

## January 11, 2021 AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force Teleconference Report

### **Attendees**

Steve Peters, Oris Friesen, Henry Goldberg, Mark Goldstein, Robert Alvarado, Tracey Beal, Andrew Bevington, Melissa Boydston, Kirk Busch, Gene Carl, Tony Casella, Michael Cohen, Jerry Crow, Alexandra Dominguez, Marcelino Flores, Terence Ford, Ian Hathcock, Steve Hill, Shereka Jackson, John Kelly, Ryan Kelly, Ilana Lowery, Derek Masseth, Sophia Mayberry, Clarence McAllister, Mala Muralidharan, Mauricio Orozco, Cody Pedersen, Lea Marquez Peterson, Lawrie Prickett, Tracy Rexroat, Paul Ross, Michelle Simon, Jeff Sobotka, Paul Stapleton-Smith, Graham Taylor, David Whitt-Ruckus, Karen Ziegler

### **Task Force Recommendations Report, Database, Participants Survey, Funding**

#### Task Force Recommendations Report

Steve Peters noted the task force recommendations report is posted on the task force website report landing page. Steve sent an e-mail on January 7th to task force participants with a cover letter they can use/personalize to distribute the task force recommendations report to their constituents.

#### Task Force Database of Stakeholders

ATIC/GAZEL has a database of stakeholders such as county managers, economic development directors, school superintendents, and important associations that should be contacted about task force activities and receive the task force recommendations report. However, a number of these contacts are out of date or need to be supplemented, so Steve requests task force participants send him relevant stakeholders' contact information for inclusion in this database.

Steve asked Jeff Sobotka and John Kelly to provide him with names of state legislators that are key broadband advocates who should receive the task force recommendations report.

#### Task Force Participants Survey

Steve reminded task force participants to fill out the Google Form on the task force website to provide their organizational and contact information so he has up-to-date information for all participants. About 40 task force participants have submitted this form so far.

#### Task Force Planning Committee

Steve will be working on establishing a planning committee to work on implementing recommendations from the task force report. There are a number of different entities involved in our task force working on distributing devices and providing tech support to those in need, and a team will be set up to enable collaboration on this.

## **Updates: State Broadband Director, AZ State Library, ADE, ACC, Sun Corridor Network**

### State Broadband Director Update

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

Governor Ducey will deliver his annual “State of the State Address” today (see Appendix Chat for the link) giving his priorities for the upcoming state legislative session. Jeff stated there is a good possibility that the Governor will request \$10 million for state broadband grant funding for unserved and underserved communities (up from the \$3 million last year where important results were achieved). If this funding is approved, Jeff will start planning for how to use these funds for the new fiscal year beginning July 1st. There may also be funding requested to deploy fiber along I-40.

The NTIA received \$1.6 billion for broadband in the federal stimulus funding. There will also be an emergency broadband benefit program at the FCC to help low-income Americans (\$50 monthly discount to qualifying households and \$75 monthly for those living on tribal lands). Steve Peters noted that Jeff provided a breakdown of the \$7 billion federal stimulus broadband funding that was e-mailed to task force participants and is posted on the task force website. There was no funding for state broadband block grants as Jeff hoped for. Jeff added that he will continue to communicate with the NTIA, FCC, and USDA about their broadband funding programs. John Kelly asked if the federal stimulus includes funding beyond connectivity to address overall digital equity issues which the ADE technology task force is considering – Jeff responded that there is some funding for this, and he would like to be involved with the ADE task force in such digital equity discussions.

Jeff noted the NTIA broadband workshops beginning in March (that he is partnering with NTIA on as discussed at previous task force meetings) will address planning, federal funding, and implementation issues for getting broadband to rural communities.

Jeff has been involved with the Telehealth BAT in discussions about federal stimulus funding opportunities for telehealth support in Arizona.

Jeff congratulated Lea Marquez Peterson on being re-elected to the Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC) and being chosen as its new Chair. Lea has been advocating for broadband at the ACC, so this is an important appointment.

