

February 1, 2021 AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force Teleconference Report

Attendees

Steve Peters, Oris Friesen, Henry Goldberg, Mark Goldstein, Robert Alvarado, Marni Anbar, Tracey Beal, Andrew Bevington, Wes Brownfield, Kirk Busch, Gene Carl, Tony Casella, Michael Cohen, Zech Crook, Jerry Crow, Dominic DeMark, Milan Eaton, Terence Ford, Rick Gibson, Ian Hathcock, Holly Henley, Steve Hill, Cindy Hogan, Dan Hunt, Shereka Jackson, John Kelly, Ryan Kelly, Tarma Liranzo, Ilana Lowery, Derek Masseth, Sophia Mayberry, Ryan McCaigue, Frank Milstead, Jeff Mirasola, Georgina Monsalvo, Mala Muralidharan, Tom O'Halleran, Mauricio Orozco, Cody Pedersen, Lawrie Prickett, Tracy Rexroat, Edgar Rivas, Paul Ross, Ryan Ross, Michelle Simon, Troy Smith, Jeff Sobotka, Paul Stapleton-Smith, Nicole Umayam, Karen Ziegler

Task Force Funding, Meetings Length, Planning Committee

Task Force Funding

Steve Peters stated that he is seeking funding support for the task force to continue its operations in 2021 (ATIC provided seed funding support in 2020). Steve e-mailed all task force participants on January 28th a task force funding request package, and stated he would appreciate funding from their organizations if possible and also asked that this request be forwarded to other organizations that may be interested in providing such funding.

Task Force Meetings Length

Steve noted he included a survey in his January 28 e-mail asking task force participants whether they would like to see longer task force meetings from 7:30 – 9:00 am to accommodate the greater number of participants now attending the meetings. An option to keep the meetings at the current length of 7:30 – 8:30 am could be to dispense with the introductions of task force meeting attendees and just include this attendees' information in the Chat.

Task Force Planning Committee

Steve will be establishing a task force planning committee to address implementation of recommendations specified in the task force recommendations report. This will be necessary for the next phase of work done by this task force.

Updates: State Broadband Director (only time for this update today)

State Broadband Director Update

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

Jeff is following state legislature activities pertaining to broadband. He hopes that the Governor's proposal for \$10 million of Rural Broadband Development Grants (RBDG) will be approved – this RBDG funding was used in the previous year to support broadband planning and for broadband infrastructure matching funds for federal grants. New state RBDG funding will be helpful in applying for the new federal broadband funding available through the federal stimulus package. There is another state bill dealing with enabling rights-of-way for ADOT deployment of fiber along state highways. Karen Ziegler asked for identification of the bill numbers for these pieces of legislation, and Jeff replied he would look into that.

Jeff is partnering with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to put together a series of broadband workshops that will address planning, federal funding, and implementation issues for getting broadband to Arizona's rural communities. NTIA is under the Department of Commerce and has about 28 employees. NTIA received \$1.6 billion for broadband in the federal stimulus funding, including \$300 million for a broadband deployment grant program to support broadband infrastructure deployment especially in rural areas. The NTIA BroadbandUSA Arizona Broadband Workshops will begin March 3rd at 10:00 am, and there will be six monthly workshops on the first Wednesday of each month including a tribal-only workshop. (More detailed information will be posted on the task force website.) Key federal broadband granting agencies such as the EDA, USDA, and FCC will be involved in these workshops. Louisiana and Idaho have been the first two states to hold such NTIA workshops. Jeff emphasized that any organization applying for a federal or state broadband grant should attend these workshops, and Jeff would appreciate this task force's assistance in reaching out to state communities and organizations to inform them about these workshops. Steve Peters asked if NTIA grant applications will be difficult to write -- Jeff replied that he is communicating with NTIA on their writing of the rules for how this funding will be allocated including doing away with the matching funds requirement, and NTIA has been responsive. Jeff noted that NTIA has the responsibility to coordinate federal broadband grant programs among the different agencies. Steve requested Jeff send him the slide on the NTIA workshops so he can distribute this to the task force.

Congressman Tom O'Halleran Presentation

Jeff Sobotka introduced Congressman Tom O'Halleran, U.S. Representative for Arizona's 1st Congressional District. Tom O'Halleran served three times in Arizona's House of Representatives and then the State Senate before becoming a U.S Congressman representing the 1st Congressional District that covers a large region of northern Arizona. Jeff stated that Congressman O'Halleran's office is the most engaged Congressional office that he works with on broadband issues. Following is a summary of key points from Congressman O'Halleran's presentation, and the recording of the full presentation will be posted on the task force website.

Congressman O'Halleran noted that a number of areas in his district have poor or no broadband service, and emphasized that broadband is necessary for education, health care, and to enable businesses to function and compete. The Navajo Nation in his district are creating Wi-Fi hotspots for example, and various Arizona counties and organizations are working to create broadband solutions.

