NEXT CENTURY CITIES URGES THE FCC TO CLARIFY ITS BROADBAND DATA CHALLENGE PROCESS BEFORE STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS INVEST ADDITIONAL RESOURCES INTO DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGIES

Washington, D.C. (July 7, 2022) – The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is revamping its Broadband Data Collection Program. Meanwhile, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is working to distribute tens of billions of federal dollars to support state and local broadband initiatives.

Next Century Cities led allies in a group letter with the National Broadband Mapping Coalition, Buckeye Hills Regional Council, Access Humboldt, SA Digital Connects, the National Association of Counties, California Community Foundation, and South Bay Cities Council of Governments, urging the Commission to clarify what the FCC’s new broadband mapping challenge process entails. As noted in the letter, local governments and consumers are directly impacted by inaccurate federal mapping. Uncertainty related to the challenge process can be a drain on already limited community resources. Clarity about what information will be included in the FCC’s updated protocols would boost local leaders’ participation in informing data sets.

Corian Zacher, Senior Policy Counsel at Next Century Cities, offered the following remarks:

“Accurately mapping service is a necessary first step to ensure that broadband funding reaches perpetually overlooked communities. While some are already prepared for upcoming data improvement opportunities, the lack of broadband access often hinders effective preparation in communities that most need it. The FCC can provide much-needed guidance by inviting local leaders into the mapping process with clear pathways for participation. Transparency about the process and publishing examples of what the FCC will accept in a successful challenge are specific ways to get them started.”

Dustin Loup, Program Manager, National Broadband Mapping Coalition, stated:

“The FCC has a mandate and an opportunity to implement a well-designed challenge process that accomplishes what it is intended to do – improve the accuracy of the maps using more local data. If implemented correctly, this would empower state, local, Tribal, and territorial governments to advocate for the solutions their communities need. If not, many of these communities may be
unduly excluded from participating in the programs designed to provide the support they need. Getting this right starts with coordination, transparency, and clarity."

Shayna Englin, Director, California Community Foundation Digital Equity Initiative, noted: “Community and local input into the mapping process is an unmitigated public good; ensuring that the lived experience and first-hand, on-the-ground reality of families, small businesses, and anchor institutions is part of the resulting maps - and useful when it comes to inevitable challenges - should be a priority. Transparency and straightforward guidance will go a long way.”

Read the group letter here.  

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