# February 22, 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, Melissa Boydston, Kirk Busch, Gene Carl, Michael Cohen, Jerry Crow, Alexandra Dominguez, Terence Ford, Rick Gibson, Steve Hill, Cindy Hogan, Shereka Jackson, John Kelly, Ryan Kelly, Ilana Lowery, Derek Masseth, Sophia Mayberry, Clarence McAllister, Ryan McCaigue, Georgina Monsalvo, Mala Muralidharan, Mauricio Orozco, Lea Marquez Peterson, Tracy Rexroat, Paul Ross, Jeff Sobotka, Paul Stapleton-Smith, Tom Tardy, Karen Ziegler

## Task Force Planning Committee, Subcommittees, Communicating FCC Programs

Task Force Planning Committee
Steve Peters is putting together a task force planning committee to develop initiative/priorities for the task force, identify next steps for implementing some of the recommendations in the task force report, and discuss how information on task force participants should be shared at overall task force Monday meetings.

The planning committee will include a broad representation of task force participants but will not exclude other task force participants from setting directions for the task force. The following people have expressed interest on being on this planning committee: Terence Ford, Mark Goldstein, John Kelly, Andrew Bevington, Mala Muralidharan, Karen Ziegler, Tracey Beal, Alexandra Dominguez, Derek Masseth, Wes Brownfield, Mauricio Orozco, Paul Ross, Janet Major (pending), and Melissa Boydston (pending).

Task Force Subcommitees
Tracey Beal and Shereka Jackson are setting up a subcommittee of the task force organizations that dispense devices to schools/students/families to share information, help each other and develop synergies, and avoid duplication. This is intended to be a short-term subcommittee to develop ways of better working together.

Steve proposed that an Education or Community Networks subcommittee be established to allow organizations that have such projects to share best practices, and those organizations planning to initiate such projects could also benefit from participating. Steve said this would be a next-generation evolution of the task force's prior technology subcommittee. Wes Brownfield commented that this subcommittee should consider the ADE Technology Task Force upcoming white paper that is aimed at creating a productive environment for virtual learning, including

technology, last-mile buildouts, school-to-the home connectivity, security, and safety of students.

<u>Communicating FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit and Lifeline Programs</u>
The FCC has had a Lifeline program that provides a discount for low-income consumers on monthly telephone service and broadband Internet service from participating wireline and wireless service providers

The FCC is about to launch a new Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program that provides a discount of up to $50 per month towards broadband service for eligible low-income households and up to $75 per month for those on tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to $100 to purchase a laptop/desktop/tablet from participating providers. On February 12th, the FCC hosted an EBB program roundtable to discuss how to make households aware of EBB and effectively enroll them as well as discuss issues related to service provider participation in this program. Steve suggested task force participants view the recording of this roundtable (Steve sent out the link in the task force meeting announcement) and stated that EBB program guidelines are expected to be available this week.

Mala Muralidharan explained that the EBB program is an expansion of the Lifeline program. USAC (who administers the E-rate program) may administer the EBB program, and would put together a webinar to engage stakeholders. Mala added that 75% of those eligible for the Lifeline program do not apply because they do not like filling out forms or fear giving out their personal data. NTIA has requested the FCC set aside funding for intermediaries to promote the EBB program and assist households with applying.

Lea Marquez Peterson noted that utilities have community action centers that provide assistance for low-income households on utility bills, and Cynthia Zwick, Executive Director of Wildfire, provides infrastructure for utility and rent assistance. Lea suggested these organizations could also assist with communicating to low-income households about the FCC EBB and Lifeline programs. Mauricio Orozco added that non-profit organizations such as Wildfire and Catholic charities are trusted more than government to provide information on such assistance programs, and Robert Alvarado noted that Chicanos Por La Causa also provides such assistance. Cindy Hogan remarked that Lifeline is complicated for low-income households to apply for when they are not accustomed to online work.

Steve Peters stated that he would like the task force to help organize intermediaries to promote and make it easier for low-income households to apply for the FCC EBB program. Karen Ziegler added she can assist in doing this with her contacts at the County Supervisors Association of Arizona and League of Cities and Towns.


## Updates: State Broadband Director, AZ State Library, ADE, ACC

<u>State Broadband Director Update</u>

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

Jeff discussed the <u>Arizona Broadband Workshops</u> that the ACA is partnering on with NTIA Broadband USA, USDA, and EDA. These workshops will be offered on the first Wednesday of every month from March through July, with the first workshop on March 3rd from 10:00 am – 12:00 pm (registration information for these workshops has been distributed to the task force).