The United States currently lacks a strong national broadband policy. The CARES Act recognized the need for broadband funding to support education and health care, but there is still a long way to go in deploying broadband infrastructure nationally. There is talk in Congress of proposing a national infrastructure bill for consideration in fall 2021 which might total \$1.5 - \$2 trillion in funding. Congressman O'Halleran is considering how much of this funding should go for broadband infrastructure (e.g. \$85 billion nationally), but there is a need for an effective federal – states collaborative process to identify clear goals and efficient plans for how such broadband infrastructure funding should be allocated. This is critical for the nation's future competitiveness and for rural America (urban areas depend on rural America for their survival and transportation). The future American workforce will be fundamentally dependent on having appropriate broadband/digital infrastructure and skills, and so it is critical that Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and rural American workers are appropriately supported in the future.

Congressman O'Halleran emphasized that broadband is the highest priority of his office because of its critical importance for rural America. He serves on four Congressional Committees including Communications & Technology, Energy, and Environment & Climate Change, and will interject broadband into the discussions of these committees. His focus will be on what needs to be done now and where the country should be 20 – 30 years from now.

Steve Peters commented there is a need for a federal government plan as well as coordination of the federal agencies that provide funding. Steve noted that our task force is focused on going beyond broadband connectivity to include all aspects of digital access including devices, technical support, digital literacy training, and digital content. Congressman O'Halleran responded that he agrees with this digital equity concept, and there are discussions ongoing in the House and Senate on the importance of this.

Jeff Sobotka commented that about 80% of Arizona land is owned by federal, tribal, state governments, and so it is critical that federal agencies' approvals of rights-of-way for broadband infrastructure be streamlined. Congressman O'Halleran responded that jurisdiction and funding is spread among multiple federal agencies, and there are insufficient personnel to handle all the needs. He added that there must be more efficient coordination among federal agencies, and there should generally be more effective planning rather than just reacting to crises.

Steve Peters invited Edgar Rivas, Congressman O'Halleran's Sr. Policy Advisor, to participate in our task force meetings and also invited the Congressman to participate when he has time. Edgar responded he would participate in the task force meetings as time permits, and he has looked at our task force report, which he views as comprehensive. Congressman O'Halleran stated that broadband and health care are the top priorities of his office, and Edgar's participation in our task force will help enable his office's objective to be a driving force for digital access in Congress.

Jeff Sobotka asked how is the Arizona Congressional delegation beyond Congressman O'Halleran's office responding to the digital access area. Edgar responded that Senators Sinema and Kelly should be supporters of this as the COVID-19 crisis has placed greater emphasis on its importance. Edgar noted that the federal stimulus allocated \$3.2 billion for an "Emergency Broadband Benefit" program at the FCC for low-income Americans that provides a \$50 monthly discount to qualifying households and \$75 monthly discount for households on tribal lands. He added that the new Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth at NTIA will have three duties: coordinate where funding is going in a timely manner, education/outreach on broadband adoption and digital literacy, and creating a single application to access multiple federal funding programs in a streamlined process.

Mala Muralidharan submitted the following notes after the task force meeting about the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program. The FCC has received over 150 comments on the implementation of this EBB program, which will provide the discounts Edgar mentioned for Internet services and up to \$100 for connecting devices for low-income households for an emergency period ending six months after the federal government deems that the COVID crisis has been resolved. A growing number of schools are already providing at-home financial support covering mobile hotspots, computing devices, and ongoing monthly Internet services for students who would not otherwise be able to afford these for remote learning. Comments stress the rules should make it clear that EBB discounts should apply to eligible student households regardless of in whose names the monthly subscriptions are held (i.e. the households or the schools). Another important comment is that EBB rules should specify appropriate Internet service bandwidth since 25/3 Mbps may meet the needs of a single user but greater bandwidth will be required for households with more than one concurrent remote learner. See Appendix 1 for the full e-mail from Mala regarding comments submitted on the EBB program..

Paul Stapleton-Smith of the AFL-CIO commented that digital access is needed for workforce development now, and asked how this will be provided. Edgar responded that hotspot donation drives (such as those organized by Jeff Sobotka and others on this task force) are a valuable near-term solution, but for the long-term students and workers require better infrastructure solutions. Edgar added that the federal stimulus funds the FCC to construct new more granular broadband availability maps on where broadband is needed, and the private sector (e.g. Cox Connect2Compete program and Cox & Comcast hub/community zones) are providing new Internet service offerings to help meet such needs.

Wes Brownfield, Executive Director of the Arizona Rural Schools Association, commented that their "Final Mile Project" is considering opportunities to build out last mile broadband access from schools to student homes because rural students need to be able to work effectively from home, particularly during the COVID crisis. Wes congratulated the task force on its comprehensive report, and would like to work with the task force on the Final Mile Project. See the Appendix Chat for further information.

