AZBSN Arizona Broadband Stakeholder Network

Arizona Telecommunications and Information Council

August 24, 2020 AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force Teleconference Report

Attendees

Steve Peters, Oris Friesen, Henry Goldberg, Mark Goldstein, Kristen Adams, Collin Boyce, Melissa Boydston, Amanda Bruno, Michael Cohen, Jerry Crow, Alexandra Dominguez, Ian Hathcock, Holly Henley, John Kelly, Tarma Liranzo, Ilana Lowery, Derek Masseth, Mala Muralidharan, Mauricio Orozco, Cody Pedersen, Lea Marquez Peterson, Alan Pruitt, Tracy Rexroat, Michelle Simon, Jeff Sobotka, Graham Taylor, Nicole Umayam, Karen Ziegler

Updates: State Broadband Director, AZ State Library, ACC, Public Safety

State Broadband Director Update

Jeff Sobotka, State Broadband Director at the Arizona Commerce Authority (ACA), reviewed his recent activities.

Jeff reported that the response deadline is today for the Arizona Dept. of Transportation (ADOT) RFI on statewide fiber middle-mile infrastructure to reach rural communities. ADOT has received a number of responses including from consultants and communities that have expressed their needs. The next step beyond the RFI will likely be to issue an RFP.

Jeff is very involved with several Arizona communities that have applied for Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants. Jeff stated that ACA works closely with EDA. EDA typically funds infrastructure and is now particularly focused on broadband infrastructure. Communities such as Yuma County, Springerville, St. Johns, and communities in northern Arizona are applying for these grants. EDA grants are geared towards rural communities' government organizations. Jeff noted that Cindi Ptak is the new EDA representative for Arizona (she will be located in Gilbert), and Cindi presented at an ACA webinar on August 11th. EDA funds shovel-ready projects as well as planning work. Jeff is focused on obtaining federal government funding for Arizona broadband projects and these EDA grants are an important funding opportunity. The EDA received about $1.5 billion in CARES Act funding, of which about $40 million was available for Arizona and other states in its region. EDA grant applications are considered on a first come – first serve basis, so Jeff encourages communities to apply as soon as possible before the funding is exhausted. Jeff added that Mark Goldstein's list of Arizona broadband consultants can be used by communities to help apply for EDA grants.

Jeff thanked Mark Goldstein for his work on putting together the broadband sections of the Arizona Technology Council 2021 Public Policy Guide.

Arizona State Library Update

Mala Muralidharan, E-rate Administrator for Public Libraries at the Arizona State Library, reported on Arizona State Library activities. Mala reported that E-rate application reviews are still happening and funding is going ahead quickly. There are federal-level adjustments being considered for the E-rate 2021 funding year, including allowing Wi-Fi to be extended from school/library anchor institutions beyond their parking lots (if this is allowed, the FCC would decide on the rules for this and cost allocations). There are upcoming E-rate webinars: a Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition (SHLB) webinar on September 11th about how E-rate handles remote learning (see the Appendix Chat), and a series of webinars to increase tribal participation in E-rate. Mala noted that SHLB has proposed an "E-rate to the Home" bill and conducts presentations on various broadband issues. Alexandra Domingues asked if E-rate rules could be changed to expand Wi-Fi coverage from schools, and Mala responded that current FCC rules only allow Wi-Fi extension to school parking lots so would need an FCC waiver or new bill to allow this. Collin Boyce added there is interest in using the fiber access to the Internet from schools but that is not currently allowed.

Mala and Ilana Lowery reported that information on the Arizona Free Wi-Fi Map Portal is being distributed to as many people and organizations that may have an interest in using this. Steve Peters commented that Kathy Hoffman, Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction, tweeted about this Wi-Fi Map. Alexandra Dominguez, Director State Government Relations of the College Board, remarked she has shared this map with students and parents. Nicole Umayam noted the Wi-Fi Map Portal has been up for about a month, and has been widely promoted for about two weeks. Nicole has added 50 new Wi-Fi hotspot locations (e.g. schools, libraries, Starbucks locations) to the map and she will be rolling out an updated map with a total of 700 Wi-Fi hotspots on it. Ilana commented she has had discussions with service providers about additional free Wi-Fi hotspots they offer, and Nicole commented that service provider hotspots typically require you to be a customer of the service provider to use them so she intends to specify that on the map. Ilana stated that some areas like Mohave County lack free Wi-Fi hotspots, and Jeff Sobotka responded he will suggest to service providers that they add Wi-Fi hotspots in such areas. Ilana added that it is important to know whether free Wi-Fi hotspots allow students to work from inside the location so they can effectively do schoolwork, and it will be useful for the Wi-Fi Map to specify which hotspots allow one to work inside.

