

Greater Arizona Educational Leadership  
**AZBSN** Arizona Broadband  
Stakeholder Network

Arizona Telecommunications and Information Council  
**COVID-19 DIGITAL ACCESS TASK FORCE**

## Media Release

### Arizona Digital Access Task Force publishes Comprehensive Statewide Digital Access Strategy Report

#### Contact

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#### [Download Digital Access Task Force Report](#)

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In 2020 the Arizona Broadband Stakeholder Network, a collaborative initiative of the [Arizona Telecommunications and Information Council \(ATIC\)](#) and the [Greater Arizona Educational Leadership \(GAZEL\) organization](#) created the [COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force](#) to address the unprecedented demand for **Internet and other digital access services and resources** in Arizona resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic's social and physical distancing requirements.

**In November 2020 the Task Force published a [Comprehensive Statewide Digital Access Strategy Report](#).**

The Report provides short and long term tactical and strategic recommendations and initiatives to address the digital access needs of all Arizona citizens, including students, parents, teachers, seniors, and library patrons, especially

those citizens in tribal, rural and other underserved communities and low-income neighborhoods in Arizona. The initiatives also address the need for Internet and other digital access services and resources to enable schools, universities, community colleges, homes, libraries, healthcare facilities, businesses and communities to support education, healthcare, community services, economic development, and more.

The report, submitted on behalf of the more than 50 public and private digital access advocates participating in the statewide Task Force, is intended for public and private advocates and policy and decision-makers representing State and Local Government, Business and Industry, Rural Communities, Economic Development, Education, Healthcare, Public Safety, Libraries, Nonprofit Organizations, and Telecommunications and Technology Companies.

The Task Force has already begun implementing these recommendations, but it will take the entire digital access stakeholder community to realize equitable digital access for all.

## Digital Access

The pandemic has illuminated the long-standing deficiencies in affordable broadband Internet access in Arizona. Many Arizona citizens, including students, parents, teachers, seniors, businesses and employees, and library patrons do not have affordable access to the Internet. **Digital access is more than affordable Internet access. While everyone needs to get connected, the report emphasizes that in addition to Internet, all Arizona citizens must also have access to: 1) affordable devices such as computers, smartphones and home hotspots; 2) skills and technical support to enable them to use the devices, the Internet and applications effectively; 3) digital literacy and web literacy skills and 4) access to digital content, applications and other resources.**

## About the Task Force

The Task Force has engaged public and private leaders and industry experts to share information and collaborate on recommendations and critical digital access initiatives for Arizona. Participation in the Task Force includes representation across State and Local Government, Public Policy Makers, Rural Community Leaders, Economic Development, Education, Health Services, Public Safety, Libraries, Nonprofit Organizations, Telecommunication Service Providers, and Technology Companies. Every Monday morning at 7:30 am 30-40 Task Force members meet for: federal, state and local community updates; digital access resource presentations and; information and resource sharing.

## The Report and Recommendations

**The report includes:** 1) An Executive Summary; 2) About the AZBSN Task Force; 3) Why This is Important - Unprecedented Demand for Digital Access; Digital Access Needs and Issues; 4) Understanding Broadband Infrastructure Deployment - Issues, Challenges and Solutions; 5) State of Arizona Broadband and Other Digital Access Initiatives; 6) AZBSN Task Force Recommendations & Call to Action.

**The recommendations include:** 1) Technology and Infrastructure; 2) State and Community Digital Access Planning; 3) Funding and Resources Support Strategies; 4) State Broadband and Digital Inclusion Leadership, Policy and Regulation; 5) Technical Support and Professional Development for Education and the Community; 6) Public Access to Digital Resources; 7) Educational Digital Content and Resource Sharing; 8) Safe Operations of Schools, Libraries and Public Spaces in the COVID-19 Environment.

## Why This Is Important - COVID-19 and Unpresented Demand for Digital Access

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic the world is creating the largest telecommunity of all time. Social and physical distancing is becoming the new normal requiring unpresented demand for digital access. Schools are closed and are working hard to convert to online and digital learning! Businesses are closed or transitioning to online engagement with their customers, while millions of employees are working from home and participating in online meetings with colleagues! Libraries are closed and often unable to provide internet access to their patrons! Overwhelmed healthcare facilities committed to meeting demand and protecting patients and staff, are providing interaction with patients through telemedicine! Government services are transitioning to online citizen access!

Many students can't participate in online learning, and the populations most in need of telemedicine such as the elderly and those with existing serious health conditions, often cannot access telemedicine services. Many small businesses are unable to provide telework opportunities for their employees. Without broadband, many people are isolated and unable to communicate with their friends, family, colleagues, and, perhaps most importantly, their healthcare providers. These citizens are being left behind because they don't have access to reliable broadband and other digital access services and resources. Unfortunately, broadband and other digital access services and resources are not available to many Arizona citizens, including students, parents, teachers, seniors, library patrons and the general public, especially those citizens in tribal, rural and other underserved communities and low-income neighborhoods in Arizona.

## More Information

For more information about AZBSN and the COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force, and to download the Task Force Report, see the [Media Release Webpage](#).

If you have any questions, please contact us by phone or e-mail  
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