Steve Peters concluded saying he would greatly appreciate Edgar providing occasional federal government updates for our task force. Edgar replied that he would do this and put his contact information in the Appendix Chat.

Next Steps

The next AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force overall meeting will be held on Monday, February 8th at 7:30 am.

Steve noted that Kajeet has contacted him about finding a community that would be interested in working on a LEO satellite demonstration project.

Steve has asked Rick Gibson of Sustainability Partner and Gene Carl of Cox Communications to deliver presentations to the task force in the near future.

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

Appendix 1: Mala Muralidharan Notes on Emergency Broadband Benefit Program

Emergency Broadband Benefit Program Comments

As of last Monday, the FCC had received over 150 comments on the implementation of the Emergency Broadband Benefit (“EBB”) program, a component of the recent COVID stimulus legislation (the Consolidated Appropriation Act, 2021). **When implemented, the EBB program will provide discounts up to \$50/month (\$75/month in tribal areas) on internet services (and up to \$100 for connecting devices) for low income households for an “emergency period” ending six months after the government deems that the COVID crisis has been resolved. The program is expected to be put in place in less than 40 days and last at least through 2021.**

Most of the comments received responded directly to the issues raised in the FCC’s Public Notice ([DA 21-6](#)) including:

- Qualifying service providers for participation in the EBB program
- Interpreting the “standard rate” for services subject to the discount
- Verifying household eligibility
- Processing supplier reimbursements

Particular attention should be paid to the comments filed by [Common Sense Media](#), the [Council of the Great City Schools](#), [EducationSuperHighway](#), the [State E-Rate Coordinators’ Alliance](#) (“SECA”), and [SETDA, CoSN, and All4ED](#). All five responses note that a growing number of schools are already providing at-home financial support covering mobile hotspots, computing devices, and ongoing monthly internet services for students who would not otherwise be able to afford the necessary tools and services for remote learning. The comments stress that the rules should make it clear that EBB discounts should apply to eligible student households regardless of whose names the monthly service subscriptions are held (i.e., the households or the schools). Such rules would have the effect of focusing initial service provider EBB participation on the important school market and encouraging even greater school participation in the EBB program.

Another important point raised by these comments is the need for EBB rules to specify appropriate levels of internet service — an issue not addressed in the FCC’s Public Notice. Presumably, by including “Broadband” in the EBB program’s name, any service meeting the FCC’s definition of advanced telecommunications — i.e., 25 Mbps/3 Mbps (the recommended minimum bandwidth for a Zoom meeting) — would suffice. Asynchronous internet service of this type may meet the basic needs of single-user households but greater bandwidth, will be required for families with more than one concurrent remote learner. Similarly, to the extent the EBB program supports cellular data services, remote student learning cannot be constrained by monthly data caps.

All initial EBB comments can be seen and reviewed in the [FCC’s Electronic Comment Filing System](#) by entering “20-445” in the “Specific Proceeding” field and clicking the “Search” bar at the bottom of the page. Reply comments on this proceeding — hopefully including those supporting proactive school participation as discussed above — are due February 16th. Interested parties may want to participate in a virtual roundtable discussion on EBB [DA 21-91](#) that the FCC has scheduled for February 12th. The topic is also set to be discussed in the FCC’s next [open meeting](#) on February 17th

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Appendix 2: Chat from Zoom

Dan Hunt to Everyone (7:34 AM)

Sorry, ZOOM wouldn't provide audio for me this morning and then it decided to try and work when I unmuted my desk set.

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:35 AM)

[file: National Urban League - Connecting & Uplifting America Plan for Digital Equity & Inclusion 2021.pdf]

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:35 AM)

The National Urban League unveiled a the framework of a comprehensive agenda for leveraging the tools of the information economy to create a more equitable and inclusive society. The Lewis Latimer Plan for Digital Equity and Inclusion is available at <https://nul.org/news/national-urban-league-unveils-new-framework-bridge-digital-divide> or attached here FYI.

iPad (5) to Everyone (7:37 AM)

I'm Ilana Lowery with Common Sense Media. sorry everyone., my computer camera isn't working

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:39 AM)

[file: Common Sense-BCG Looking Forward, Looking Back to Permanently Close the K-12 Digital Divide 01_21.pdf]

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:39 AM)

Common Sense has issued a third report "Looking Back, Looking Forward: What It Will Take to Permanently Close the K–12 Digital Divide" tracking progress made during the pandemic toward closing the digital divide, while also exploring its root causes. Available along with their earlier reports at <https://www.common sense media.org/kids-action/publications/closing-the-k-12-digital-divide-in-the-age-of-distance-learning> and attached here FYI.

Marni Anbar to Everyone (7:44 AM)

Jeff can you please send the slide to Steve to send out to the group. I will send to my city council and manager.

