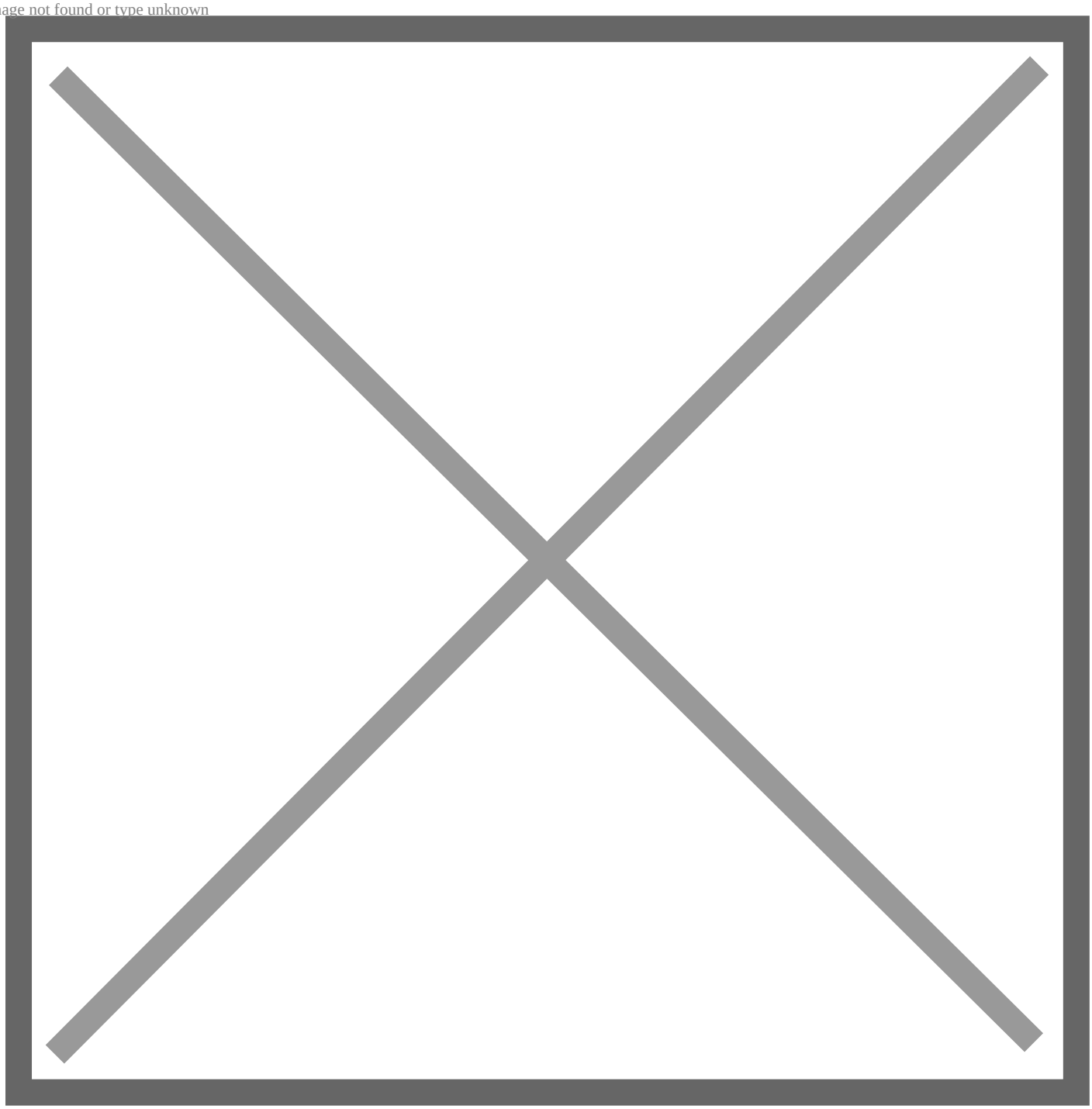
The Michigan Moonshot Partners with Toyota and Cisco to Expand Wi-Fi Access in Detroit, Inkster, Flint and Washtenaw County, Michigan

November 23, 2020

Image not found or type unknown



ANN ARBOR, Mich. (November 23, 2020) — Residents of Detroit, Inkster, Flint and Washtenaw County will soon benefit from expanded free Wi-Fi access at more than 50 community locations across S.E. Michigan. The effort, part of Merit Network's Michigan Moonshot initiative, was supported by contributions from the Toyota USA Foundation and Cisco. Washtenaw Intermediate School District and Merit Network provided in-kind contributions for the project.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Detroit Public Schools has the highest number of households in the state without internet access at 82,894. The Flint School District has the second highest number with 14,221 households without internet access. In addition, 57% of K-12 students in Washtenaw County do not have high speed Wi-Fi access at home.

"For thousands of students across the state of Michigan, the pandemic has introduced new challenges or highlighted existing ones," said Charlotte Bewersdorff, Merit Network's vice president for Community Engagement. "We expect this to help both rural and urban communities access the internet for basic informational needs tied to living, learning and working."

The grants address the digital divide by providing community organizations with the technological ability to extend their existing internet connectivity through Wi-Fi networks which are accessible outside the buildings. Detroit Public Library will extend their Wi-Fi network beyond the walls of nine select sites, during normal business hours. Washtenaw Intermediate School District is coordinating 30 different access points at area schools and community partners across the county.

"As COVID-19 continues to spread throughout our nation, Toyota is proud to partner with Michigan Moonshot and Cisco to expand free Wi-Fi to Southeast Michigan area schools, libraries and community gathering locations to provide an immediate solution to this urgent issue of access," said Chris Reynolds, chief administrative officer, Toyota Motor North America.

Beyond Washtenaw County where Toyota has its North American research and development headquarters, the Toyota USA Foundation provided grants to help address the digital divide in 13 states across the nation.

Internet access at community sites is powered and secured by Cisco's next-generation Wi-Fi and cloud security technology. The overall effort is supported through Cisco's Country Digital Acceleration (CDA) program, which has over 900 active or completed mass-scale digitization projects in 37 countries around the world.

"It is our responsibility as business leaders to step up and mobilize the tools and innovations at our disposal to help curtail the growing disparities in our communities caused by the digital divide," said Nick Michaelides, senior vice president, U.S. Public Sector at Cisco. "We are proud to launch this initiative alongside Merit and Toyota to help ensure equity of access, and to power an inclusive future for all Michiganders."

Moving into the future, the Michigan Moonshot will continue to identify and lessen the impacts of inequitable access to broadband internet with the help from our communities. If your community, private or philanthropic organization is interested in supporting local Community Access Network sites, please contact moonshot@merit.edu.

To view an interactive map of all locations and hours of operation, please visit MichiganMoonshot.org/CommunityWiFi