NTIA received $1.6 billion for broadband in the federal stimulus funding. Jeff stated such NTIA workshops have been held in the past in Louisiana and Idaho, and this is a rare opportunity for Arizona rural communities to be significantly assisted in applying for federal broadband programs with coaching and homework assignments. Jeff noted that communities that apply for state Rural Broadband Development Grants will be given extra points if they attend these workshops. Jeff emphasized it is critical that rural communities applying for federal or state broadband programs attend these Arizona Broadband Workshops. He would like to see as many Arizona communities as possible be successful in obtaining such grants.

Arizona State Library Update

Mala Muralidharan, E-rate Administrator for Public Libraries at the Arizona State Library, reported on her recent activities.

Mala noted the House Committee on Energy and Commerce passed new E-rate legislation on February 12th (see link in the Appendix Chat). This includes $7.6 billion allocated to the E-rate program to support emergency educational connections and devices, and allows E-rate funds to be used by schools and libraries to provide off-campus Internet connectivity to students, teachers, and library patrons. This committee proposal was sent to the House Budget Committee for inclusion in the larger budget reconciliation bill, which may lead to the Biden Administration's American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 expected by mid-March.

The Navajo Nation recently received $53 million in E-rate funding to install 600+ miles of fiber to 90 Chapter Houses/Libraries and 53 Head Start facilities in New Mexico and Arizona. The Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) won the contract to do most of this buildout. Fred Brakeman of Infinity Communications & Consulting is shepherding this project along, and the State Library is providing e-resources and assisting with assisting with the training of staff to help patrons use those resources.

ADE Update

Sophia Mayberry, Project Manager in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction at the Arizona Dept. of Education (ADE), reported on recent ADE activities.

Responding to Wes Brownfield's earlier comment, Sophia stated the ADE Technology Task Force's white paper on the rural digital divide should be out in about a month.

ADE has been working on the 2nd round of federal stimulus allocations for K-12 schools, which will provide additional funding for rural schools.

The Governor signed a bill and executive order pausing ADE's school letter grade assessments for a year.

ADE will deliver a webinar on March 3rd for school districts to learn about the Sun Corridor Network. Sophia will provide information about this to Steve Peters.

ACC Update

Lea Marquez Peterson, Commissioner and Chair of the Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC), reported on her recent activities.

Lea stated the ACC is continuing work on its open docket regarding reforming the Arizona Universal Service Fund (AUSF) to support broadband services in high-cost rural areas. She invited task force participants to submit comments to this docket on their suggestions of what would be effective.
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## Cox Business Presentation

Gene Carl, Sales Manager for Public Sector/Hospitality of Cox Business, delivered a presentation on Cox Business offerings and programs to bridge the digital divide. Following is a summary of key points from the presentation, and the recording of the presentation and full presentation will be posted on the task force website.

Cox Business is a subsidiary of Cox Enterprises, a family-owned national company that has $12 billion in annual revenues from Cox Business and Cox Media as well as having a Cox Automotive and Cox New Ventures (Cleantech, Healthcare, Esports) divisions. Cox Business (CB) core solution offerings are Internet & transport, voice, managed cloud services, and video services, including security solutions. CB is developing wireless solutions (CBRS, Managed Wi-Fi, etc.) for rural communities requiring broadband access. CB is also strategically investing in other areas such as smart communities.

Cox is committed to bridging the digital divide for low-income families with school-age children. Their Connect2Compete program offers low-cost Internet service (now at 50/3 Mbps with unlimited usage) for $9.95 per month for eligible low-income households with K-12 students that participate in government assistance programs (e.g. National School Lunch Program, Head Start). This program requires no deposits or contracts, and includes free installation and free Wi-Fi modem rental. It also has Cox Cares Act Solutions for Education to help schools cover the cost of student Internet access during the COVID-19 crisis: 25/3 Mbps for $30/month and 50/3 Mbps for $40/month. Cox offers access to its outdoor Wi-Fi hotspots as well. Cox uses the following process to engage with school districts: school districts confirm plans to pay a subsidy per student/family and provide the list of addresses to be served; Cox checks the serviceability of the addresses and equipment needed; and parents have a portal to sign up for the subsidized Internet service and are provided a self-install kit.