ACC Update

Lea Marquez Peterson, Commissioner of the Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC), reported she has been tackling the issue of transitioning the Arizona Universal Service Fund (AUSF), which is $500,000 - $600,000 in 2021, to support broadband services in high-cost areas. She has discussed with ACC staff how to amend the rules and whether this can be done on an emergency basis. Lea says this AUSF transition must be supported by at least three of the five ACC Commissioners, but does not need to be addressed by the State Legislature. She will report on the progress on the AUSF transition at future task force meetings. Steve Peters noted that this AUSF transition to support broadband services is a recommendation that will be included in the task force's recommendations document.

Lea added that she is promoting the Arizona State Library Free Wi-Fi Map Portal.

Public Safety Update

Karen Ziegler, Public Safety Program Manager at the Arizona Dept. of Administration (ADOA), reported she has left her position at ADOA. Karen stated that she intends to stay involved with this task force, and will let the task force know her future activities.

Jeff Sobotka stated he hopes Karen will continue to be involved with the state government.

Technology Subcommittee

John Kelly, co-leader of the Technology Subcommittee, reported that at the subcommittee's meeting on August 18th the broadband access technologies section for underserved/unserved communities, which is being prepared by John and Mark Goldstein for the task force recommendations document, was reviewed. This includes a menu of technology options describing their features, cost characteristics, and pros & cons, as well as their suitablility for different geographies (urban, suburban, rural-major, and rural-minor areas). They are also working on including some small case studies. There is also a white paper by US Ignite on business model options for municipalities that discusses a continuum of possible private-public partnerships, which will be summarized in this technology section (Mark posted a link to this white paper in the Appendix Chat). Jeff Sobotka stated the business model is the biggest challenge communities face (how to use technologies in a business model that makes sense), and the ADOT RFI for fiber middle-mile infrastructure is also considering business models. Steve Peters noted the Technology Subcommittee's technology section will be included as an appendix in the overall task force recommendations document.

Arizona Technology Council Public Policy Guide

Mark Goldstein reported he has completed and distributed his draft of the broadband sections for the Arizona Technology Council 2021 Public Policy Guide. The broadband sections address transportation/digital infrastructure, education/workforce, universities/higher education, and telehealth. This draft includes some recommendations coming out of our AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force.

Mark noted that he worked with the Arizona Commerce Authority on constructing this draft. This draft must be approved and may be revised by the Arizona Technology Council Public Policy Committee for publication in the Public Policy Guide.

Mark stated that Ben Blink, Governor Ducey's Policy Advisor for Transportation and Technology Innovation, has requested a meeting with the Arizona Technology Council Public Policy Committee to discuss the broadband sections of the Public Policy Guide for consideration for the Governor's future budget and policy priorities.

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Task Force Preliminary Recommendations Document

Steve Peters is continuing work on drafting the task force's preliminary (Phase One) recommendations document.

This recommendations draft document will be discussed at the August 25th Technology Subcommittee meeting. Steve has also sent an e-mail to a core group of people about editing this document and scheduling a session to do this.

John Kelly noted the Arizona Dept. of Education (ADE) Technology Task Force needs to set directions for the future. Steve responded that some people on our task force participate in this ADE task force so can discuss relevant directions with them.

Next Steps

The next AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force overall meeting will be held on Monday, August 31st at 7:30 am.

This week, the Technology subcommittee will meet on Tuesday August 25th at 9:30 am. No meetings will be held this week of the Education and Libraries and Funding and Resources subcommittees.

Henry Goldberg and Oris Friesen will write up a summary report of today's task force meeting.

Appendix: Chat from Zoom

From Josh to Everyone: (7:32 AM)
  good morning. I want to let you all know I have to leave at 8:00

From Mark Goldstein to Everyone: (7:41 AM)

[file: AZTC State Broadband Policy Brief 2021 V01D.docx]
  Here's the draft of the Arizona Tech Council State Broadband Policy brief I submitted last Friday after workshopping with ACA leadership. Thanks to all who contributed.