Jeff asked John Kelly what he expects to occur in the upcoming state legislative session. John responded K-12 education funding is a key issue, legislative leaders all mention broadband as a key priority but have not specified what policies they support in this area, and there will be a lot of emphasis on getting the state budget approved quickly and providing COVID relief. It is not clear what the duration of the legislative session will be – some hearings will be virtual and some will be hybrid virtual/in-person. Steve Peters asked John Kelly to provide the task force with the Arizona Chamber of Commerce legislative update, and John provided a link to Triadvocates legislative preview in the Appendix Chat.

### Arizona State Library Update

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

The federal COVID-19 stimulus contains funding for a number of areas pertinent to libraries. There is \$285 million to NTIA for broadband for minority-serving institutions and the anchor communities surrounding them – NTIA will be developing rules for this program by early February, and SHLB will be putting together a document for NTIA to make recommendations on this. The stimulus does not provide direct assistance to community libraries but does provide emergency benefits to cover the cost of broadband for qualifying low-income and tribal households. Many library organizations that have 501(c)(6) status are now eligible for the Paycheck Protection Program forgivable loans that are available for qualified businesses. The FY2021 budget includes a \$5 million (national) increase from the previous year for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) including \$2 million for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).—IMLS funding fuels innovative programs such as early literacy and digital skills. In addition to the LSTA, the Innovative Approaches to Digital Literacy program received \$28 million, at least half of which is dedicated for school libraries.

Mala mentioned that Jeff Sobotka and John Kelly should contact her if they have any recommendations she should take to SHLB for advising the NTIA on their rulemaking.

#### 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.

ADE is meeting to discuss the federal stimulus broadband funding opportunities for education and how this funding should be spent.

The ADE Technology Task Force is continuing its work, and one of the subcommittees is close to completing its document.

#### ACC Update

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

Lea stated the ACC has five commissioners, two of whom are new commissioners.

Lea made a presentation recently to the ACC on broadband and how the ACC could support broadband development in rural areas in the state.

Lea continues to serve on the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) broadband task force that is working on broadband best practices for states (as discussed at previous task force meetings).

Lea expects to see work done at the ACC to reform the Arizona Universal Service Fund (AUSF) to support broadband services in high-cost rural areas. The AUSF currently collects \$1.2 million annually. New rules need to be considered as to how service providers can access these funds and for what purposes. Steve Peters commented that he would like our task force to convene meetings to make recommendations for reforming the AUSF, and Lea responded that she can submit any such recommendations to the ACC AUSF docket.

## Sun Corridor Network Update

Derek Masseth, Executive Director of the Sun Corridor Network (SCN), reported on recent SCN activities.

The SCN has received approval from Internet2 to work on expanding the EduRoam service statewide.

The SCN is continuing work on providing CBRS wireless access in a number of communities.

## **Simply Bits Presentation**

Tony Casella, Managing Director of Simply Bits, LLC, delivered a presentation on their company's activities. Following is a summary of key points from the presentation, and the full presentation is posted on the task force website.

Simply Bits, headquartered in Tucson, is the largest wireless Internet Service Provider in southern Arizona. It has 60+ employees working in areas such as engineering, operations, technical support, and business functions. They have three data centers in the state to support their network and provide connections to Tier 1 service providers. Simply Bits offers wireless Internet, layer 2 services, voice over IP, Wi-Fi, and other services. They provide 100 Mbps to 10 Gbps last-mile access for commercial, government, and residential markets. Most of the solutions they provide are managed services. Simply Bits competitive strength is that it can provide an overall rapid solution including network design, engineering, and 24x7x365 support.