Cox has launched a new "Managed Device as a Service" program for education that provides devices (laptops, chromebooks, tablets from LG, HP, or Samsung with charger) at a monthly price with 24/7 technical support. For example, an LG tablet enabled with LTE costs $25/month. Laptops have pre-installed software such as Windows 10, Adobe Reader, Web browser, and Bark access control for students.

Cox offers an overall wireless networks toolbox to build private networks (e.g. for schools, hospitals, enterprises) in rural areas including CBRS, Managed Wi-Fi and other options. Cox's competitive advantages for such private networks solutions include: it owns PAL (20 MHz+ licenses) in counties in which it operates guaranteeing spectrum access; it owns fiber backhaul networks for end-to-end solutions; offers in-house network management capabilities; and works with a broad set of solution partners for equipment, network design/deployment, and applications.

Cox is also offering solutions for smart communities in areas such as lighting, traffic, and video analytics. For example in the lighting area there are solutions for: light activation for efficient

electricity pricing, sensors on light housing to support traffic/air quality applications, and electric vehicle charging using light pole power.

In Arizona, CB serves Maricopa, Pinal, Pima, and Cochise counties, and is looking to expand into other areas such as Flagstaff and southern Arizona. CB provides Internet and transport services to over 55 K-12 school districts and 189 charter schools in Arizona as well as for various higher-educational institutions such as Maricopa County Community College District, Grand Canyon University, Univeristy of Arizona, ASU, and the Sun Corridor Network. CB just completed 250 miles of dark fiber connecting all of the ASU locations in the valley, and is in the process of working with APS to provide fiber from Phoenix to Flagstaff. CB has invested over $1.5 billion in infrastructure in Arizona over the last five years.

Shereka Jackson asked if non-profit organizations are able to pay for low-income families' discounted Internet services, and Gene responded that this is possible as long as the addresses are in a Cox service area but they are focused on working with school districts to provide service to as many students as possible.

Jeff Sobotka commented that Cox has done more than any other service provider to provide discounted services for low-income students during the pandemic, and he is hopeful Cox will expand into new markets such as Flagstaff and Yuma.

Kirk Busch asked about Cox's involvement with the Connect2STEM program, and Gene responded that Cox's involvement with that may be under the Cox Charities division.

Steve Peters commented that this task force can assist in making non-profit organizations aware of Cox programs for low-income households since many don't know these programs are available or are reluctant to apply. Marni Anbar commented that Navigators and non-profit organizations such as the United Way and Boys & Girls Clubs can assist with getting such information out. Michael Cohen remarked that Pinal County does not have as many such organizations as Maricopa County, and he would like to know which organizations can help there. Cindy Hogan added that attention to the digital divide solutions should extend beyond the pandemic.


## Next Steps

The next AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force overall meeting will be held on Monday, March 1st at 7:30 am.

Derek Masseth is talking to Microsoft Airband about their need for partners in Arizona. Steve Peters would like to talk with them about joining our task force. John Kelly stated he could help with that, and that Airband is a Microsoft program which includes their TV White Spaces offering.

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


## Appendix: Chat from Zoom

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:37 AM)

[file: ITIF Broadband Myth Series - Are High Broadband Prices Holding Back Adoption 02_21.pdf]

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:37 AM)
ITIF has released a report "Broadband Myths: Are High Broadband Prices Holding Back Adoption?" that is interesting, but getting some pushback in the policy world. Available at https://itif.org/publications/2021/02/08/broadband-myths-are-high-broadband-prices-holding-back-adoption and attached FYI.

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:41 AM)
[file: University of Washington - E-Rate Funding & Libraries Preliminary Analysis of Trends Post-Modernization Article 2021.pdf]

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:41 AM)
University of Washington has published an article, "E-Rate Funding & Libraries Preliminary Analysis of Trends Post-Modernization" available at https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/46678 and attached FYI.

Tracey Beal to Everyone (7:47 AM)
John Kelly is working on this!

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:47 AM)
[file: US ED COVID-19 Strategies for Safely Reopening K-12 Schools 02_21.pdf]

John Kelly to Everyone (7:47 AM)
I am?  Oh yeah.

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:47 AM)
U.S. Department of Education has released "COVID-19 Handbook Volume 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools." Press release at https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-covid-19-handbook-volume-1-strategies-safely-reopening-elementary-and-secondary-schools, report downloadable at U.S. Department of Education COVID-19 Handbook Volume 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools and attached FYI.