From John Kelly to Everyone: (7:41 AM)
  Amen to that Jeff!!!

From Karen Ziegler to Everyone: (7:43 AM)
  Thank you! I will still be around and will share my new contact information with Steve.

From Alan Pruitt to Everyone: (7:44 AM)
  Cindi Ptak (EDA) Broadband Program Highlights - https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1-Fo8VWl4qhbCWnRoK--qKsaogdo9UaSvUw2oxsvd2xE/edit#slide=id.p

From Mark Goldstein to Everyone: (7:47 AM)

[file: AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force - Arizona Broadband Consultants V02G.docx]
  Here's the current, updated AZBSN Broadband Consultants List FYI.

From Jeff Sobotka to Everyone: (7:48 AM)
  jeffs@azcommerce.com cell 602-432-0004

From Alan Pruitt to Everyone: (7:50 AM)

Selected Federal Agency Funding Announcements - 08-21-2020 - Some are related to broadband - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q9V5HVzfyi-oaAdOW5FKYxuOEbikP89-/view?usp=sharing

From Lea Marquez Peterson to Everyone: (7:52 AM)
  Mala - As you know, students are scrambling to access broadband for the start of school. Are students allowed to stay inside any of the libraries (with social distancing) for a longer period of time to access their classes? I've heard schools are also opening up their buildings and spreading kids out among the rooms to access their internet.

From Nicole Umayam to Everyone: (7:57 AM)
  @Lea it's complicated and there is no singular mode of operations as each library/library system. Some libraries are open to the public and some are not. Some libraries are allowing 45 min appointments for use of study rooms, computers, etc. Other libraries are open to the public for limited time periods as well. Other libraries are still closed to the public

From Lea Marquez Peterson to Everyone: (8:01 AM)
  www.Connect-Arizona.com - directs people to the Arizona library website that lists public wifi spots, tech help and devices. Shorter url for promotion.

From Ilana Lowery to Everyone: (8:02 AM)
  Thanks, Lea. We've changed it to this much easier URL in all of our promotion materials.

From Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone: (8:03 AM)
  SHLB Workshop: How Does E-rate Handle Remote Learning?
September 11, 2020
1:00 to 2:30 p.m. ET, Live Online
Register at https://www.anchornets.org/e-rate-1

From Ilana Lowery to Everyone: (8:03 AM)
  If anyone knows of free wifi hotspots in Mohave County, please let me or Nicole know so we add them to the site. There's a lot of gaps…

From Mark Goldstein to Everyone: (8:03 AM)

[file: US Ignite - Broadband Models for Unserved & Underserved Communities 2020.pdf]

From Mark Goldstein to Everyone: (8:03 AM)
  US Ignite Broadband Models for Unserved & Underserved Communities, showing how a continuum of public-private partnerships can be modeled and structured to invest, manage, and profit by P3 broadband infrastructure investments. See press release at https://www.us-ignite.org/news/us-ignite-and-altman-solon-release-extensive-report-on-broadband-models-for-pool-of-6500-unserved-and-underserved-communities/ and attached PDF.

From Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone: (8:08 AM)

Lea, Nicole answered your question. It is still a huge problem . Many parents are having to make hard choices between sending kids to in-person school and risk getting infected versus keeping them home and trying to access free wifi and not learning much this year....

From Lea Marquez Peterson to Everyone: (8:10 AM)
  Nicole/ Mala -Thank you!

From Nicole Umayam to Everyone: (8:16 AM)
  Some libraries have a front area/lobby that can be opened for the public, but some have been directed by their cities to close those lobbies

From Nicole Umayam to Everyone: (8:17 AM)
  e.g. Sierra Vista had lobby access and laptops to check out for use in the lobby at the beginning of the pandemic, then were later told by their city to close the lobby space as well

From Alexandra Dominguez to Everyone: (8:19 AM)
  When it comes to student connectivity, I know that identifying the actual level of need and the connectivity deserts are has been a challenge. I know ADE issues a survey back in the spring but only 300 LEAs responded. Are we including in our recommendations to do another survey/effort to ascertain where the needs still are?