

# Fiber Smarts:

How Community Associations  
Can Make a True Apples-to-Apples  
Bid on Internet Services

**fiber**now™

## In today's always-connected world, fast and reliable internet is no longer a luxury; it's an essential utility.

For community associations, investing in a fiber-optic network is one of the most impactful decisions a board can make. But with multiple vendors offering competing proposals, how can boards ensure they're making a true apples-to-apples comparison?

The truth is that not all fiber internet services are created equal. For a connection to be considered true Fiber-to-the-Home/Unit (FTTH/U), the fiber must run directly from the source all the way to each individual unit. To properly assess this, boards must understand the construction methods and network configuration behind each proposal.

What's more, providers often differ significantly in their use of technical language, service packages and pricing structures, making it easy to miss key differences that affect long-term value. Choosing a provider based on price alone may seem fiscally responsible in the short term but can result in performance issues, resident complaints and expensive transitions later.

This article offers a strategic framework to help community associations evaluate fiber-optic proposals side by side, so boards can make informed, confident decisions that benefit their residents for years to come.

### The Challenge of Comparison

Community boards often receive multiple bids from internet service providers, each with differing packages, pricing models and technical terminology. One may include equipment, while another charges separately. One might offer "gigabit service" but only deliver that speed to a shared node and not to each unit. Another might provide symmetrical upload and download speeds, while others don't.

It's easy to get lost in technical jargon or misled by seemingly lower prices. Without a standardized evaluation process, boards may compare vastly different services under the assumption they're the same. What is the result? It is missed opportunities, gaps in future-proofing and resident dissatisfaction.

To avoid this, communities should adopt a consistent method for evaluating bids across a set of core categories.

# WHAT TO COMPARE

Seven Core Categories

# 1



## Network Infrastructure & Technology

Start with the fundamentals: What is the provider actually delivering? True fiber-to-the-home/unit (FTTH/U) means the fiber-optic connection runs directly into each residence, offering the fastest, most reliable service. In contrast, some providers use fiber only to a central node or curb, finishing the connection with outdated copper or coaxial cables that can create potential bottlenecks.

Boards should also ask about the type of fiber technology used. Gigabit Passive Optical Network (GPON) is common but often shared across multiple units. 10-Gigabit Symmetrical Passive Optical Network (XGS-PON), a newer standard, supports higher symmetrical speeds and better scalability.



**ASK**

**What's the last-mile technology?**

**Is each unit receiving a dedicated fiber connection?**

# WHAT TO COMPARE

Seven Core Categories

## 2



### Symmetrical Speeds & Scalability

Download speed is often the headline number, but upload speed is just as critical, especially with video conferencing, cloud storage and smart home devices becoming commonplace.

Symmetrical speeds (e.g., 1 Gbps down and 1 Gbps up) provide a smoother experience than asymmetrical ones (e.g., 1 Gbps down, 100 Mbps up). Boards should also consider whether the network can scale to 2 Gbps or even 10 Gbps without significant infrastructure upgrades.

Providers should clearly outline current speed tiers and their roadmap for future upgrades.



**ASK**

**What is the maximum speed you can offer (1G/10G/50G)?**

**Are speeds symmetrical?**

**If your ceiling is 1G today, what do you need to change to offer 10G?**

# WHAT TO COMPARE

Seven Core Categories

# 3



## Equipment & In-Unit Installation

A fiber network is only as good as its delivery point inside the home. Pay close attention to the Customer Premises Equipment (CPE) included in the proposal.

These details directly impact resident satisfaction and can reduce the volume of service calls.



**ASK**

**How many WiFi access points are included?**

**Is the network professionally managed or simply basic hardware?**

**Is installation handled by technicians, or is it self-install?**

# WHAT TO COMPARE

Seven Core Categories

# 4



## Service-Level Agreements (SLAs)

SLAs define the performance standards the provider is contractually obligated to meet. This is where strong partners separate themselves from the rest. For example, providers who offer service credits for missed SLAs show a real commitment to accountability.

