March 15, 2021 AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force Teleconference Report

Attendees

Steve Peters, Oris Friesen, Henry Goldberg, Mark Goldstein, Marni Anbar, Robert Alvarado, Tracey Beal, Andrew Bevington, Michael Britt, Wes Brownfield, Kirk Busch, Gene Carl, Michael Cohen, Jerry Crow, Milan Eaton, Rick Gibson, Holly Henley, Karen Hewitt, Steve Hill, Cindy Hogan, Shereka Jackson, John Kelly, Ryan Kelly, Tarma Liranzo, Sophia Mayberry, Clarence McAllister, Georgina Monsalvo, Mala Muralidharan, Mauricio Orozco, Cody Pedersen, Lawrie Prickett, Paul Ross, Jeff Sobotka, Paul Stapleton-Smith, Joy Whiting, Karen Ziegler

Task Force Planning Committee, Communicating FCC Programs

Task Force Planning Committee
Steve Peters reported that the task force planning committee had its initial meeting on March 8th. The planning committee discussed: 1) priorities for projects to undertake based on the task force recommendations report and proposals from Steve; 2) how to do information sharing and communications among task force participants; and 3) the format of the Monday task force meetings.

Steve has created an Updates webpage on the AZBSN website that will include important announcements and dates of upcoming events.

Communicating FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit and Lifeline Programs
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 launching a new Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) $3.2 billion 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.

Steve asked Cindy Hogan, Digital Equity Program Manager for the United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona, to discuss the EBB program which she has been tracking. Cindy stated that she attended the FCC Roundtable on the EBB program where outreach was emphasized, and she wants to ensure eligible low-income households are informed about this program. Cindy also attended a webinar on the current status of the EBB program rollout/rules, which she

summarized in a document. The EBB program is supposed to open enrollment in mid-April. Cindy noted that the EBB program is a lot more inclusive than the Lifeline program in terms of including more eligible households and providing a discount for purchase of computers.

Steve stated he will be discussing with Sophia Mayberry of the Arizona Dept. of Education how a "Navigators" program can be established to assist with outreach/assistance for low-income households applying for the EBB and Lifeline programs.

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 reported on the Arizona Broadband Workshops that the ACA is partnering on with NTIA Broadband USA, USDA, and EDA to assist rural communities in being successful in applying for federal broadband grants. The first workshop was held on March 3rd. Jeff noted that there will be follow-up working sessions with various state regions (by COGs) on Wednesday March 17th, which task force participants can attend (Steve Peters has sent an e-mail to provide information about how to register for these). The next Arizona Broadband Workshop will be held on Wednesday April 7th, which will include a very knowledgeable federal presenter.

Jeff noted that the recently-passed federal American Rescue Plan Act contains a lot of funding for states, counties, and cities, and much of this is eligible for broadband purposes. The Emergency Connectivity Fund for E-rate has allocated $7.2 billion in new funding, much of this for enabling remote connectivity from student homes to schools. The Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund is targeted at infrastructure such as roads and bridges, but some of this may be available for broadband infrastructure. The Governor's Office is considering what federal funding of various types can be used for. Coconino County has an excellent program in planning for federal broadband funding.

Jeff reported on the progress of two broadband bills being considered by the Legislature. The bill HB 2596, on rights-of-way for ADOT fiber deployment along state highways, and HB 2808, on the ACA Rural Broadband Development Grants funding, were both passed by the House.

Jeff stated that a new actionable statewide broadband strategic plan will be published shortly. An RFP is coming out today (posted on the ACA website) relating to providing middle-mile fiber from rural communities to Phoenix, and the federal grant funding will be used for last-mile projects in rural communities. The goal is to develop a blueprint for how communities can attain broadband connectivity in the future. Karen Ziegler asked about the timing of the RFP, and Jeff responded that companies will likely have about one month to respond with a decision on the winners two weeks after that. Steve Peters requested a copy of the state broadband strategic plan for the task force when that is available, and Jeff replied he would provide that.

<u>Arizona State Library Update</u>

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

The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition (SHLB) held a meeting on March 11th to discuss the Emergency Connectivity Fund for the E-rate program with Joey Wender of Senator Markey's staff. The Emergency Connectivity Fund of $7.17 billion (the corrected amount) is a huge victory for E-rate off-campus connectivity to student homes. USAC will receive $71 million to administer the program. The program will provide funding for advanced telecommunications and information services (not only hotspots and cable modems which are quick to implement), and the FCC will determine in the next 60 days what technologies are eligible such as end-user computers. School teachers will be eligible but don't yet know about library staff. The E-rate funding will cover 100% of the costs, with no matching funds required. Schools/Libraries may be eligible for retroactive reimbursements to the start of the pandemic – the FCC will decide on these retroactive rules. This funding program extends out to 2030. This E-rate program is a major opportunity for Arizona communities to connect students from their homes, and it will be critical for communities to develop plans to apply for this program in the next 60 days.

