

BIF Connectivity Accelerator Program for PM WANI culminates in Grand Finale

- *Top 3 performing Startups from 10 finalists receive a grant of INR 20 lakhs each*
- *Program aimed at enhancing PM-WANI (Prime Minister Wi-Fi Access Network Interface) initiative and facilitating proliferation of internet across India*

New Delhi, 17 August 2022: Broadband India Forum (BIF), the leading independent Think-Tank and Policy Forum for Digital Communications in the country, in collaboration with Headstart Network Foundation, and Meta, organised the Grand Finale of its Broadband India Forum Connectivity Accelerator (BIFCA) Program. The BIFCA Program focused on creating awareness, facilitation and proliferation of the Digital Connectivity ecosystem in the country with special emphasis on leveraging the PM-WANI Initiative. The occasion was graced with the presence of **Shri A.K. Tiwari, Member – Technology, Digital Communications Commission, Ministry of Communications, Government of India, as Chief Guest; along with Shri Vivek Narayan, DDG (DS), Department of Telecommunications (DoT); Dr. Pankaj Kumar Dalela, Director, Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT); and Mr. Narendran Varma, Senior Vice President, ACT Fibernet as Special Guests of Honour.**

Chief Guest Shri A.K. Tiwari, Member (T), DCC, commented – *“The BIF Connectivity Accelerator Program targets the promotion of India’s flagship PM WANI Public Wi-Fi initiative with a clear vision to provide seamless access to high speed Wi-Fi to the consumers at affordable costs, while simultaneously creating business and revenue opportunities for shopkeepers/entrepreneurs (referred to as Public Data Offices or PDOs) who will deliver this service. This will go a long way towards connecting the rural, remote and far-flung areas of the country and help bridge the digital divide through the proliferation of Public Wi-Fi hotspots. My compliments to BIF for their successful efforts through this program; and congratulations and best wishes to the winners as well as finalists of the grand finale for their excellent work and their future plans on enhancing India’s Public Wi-Fi footprint by leveraging PM WANI.”*

At the Grand Finale, the top 3 ventures - **LM Energy and Software Pvt. Ltd., M2M Cybernetics Pvt. Ltd., and WIOM** - who created the most impact during the course of the program, and are showing high-potential for growth, each received a grant of INR 20 lakhs. BIF, along with Headstart, India’s largest early stage startup community, will work closely with the winners to further grow the PM WANI ecosystem and enable partnerships to bring quality services to the end users, with values ranging from agriculture and financial solutions, to education, health and relevant content that are most needed in the underserved regions across the country.

Mr. T.V. Ramachandran, President, Broadband India Forum, shared on the occasion, *“We are delighted to see the excellent outcomes of this humble initiative, and would like to congratulate the winners for their deserving awards. We also want to assure that the Grand Finale is not the end of the BIFCA program, but is actually the launchpad for the quantum leap to the next level of PM WANI 2.0. Considering that BIFCA so far has succeeded in exciting the interest of various players in the PM WANI ecosystem, we see more and more interest growing with new business models continuously emerging. We are fully committed to take it to the*

next level going forward, and are optimistic that more such efforts will help us get closer to the national objective of 10 million Wi-Fi hotspots across the country soon."

BIFCA program had shortlisted top 10 ventures from 100's of applications received from across the country and the shortlisted ventures went through an intensive, fast-paced program, to exponentially scale their businesses. The accelerator program offered the shortlisted teams masterclasses and mentorship by industry experts to guide them on leveraging innovative ways to grow their ventures and offer networking opportunities with corporates, and other partners. One of the revolutionary potentials that was unearthed during the accelerator program was that the top startups in the PM WANI ecosystem, while extending internet to the tier 3/4 parts of India, are consequently and rapidly opening up massive uncharted markets.

Commenting on the BIFCA program, Taha Malik, Program Director from Headstart said *"One of the biggest challenges that we see startups solving for Rural India a.k.a "Bharat", is the market access and technology to reach end consumers. With PM-WANI ventures, we see great potential in not just helping get internet to the last mile but also having an on-ground network of people to help bring new age solutions to Rural India. This partnership is a win-win for all stakeholders, and brings real impact to people, who need this the most."*

Under BIFCA, integrating high-potential startups into the PM WANI ecosystem, through the top 10 ventures, proved to be quite successful as this is a goldmine opportunity to explore new markets, and narrow the service availability gap between rural and urban India. This partnership brought in sterling services, which were available only in urban parts, to the rural and remote localities as well. This also attracted other potential beneficiaries of the PM WANI ecosystem such as Corporates, Investors, Foundations, etc. to enter this ecosystem, thereby enhancing its growth potential and scope further. The program also saw ventures raising CSR funds and engaging with some of the top investors in the ecosystem for future.

Please visit www.bifconnectivityaccelerator.headstart.in for more details on the BIF Connectivity Accelerator Program.

About Broadband India Forum

Broadband India Forum (BIF) functions as an independent policy forum and knowledge-based think-tank that works for the development and enhancement of the entire broadband ecosystem in a holistic, technology-neutral and service-neutral manner. BIF has established itself as a thought leader and a credible and effective voice, to help propel the nation to achieve the country's ambitious vision of creating a Digital India. To achieve this, BIF works to promote the rapid development of policies, so as to facilitate affordable and high-speed ubiquitous broadband throughout the country.

About Headstart

Headstart Network Foundation is a community of impactful entrepreneurs, enabling the startup ecosystem since 2007. It is a volunteer driven organization, present in more than 23 cities in India, with chapters in Finland and Germany. They work closely with all the enablers of the startup ecosystem: Startups, Government, Incubators, Corporates, Investors to help them succeed.

For further information, please contact:

Kaustuv Sircar – kaustuv@broadbandindiaforum.in/+91-9999326911/+91-7003157047