Paul Ross (Phoenix College) to Everyone (7:46 AM)

This potentially will be a very large and engaging meeting.

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:48 AM)

AZBio is having a webinar with a panel discussion tomorrow "How Vaccines Impact Arizona's Economy" from 11:30AM-12:30PM. Details and registration at <https://www.azbio.org/events/how-vaccines-impact-arizonas-economy>. I believe it is free for all.

iPad (5) to Everyone (7:49 AM)

thanks, Mark. I was going to share the report's findings with everyone in an email. it is free.

Sophia Mayberry to Everyone (7:49 AM)

My grandparents lived in the village of Oak Creek my entire childhood what a beautiful area

Wes Brownfield ARSA to Everyone (8:03 AM)

<https://www.thefinalmileproject.com> The Final Mile Project is focused on achieving last mile connection to promote internet equity for rural students. We believe we can achieve a host of marginal success which will aggregate to measurable internet equity for rural students. We are happy to focus on the granular aspects of equity. Arizona Rural Schools Association, ARSA

Sophia Mayberry to Everyone (8:03 AM)

Could you speak more to the 200 million dollars for rural AZ broadband you put out a press release on in December? Thank you for being here today.

Marni Anbar to Everyone (8:03 AM)

how is the AZ congressional delegation as a whole responding to this issue?

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (8:10 AM)

[file: US DOI National Tribal Broadband Strategy 01_21.pdf]

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (8:11 AM)

The U.S. Department of Interior's (DOI) Indian Affairs recently released the National Tribal Broadband Strategy (NTBS), a work product of the American Broadband Initiative designed as a roadmap for the Federal Government and the private sector. Available at <https://www.bia.gov/news/doi-and-indian-affairs-announce-national-tribal-broadband-strategy-close-connectivity-gap> or attached FYI.

Edgar Rivas to Everyone (8:11 AM)

Hi everyone, as mentioned, I am the Congressman's Senior Policy Advisor and I lead his work on telecommunications issues on the House Energy & Commerce Committee. I know a few of you but I would love to stay in touch on this important issue going forward. My email is edgar.rivas@mail.house.gov should any of you like to reach out individually to connect and discuss further.

John Kelly to Everyone (8:13 AM)

Congressman, Edgar - Several of us that participate in this group are also on Superintendent Hoffman's Ed Tech task force. A lot of overlap between the two functions. Happy to support your work on our behalf!

iPad (5) to Everyone (8:13 AM)

thank you

Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone (8:15 AM)

FCC has an open docket (DA 21-91) Emergency Broadband Benefits Program or Comments

Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone (8:15 AM)

This is what Edgar is talking about

It is open for comments now

Cindy Hogan to Everyone (8:18 AM)

Is this “new office” a state or federal office?

Nicole Umayam to Everyone (8:18 AM)

We've been waiting for the focus to include broadband adoption in tandem with infrastructure :)

Jeff Sobotka to Everyone (8:25 AM)

Nicole, this is a very interesting program to do both from Tulsa, OK. It involves the use of Navigators to help with digital adoption & ongoing training. <https://www.tulsaresponds.org/>

Nicole Umayam to Everyone (8:26 AM)

Washington State too... California has an EO which asks libraries to share info about discount internet offers through Digital Navigators

Sophia Mayberry to Everyone (8:27 AM)

I might shoot you an email about this Nicole Jeff and I have been talking about this idea

Nicole Umayam to Everyone (8:27 AM)

https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Equity_PolicyBrief_Dec%2014.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

Edgar Rivas to Everyone (8:29 AM)

Hi everyone, as mentioned, I am the Congressman's Senior Policy Advisor and I lead his work on telecommunications issues on the House Energy & Commerce Committee. I know a few of you but I would love to stay in touch on this important issue going forward. My email is edgar.rivas@mail.house.gov should any of you like to reach out individually to connect and discuss further.

Sophia Mayberry to Everyone (8:33 AM)

We could shift intros to the chat

Just an idea :)

Wes Brownfield ARSA to Everyone (8:33 AM)

Good idea

Tracy R to Everyone (8:33 AM)

The presentations are great!

Marni Anbar to Everyone (8:34 AM)

what about live intros once a month and rest of the month in the chat?

Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone (8:34 AM)

Yes agree with Sophia or send it to Steve and it can be added as a document to the reminder to attend the meeting.

Mauricio Orozco to Everyone (8:34 AM)

Can also share a meeting participation list along with contact information along with minutes.
Thanks

Paul Stapleton-Smith, IATSE 336, AFL-CIO to Everyone (8:35 AM)

If we put name, organization and why we are here in the chat intros, we can learn more about how we can collaborate.

Georgina Monsalvo - Stand For Children AZ to Everyone (8:36 AM)

Thanks everyone have a great day!