Sophia to Everyone (7:48 AM)
the white paper on Rural Digital divide should be done in a month or so

Rick Gibson to Everyone (7:55 AM)
I have to sign off.  If you need me for project funding issues:  Rick Gibson, Sustainability Partners 520-661-6797 rgibson@s.partners

Sophia to Everyone (7:55 AM)
have they selttles wit
sorry

Sophia to Everyone (7:56 AM)
has the fcc settled whether or not carriers can opt out yet? thats a concern i have.

Marni Anbar to Everyone (7:57 AM)
I am wondering if a program like the one used to garner volunteers to help people with their taxes might be useful

Paul Ross to Everyone (7:58 AM)
This has been a problem for years in schools with F&R lunch which is more streamlined than previously. Suggest leveraging the USDA program mechanisms if possible or mirror their processes.

Lea Marquez Peterson to Everyone (7:58 AM)
Wildfire - led by Cynthia Zwick, Exec Director - has existing infrastructure for utility and rent assistance. https://wildfireaz.org/

Robert Alvarado to Everyone (7:59 AM)
We have utility and rent assistance program here at CPLC.  I can send some info out.

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:59 AM)
ILSR has published a nice article, "Going Wireless for Students and Seniors in Tucson" on their CBRS public network initiative available at https://ilsr.org/going-wireless-for-students-and-seniors-in-tucson/ FYI.

Tracey Beal to Everyone (7:59 AM)
Thank you, Lea and Paul! It does seem like getting these great resources actually into the hands of those who need them is a challenge!

Marni Anbar to Everyone (8:00 AM)
Valley Interfaith Project?

Tracey Beal to Everyone (8:00 AM)
Resource Centers are great places for this information to be shared as well.

Paul Ross to Everyone (8:01 AM)
FYI my research has identified 386 news articles published in the 30 days connected to the digital divide, I have commenced coding the news stories to identify initiatives, trends, policy developments and locations.

Tracey Beal to Everyone (8:01 AM)
Wow, Paul. Incredible.

Melissa Boydston to Everyone (8:02 AM)
I can see UW supporting these organizations who have the infrastructure already set up to assist folks with lifeline or EBB - we already do for SNAP and other benefits (utility, rent, ect.). I'd love to see navigators a part of the plan!

Tracey Beal to Everyone (8:02 AM)
Great idea, Melissa!

Cindy Hogan - United Way Tucson and Southern Arizona to Everyone (8:04 AM)
I am so glad that Mala brought this up! While there is are "digital connection" issues, the solutions will likely be a series of human solutions, including Digital Navigators!

Jeff Sobotka to Everyone (8:07 AM)
https://www.azcommerce.com/broadband/arizona-broadband-workshops/

Wes Brownfield to Everyone (8:08 AM)
HR 6800?
I think the importance of this on the Nation cannot be overstated. Thanks Mala!

Terence Ford to Everyone (8:11 AM)
Great work here Paul on the news articles..

Ilana Lowery to Everyone (8:12 AM)
Letter grades for school assessments and not individual student grades.

Terence Ford to Everyone (8:12 AM)
Sophia, can you include the K-12 announcement in chat here please.  Thx, Terence

Sophia sophia.mayberry@azed.gov to Everyone (8:12 AM)
yes terrence
Thank Ilana!

Wes Brownfield to Everyone (8:14 AM)
Sorry Jeff that "F" stays on your transcript.

John Kelly to Everyone (8:14 AM)
Executive order on letter grades and "using data to support success for Arizona Students"
https://azgovernor.gov/sites/default/files/eo_2021-03.pdf

Sophia sophia.mayberry@azed.gov to Everyone (8:15 AM)
Thanks John for providing the link!

Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone (8:15 AM)
E-rate Legislation Bill is at
https://budget.house.gov/sites/democrats.budget.house.gov/files/documents/S%20Con%20Res%205%20Bill%20Final.pdf

Lea Marquez Peterson to Everyone (8:17 AM)
Interested in submitting information to the Arizona Universal Service Fund docket at the Az Corporation Commission? Email me at lmarquezpeterson@azcc.gov.

Jeff Sobotka to Everyone (8:19 AM)
Melissa - Cindy, I am a big fan of the Tulsa Responds program that utilizes Navigators to help low income families sign up for white labeled service from Cox & AT&T. They have attacked the real issues holding back digital equity in urban markets credit & technical understanding.