Simply Bits customers include: emergency networks (e.g. police, fire, medical facilities); municipal customers (e.g. Davis Monthan Air Force Base, Pima County, City of Tucson), and about 20,000 residential and commercial users daily. They cover the Tucson metro area and various other communities in southern Arizona. They can build quickly to provide service in communities. Tony mentioned he has met with Jeff Sobotka to discuss unserved or underserved communities in the state, which led to Simply Bits recently providing service in Douglas (2 hours from Tucson).

Their wireless access services have provided dramatic increases in bandwidth in recent years, and they work on providing infrastructure closer to the customer to provide increased bandwidth. They serve small communities at a reasonable cost by collocating equipment on existing cell towers. They have also recently been working with a home developer to deploy fiber-to-the-home in addition to wireless access.

Steve Peters asked if Simply Bits works on municipal networks in addition to the direct networks for individual customers. Tony responded that they are interested in public-private partnerships to build municipal networks but this depends on the availability of government grant funding. Steve noted that municipalities that receive federal COVID-19 relief funding need to consider how their networks will be supported after the grant funding ends. Tony responded that grant funding enables networks to be built, but operational expertise is needed to maintain these networks over time. Jeff Sobotka asked if Simply Bits participated in the FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF), and Tony responded they did not because it is too difficult for them to participate in the associated auctions.

Steve Peters asked if Simply Bits is interested in expanding to other parts of the state. Tony responded that they are interested in expanding to serve other communities and hire local people to help support this. Jeff Sobotka noted he is trying to get quality service providers to expand beyond their normal service areas (Simply Bits clearly provides quality service since they serve an air force base), and smaller communities are looking for service providers that can provide the necessary expertise and ways to get the costs of solutions down. Jeff is focused on getting middle-mile fiber to rural communities, and is agnostic about the last-mile access used.

## **Next Steps**

The next AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force overall meeting will be held on Monday, January 25th at 7:30 am. There will not be a meeting on January 18th for the Martin Luther King holiday.

Mark Goldstein announced that ATIC's first board meeting of 2021 will be held on Wednesday, January 13th from 12:00 – 2:00 pm, and all task force participants interested are invited to attend this virtual meeting.

Robert Alvarado, VP of Chicanos Por La Causa, announced they will be holding a virtual celebration for Lea Marquez Peterson and Anna Tovar for being the first Latinas elected to a statewide office in Arizona. This virtual event will be held on Thursday, January 14th at 3:00 pm.

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 (7:38 AM)

Governor Ducey will deliver his annual State of the State Address today at 2:00 PM. Available on some regional media outlets and to be streamed live on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/dougducey/live>

Jeff Sobotka to Everyone (7:59 AM)

Thanks for sending that out Mark!

John Kelly to Everyone (8:04 AM)

TRIADVOCATES legislative preview:

<https://triadvocates.com/index.php?pagename=article/triadvocates-navigator-january-8-2021>

Ilana Lowery to Everyone (8:05 AM)

If anyone has an extra Business Journal Book of Lists, a number of the lists are in there. Subscribers would have access to them digitally.

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (8:09 AM)

Actually Phoenix Business Journal's Book of Lists is not available as a PDF download even to subscribers but may be viewed online by them. Online database style access can be purchased

separately sometimes with extended leadership contacts and vectors. Or one can revisit the weekly edition containing a specific list of interest and download that issue as a PDF. HTH.

Lea Marquez Peterson to Everyone (8:10 AM)

Lea Marquez Peterson, Chairwoman

lmarquezpeterson@azcc.gov

Ilana Lowery to Everyone (8:10 AM)

@Mark, I might be able to get a couple of specific ones in excel format. Maybe let me know which ones would be helpful and I can see if I can get them

Lea Marquez Peterson to Everyone (8:20 AM)

Great news that Simply Bits is offering services in Douglas and Nogales now!

Shereka Jackson to Everyone (8:42 AM)

Congratulations Lea

tonyc to Everyone (8:42 AM)

Thanks Lea!! And Congrats again!

Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone (8:43 AM)

Congrats Lea!

Tracy Rexroat to Everyone (8:43 AM)

Great info!