 **ASK**

**What is your uptime guarantee?**

**What are your guaranteed response and resolution times for outages or service issues?**

**Do you offer proactive monitoring and alerts?**

**Are service credits issued for missed SLAs?**

# WHAT TO COMPARE

Seven Core Categories

# 5



## Support & Customer Experience

Even the best technology can fail if support is subpar. Associations should evaluate the provider's customer service experience.

Support is more than fixing problems; it's about trust and peace of mind.



**ASK**

**Is there a dedicated support line for the community?**

**Are customer service reps local or overseas?**

**What are average wait times and first-response rates?**

# WHAT TO COMPARE

Seven Core Categories

# 6



## Bulk Pricing & Contract Terms

Price matters, but only in the context of what's included.

Boards should evaluate the total cost of ownership, not just the monthly per-unit price. A seemingly cheaper provider may cost more in the long run due to poor performance or lack of support.



**Does the price include equipment, installation and maintenance?**

**Are there hidden fees or annual escalators?**

**What is the contract length, and are there renewal options?**

# WHAT TO COMPARE

Seven Core Categories

# 7



## Added Value & Future-Proofing

Some providers offer additional features that enhance value and readiness for the future. Ask how the provider plans to support future needs, like WiFi 7, 50G-PON, smart buildings or energy-efficient technology upgrades without major reinvestments.



**ASK**

**Do you offer bundled streaming, voice or security services?**

**Is community-wide WiFi available in common areas?**

**Would our residents get dashboards or usage reports?**

**Are there plans for ongoing infrastructure upgrades?**

**Do you offer seasonal pause plans for snowbird residents?**

## Creating a Standardized Bid Comparison

To make a true apples-to-apples comparison, boards should develop a bid checklist using the categories above. Require all vendors to complete this checklist during the Request For Proposal (RFP) process.

This removes ambiguity, highlights differences and helps boards clearly identify the proposal that delivers the most value for the contract.

Here's a simplified example:

CATEGORY	PROVIDER A	PROVIDER B	PROVIDER C
Technology	FTTU, XGS-PON	FTTU, HFC	FTTU, GPON
Speed	1 Gbps sym.	1 Gbps/100 Mbps	1 Gbps sym.
Equipment	Included	Leased	Included
SLA	24-hour response	48-hour response	12-hour response
Support	24/7, local	Business hours only	24/7, overseas
Price/Unit	\$65/month	\$60/month + \$5 equipment	\$67/month
Term	10 years	10 years	7 years

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Even with a solid framework, boards can fall into the following common traps:

- Focusing solely on price, without understanding what's included
- Assuming all fiber networks are built the same
- Ignoring SLAs and support structures
- Failing to gather resident input on pain points and expectations

Boards can avoid these missteps by asking the right questions and expecting detailed answers.

## Final Thoughts: Fiber as a Long-Term Investment

Fiber is more than a utility — it's infrastructure that defines the digital experience of your community. Making decisions based on long-term value rather than short-term cost ensures that residents enjoy fast, reliable internet now and are ready for the technologies of tomorrow.

By applying a clear, consistent approach to comparing bids, community associations can protect their investment, increase resident satisfaction and build lasting partnerships with providers who are committed to future-ready solutions.

If your board is preparing to evaluate internet bulk proposals, start by creating a comparison checklist or reach out to a provider, like Fibernow, that can help guide you through the process. A well-informed decision today leads to a better-connected, future-proof community tomorrow.

### ABOUT **fibernow**<sup>™</sup>

Founded in 2004 and based in South Florida, Fibernow (formerly OpticalTel) is a leading fiber broadband provider serving both communities and businesses across Florida. Fibernow delivers high-speed fiber internet, cloud-based television, digital voice and a comprehensive suite of business services — including managed IT, hosted voice and multi-gig internet — tailored to support small to mid-sized businesses and large-scale community properties. From residential neighborhoods and HOAs to student housing and assisted living facilities, Fibernow is committed to providing fast, reliable connectivity that powers digital experiences in today's connected world.

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