Jeff Sobotka asked if Arizona will receive $195 million from this E-rate Emergency Connectivity Fund program. Mala responded that she is not aware of this funding being allocated by state, and Milan Eaton (E-rate Director at ADE) responded that E-rate funding is not allocated by state but there is an attempt to spread the funding appropriately across states. Milan added that the EBB program is only a temporary band-aid for broadband connectivity, and rural homes will not be able to afford broadband connectivity once the EBB funding ends.

Mark Goldstein noted that the House Energy & Commerce Committee Democrats have introduced the LIFT America Act bill which would allocate $109 billion for broadband (See the Appendix Chat for a news release on this).

Steve Peters suggested it would be useful to have summaries of the various federal broadband funding programs. Mala responded that SHLB and Funds for Learning will provide such summaries, and she will also summarize this for the task force.

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.

Sophia reported that ADE is providing $1.5 million in funding for "The Final Mile Project" run by the Arizona Rural Schools Association. The details are being worked out and will be published this week.

ADE will be holding an introductory meeting on Thursday March 18th at 3:00 pm to discuss establishing "Navigators" to assist low-income households in applying for the EBB program to support their educational needs. Steve Peters has sent a notice to the task force if they wish to attend this meeting.

ADE will also be publishing a document on how it will be using federal funding programs.

ACC Update

In the absence of Lea Marquez Peterson, Steve Peters reported that the Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC) meeting to discuss reforming the Arizona Universal Service Fund (AUSF) to support broadband in rural areas has been moved to April 13th (from March 23rd). Steve added

that task force participants are welcome to submit comments to the ACC docket on this issue, and Steve will be scheduling a task force meeting to discuss ideas on good uses for the reformed AUSF which may lead to a task force submission to the docket if agreement could be reached among task force participants.

Arizona Rural Schools Association Presentation

Wes Brownfield, Executive Director of the Arizona Rural Schools Association, spoke to the task force about "The Final Mile Project" of their organization. Following is a summary of Wes' talk (there was no slide presentation used).

Wes is a retired high-school principal and is not a broadband expert. The Arizona Rural Schools Association created The Final Mile Project to bring dependable broadband Internet service to rural students so they can equitably participate in virtual learning. The E-rate program has enabled the implementation of a broadband superhighway (i.e. fiber access to the Internet) to most rural schools. There has been a lot of federal funding to address the digital divide but it tends to focus on broadband infrastructure rather than last-mile connectivity to student homes. The Final Mile Project is dedicated to identifying achievable last-mile projects for which they can coordinate spoke-and-hub buildouts from the anchor institution (usually the school or school district) to the student home using wireless (e.g. Wi-Fi) technology.

ADE has provided $1.5 million for The Final Mile Project, and the Arizona Rural Schools Association has created a website to publicize the project. They will be developing plans for last-mile projects in different communities. Wes is working with Milan Eaton of ADE on this project. Wes hopes that with the upcoming Emergency Connectivity Fund for E-rate that last-mile connectivity to student homes will be a normal part of the E-rate program. He also hopes that state deployment of fiber conduit along state highways will not crowd out funding needed for last-mile connectivity. Questionnaires have been sent out to rural schools around the state to determine student homes that lack broadband Internet service.

The Final Mile Project has begun with a pilot project providing last-mile broadband Internet connectivity to six homes in each of several counties around the state. This project provides wireless towers at anchor institutions connecting with receivers at student homes. Internet access is filtered for synchronous and asynchronous learning.

If the capital cost of the broadband infrastructure is covered by the E-rate program, service providers will be able to provide Internet access services at a substantially reduced rate only needing to cover operating costs plus their profit margin. The project is also considering whether wireless ISPs can provide a range of Internet services to student homes in the evenings so that their ROI is sufficient.

The Final Mile Project is a public-private partnership that will benefit students, families, and their communities. It is addressing equity issues in education that are critical to young students for their entire lives, and will enable long-term economic development of the communities.

Jeff Sobotka commented this is a great model, and the challenge has always been to share the E-rate fiber bandwidth capacity available at schools. Jeff asked if service providers will be able to use this E-rate bandwidth for the entire family not just students. Milan Eaton responded that it appears that the school's bandwidth can be shared with the community.

Jeff Sobotka further asked how upgrades and maintenance will be handled for The Final Mile Project. Milan responded that this will be included in the RFP, and ISPs should be able to make a profit beyond covering all the monthly recurring costs. Milan added that with the capital cost of connecting to the student home being covered by the E-rate Emergency Connectivity Fund, he expects service providers can offer broadband Internet service for under $10 per month.

Mala Muralidharan stated she will connect with Wes to speak to him about library projects at parking lots and on bookmobiles.

Paul Stapleton-Smith commented that The Final Mile Project should also consider economic and workforce development of communities, and that the project should be designed to be an efficient overall solution for the education, healthcare, economic/workforce development needs of the communities. Paul added that they should be wary of possible price gouging with the funding providing by the American Rescue Plan, and Wes responded that Milan Eaton will be closely monitoring projects to avoid this.

