

Broadband 101

with Corian Zacher and Lukas Pietrzak

Why does universal broadband matter?

- Provides access to vital services such as healthcare, education, employment, financial institutions, and government offices.
- Enables participation in community events, communication with family, and maintaining social connections.
- Improves economic opportunities for residents and allows residents to age in place, keeping communities and families together.

How important is data and mapping?

Before we can achieve universal broadband, we must understand who lacks access to fast, affordable, and reliable broadband. Current maps from the Federal Communications Commission often overstate availability.

Steps to Take:

- Consider launching a speed test system for your community
- Circulate a survey online and in-print at community locations to ask residents about access and adoption
- Partner with your state government to support a statewide mapping initiative

Additional Reading:

- [Next Century Cities: Mapping Across America](#)
- [NCC Joins SHLB Coalition Allies in Broadband Mapping Call with FCC Bureau Staff](#)
- [There are lots of ways that Congress can help to expand broadband. Here are a few places to start.](#)

What should I know about funding?

Federal funding programs:

- NTIA reports that there are [57 federal funding programs spanning 14 agencies](#). Some of those programs are available to communities nationwide that meet particular requirements, others are targeted at specific geographic areas.
- [Federal Communications Commission](#) (Rules are set by the FCC, administered by the Universal Service Administration Company or USAC):
 - [Lifeline](#) (provides a \$9.25 subsidy that can be used toward mobile service or a wireline service)
 - [High Cost](#) (available to connect areas that are unserved or underserved with broadband infrastructure)

- [E-Rate](#) (provides service discounts to schools and libraries)
- [Rural Healthcare](#) (funds voice and internet services to healthcare providers)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
 - [ReConnect Loan and Grant Program](#) (supports broadband expansion initiatives in rural areas)
- Department of Education
 - [Rural and Low-Income Schools grant program](#) (provides rural, low-income K-12 school districts for broadband infrastructure and digital tools training)
 - [Promise Neighborhoods program](#) (provides funds to libraries, schools, Tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, and rural recipients that can be used for broadband infrastructure and adoption)
- COVID-19 recovery programs
 - [CARES Act](#) (distributed funding to states that was used for varying purposes by state, with some states taking an expansive view and others narrowly targeting funding at K-12 initiatives)
 - [December 2020 COVID relief](#) (includes a \$50 broadband benefit that can be used in addition to Lifeline and funding for increasing access on Tribal lands, in rural areas, and around historically Black colleges and universities. The bill also provided additional funding for the FCC's telehealth initiative and to improve broadband mapping)

Are there various models and technologies we can use?

Our team knows that there is no single solution to close the digital divide across the country. Instead, local communities must explore the needs and assets of their municipality and develop a plan that works best for them.

- Business Models:
 - Fully Private Owned and Operated Network
 - Public Private Partnerships
 - Local government financially supports service for government buildings or certain locations
 - Local governments assists in infrastructure deployment or other operational ways
 - Electric/Broadband Co-Ops
 - Open Access Network
 - Fully Municipally Owned and Operated Network
- Technologies
 - Satellite: Almost universally available across the country
 - Fixed Wireless: A fixed connection is connected to a tower that provides a wireless connection to surrounding areas
 - Copper/DSL: A connection provided over existing copper or phone lines
 - Coax/Cable: A connection provided by cable providers over existing networks
 - Fiber: The fastest network connection provided over fiber optic cables

How has COVID-19 affected state and local efforts?

COVID-19 has increased the resources available to state and local governments to improve broadband. The pandemic made a lack of ubiquitous broadband access tangible, and local governments across the country found that even their own colleagues did not always have the requisite connectivity needed to work from home. At the same time, those resources have not always come with institutional support or instructions on how the money can legally be used and included a deadline that made infrastructure projects unrealistic for many communities. In some cities and counties, COVID-19 became an opportunity to mobilize awareness for broadband challenges and build lasting and resilient solutions for residents.

- Additional reading:
 - [State Government COVID-19 Digital Inclusion Response](#)
 - [Local Government COVID-19 Digital Inclusion Response](#)
 - [Broadband Demands During COVID-19 Reveal Disparities](#)

What will broadband and COVID-19 recovery look like under the new Administration?

As the Biden-Harris Administration kicks off their policy agenda, we are looking forward to their commitment to close the digital divide. The beginning of a new Presidential Administration is a great time to explore what President Biden and Vice President Harris have said about broadband. The Biden Administration has pledged to take major steps to close the digital divide for all people:

- President Biden plans to expand funding for connectivity in federal child care centers and public schools, especially Title I schools.
- President Biden has committed to supporting a widespread infrastructure plan that would upgrade our crumbling telecommunications infrastructure.
- President Biden has supported the Digital Equity Act and plans to work with Congress and the FCC to invest more heavily in Universal Service Fund programs.
- President Biden has committed to investing in Rural Economic Development and plans to prioritize closing the digital divide for hard-to-reach communities

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