Tulsa Responds has signed up 22,000 families in Tulsa this school year. https://www.tulsaresponds.org/

Sophia sophia.mayberry@azed.gov to Everyone (8:20 AM)
Melissa and Cindy ADE also thinks the tulsa program is cool feel free to keep connected with us as well!

Melissa Boydston to Everyone (8:20 AM)
@ Jeff - thank you! Will take a look!
@Sophia, yes! Will do!

Cindy Hogan - United Way Tucson and Southern Arizona to Everyone (8:21 AM)
Yes,Tulsa is a great case study!  Thanks for the url!

Tracey Beal to Everyone (8:23 AM)
Love what Tulsa Responds is doing.

Marni Anbar to Everyone (8:24 AM)
Who are the 'Navigators' in the Tulsa program - Cox volunteers? community volunteers?

Jeff Sobotka to Everyone (8:24 AM)
Bilingual Navigators are the key. Stephanie Parra from PUSD proposed a similar idea when we last spoke. I'd love to pull a group together on this and see what federal grants we can pull down for Digital Equity. A little bit outside of my scope but a very important issue in our urban areas.

Sophia sophia.mayberry@azed.gov to Everyone (8:24 AM)
I have also been hearing from our leaders on tribal lands that navigators are greatly needed.

Cindy Hogan - United Way Tucson and Southern Arizona to Everyone (8:25 AM)
Yes, definitely bi-lingual navigators.

Cindy Hogan - United Way Tucson and Southern Arizona to Everyone (8:26 AM)
I have discovered a number of different approaches to navigation across the country:

Jeff Sobotka to Everyone (8:28 AM)
Navigators are the key to adoption. We take for granted our basic understanding of technology that many people just do not have.

Mauricio Orozco to Everyone (8:29 AM)
Cover Arizona has a statewide network of Navigators. They speak different languages and assisting community members apply for AHCCCS and SNAP benefits, they also share community resources.  http://coveraz.org/navigators-and-assisters/

Tracey Beal to Everyone (8:30 AM)
Seems like this is another area to discover all of the resources available and see how to align and take advantage of these.

Cindy Hogan - United Way Tucson and Southern Arizona to Everyone (8:31 AM)

EdNavigator, Tech Goes Home, NDIA, https://www.digitalequity.us/initiatives/vista/

Jeff Sobotka to Everyone (8:31 AM)
Navigators in Tulsa are paid contractors paid by Tulsa Responds with CARES Act funding.

Tracey Beal to Everyone (8:32 AM)
Love that Jeff!

Cindy Hogan - United Way Tucson and Southern Arizona to Everyone (8:32 AM)
Yes, assistors have been available for public services, for the ACA, digital is the next frontier.

Paul Ross to Everyone (8:33 AM)
Herding cats greatest superbowl IT commercial, but a good depiction of all the efforts being
developed and deployed.

Mauricio Orozco to Everyone (8:33 AM)
Other Statewide networks worth considering. First Things First and Head Start

Cindy Hogan - United Way Tucson and Southern Arizona to Everyone (8:33 AM)
For sure, Jeff!
For sure, Paul, I meant!

Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone (8:40 AM)
HAve to hop off Thanks all for all the information

Paul Ross to Everyone (8:41 AM)
The Cox presentation first referred to herding cats, but I'm in agreement.

Marni Anbar to Everyone (8:42 AM)
Valley of the Sun YMCA and local Boys and Girls clubs would be great community partners

GENE CARL to Everyone (8:42 AM)
gene.carl@cox.com

Paul Ross to Everyone (8:42 AM)
Collectively we are on the cusp of great things, for our region and the state.

Marni Anbar to Everyone (8:42 AM)
YMCAs have been enabling kids to be in childcare and online for school since last May

Cindy Hogan - United Way Tucson and Southern Arizona to Everyone (8:42 AM)
Thank you, Marni!

Ilana Lowery to Everyone (8:45 AM)
Was there ever a media push for the report?

Cindy Hogan - United Way Tucson and Southern Arizona to Everyone (8:45 AM)
Ilana which report are you referring to?

Marni Anbar to Everyone (8:45 AM)
marnianbar  marnibo1@mac.com

Ilana Lowery to Everyone (8:46 AM)
Sorry Cindy, the task for report

Tracy R to Everyone (8:46 AM)
The meeting is always great!

Michael Cohen to Everyone (8:46 AM)
mikey1145@yahoo.com