Steve Peters commented that community planning will be key to obtaining funding from federal sources or the state Rural Broadband Development Grants program. Wes responded that this task force should work with the League of Arizona Cities and Towns on community planning. Steve responded that he has been in touch with them as well as the County Supervisors Association about our task force report. Karen Ziegler noted she will be giving a presentation to the League of Arizona Cities and Towns at their event "The Basics of Broadband for Arizona Rural Communities" this Wednesday about options for developing broadband projects (including public-private partnership models) as well as sharing information on the ACA Arizona Broadband Workshops and the work of this COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force.

Mauricio Orozco suggested faith-based organizations could be considered in supporting The Final Mile Project since people often take their children to churches for child care. Milan Eaton replied that he will discuss this with Mauricio. Tracey Beal added that the Connect –Arizona portal public Wi-Fi map could include faith-based organizations, which have provided funding for the City of Phoenix wireless connectivity activities. Steve Peters remarked that faith-based organizations could be part of the "Navigators" program for community outreach.

Next Steps

The next AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force overall meeting will be held on Monday, March 22nd at 7:30 am.

As noted above, the Arizona Broadband Workshops regional working sessions will be held on Wednesday March 17th, and the ADE Navigators meeting will be held on Thursday March 18th at 3:00 pm (see Steve Peters' e-mail on updates to register for these).

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

Appendix: Chat from Zoom

Tracey Beal to Everyone (7:33 AM)
Jeff, are these recorded so we can listen if we can't make the actual webinar?

Karen A. Hewitt - VectorUSA to Everyone (7:38 AM)
Thanks Jeff for the shout out regarding the CBRS solution VectorUSA presented last week.
Karen 602.283.7446 kahewitt@vectorusa.com

Paul Stapleton-Smith, IATSE 336, AFL-CIO to Everyone (7:39 AM)
Good morning all! Paul Stapleton-Smith, Pima County Workforce Investment Board
831.227.9660 email at paulforarizona@gmail.com On issues of specific workforce development
and rural county projects, please contact me for specific projects that can be identified per Jeff
Sobotka's federal grant notices.

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (7:41 AM)
House Commerce Democrats Introduce the LIFT America Act for $312B with $109B allocated
to broadband. See announcement at https://energycommerce.house.gov/newsroom/press-
releases/ec-democrats-introduce-lift-america-act-that-invests-in-clean-energy

John Kelly to Everyone (7:53 AM)
Here is the AZ JLBC overview of the American Rescue Plan impact for Arizona.
https://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/Americanrescueplanact.pdf

Jeff Sobotka to Everyone (7:54 AM)
Tracey - All webinars are recorded & posted to YouTube.

Tracey Beal to Everyone (7:55 AM)
perfect.. Name?

Paul Ross to Everyone (7:55 AM)
Sustainability needs.

Sophia Mayberry to Everyone (7:59 AM)
sophia.mayberry@azed.gov

Jeff Sobotka to Everyone (7:59 AM)
https://youtu.be/CH7gs3EZVBg
Recording of Webinar #1 3-3-21
If you are not getting the webinar emails please contact Chamai at chamais@azcommerce.com

Jeff Sobotka to Everyone (8:04 AM)
For a copy of the Consulting RFP contact Teri at terio@azcommerce.com

Karen A. Hewitt - VectorUSA to Everyone (8:05 AM)
Steve & Team, great job with the new announcement summary page on the website!

Paul Ross to Everyone (8:26 AM)
Some emergency services can now use drones with Wi-Fi.

John Kelly to Everyone (8:29 AM)
Wes, there is an old phrase: "We can prove it works in practice; we just can't prove it works in
theory." Thanks for taking this and making it real. +Milan

Holly Henley to Everyone (8:31 AM)
The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 designated $200 million to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for pandemic response. The Arizona State Library will receive $3.617 million from IMLS through the Grants to States program to continue to respond to COVID . Guidance is forthcoming but we expect it to be similar to that for the CARES Act which allowed us to work with libraries statewide to expand digital network access, purchase internet accessible devices and provide technical support services.

Paul Ross to Everyone (8:37 AM)
Would be a good place for a large capacity hotspot like a community center.
Navigators? Education across the generations is needed.

Milan Eaton to Everyone (8:38 AM)
Mauricio, my contact info: milan.eaton@azed.gov Cell 623-332-6357

Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone (8:38 AM)
It would be a wonderful place to get Navigators as they will be trusted resource people

Milan Eaton to Everyone (8:38 AM)
Sorry everyone, I'm late for next nest call. I'm dropping now.

Lawrie Prickett to Everyone (8:38 AM)
lol. sorry. the religious organization idea.

Tracey Beal to Everyone (8:39 AM)
Great being with everyone this morning!

Mauricio Orozco to Everyone (8:41 AM)
https://www.azleague.org/

Mark Goldstein to Everyone (8:41 AM)
Thanks for your involvement and support. Have a great week all!