March 27, 2020 Emergency Leadership Team Meeting Teleconference Report

Attendees

Steve Peters, Oris Friesen, Henry Goldberg, Mark Goldstein, Michael Amick, Melissa Armas, Michael Cohen, Jerry Crow, Tim Harrington, George Kaloudis, John Kelly, John Lucas, Derek Masseth, Mala Muralidharan, Lea Marquez Peterson, Erik Santiago, Daniel Schwiebert, Jeff Sobotka, Dan Stormont, Graham Taylor, Nicole Umayam, Marissa Walker, Nan Williams, Karen Ziegler

AZBSN Leadership Team Meetings/Activities for COVID-19 Crisis

Steve Peters explained that the purpose of this 2nd emergency AZBSN Leadership Team meeting (following our initial March 23rd meeting) is to discuss how the AZBSN could help with the state response to the lack of broadband and technology availability for students and the overall population as schools and employers have closed their buildings to prevent spread of the coronavirus, and people are required to work from home or other locations. There are various federal/state/local/service provider initiatives being considered or beginning to roll out, and the AZBSN can play an important role in enabling collaboration among key players, sharing important information, and developing priorities and creative strategies for the most effective state response. Steve emphasized that time is of the essence, particularly for schools to provide solutions for their students and for libraries to provide resources for their communities.

Steve has begun creating a COVID-19 Broadband Strategy Group website hosted on the ATIC/AZBSN website. This will have webpages including: About the Project, Team Members, Meetings and Minutes, Resources, Updates, COVID Contacts, Priorities, and a Blog.

Steve suggests that the AZBSN establish two tracks to facilitate an effective response to the crisis:

1) Identify projects and areas of collaboration.

2) How do we engage/communicate with others?

He proposes that the AZBSN establish subgroups for: Education, Libraries, Telemedicine, Communities (including telework and economic issues), and Service Providers. Each subgroup would develop clear strategies that identify needs, barriers, and recommendations. A unified report would then be written assembling the results from the subgroups. Tim Harrington remarked that each subgroup should include appropriate stakeholders to identify important issues. Mala Muralidharan commented that we should be leveraging solutions available now and work towards the goals. Steve added we should be considering both Internet connectivity and device needs, and proposed recommendations should include support and funding

requirements. This will be discussed further at the next AZBSN Leadership Team meeting on March 30th.

Steve plans to coordinate an AZBSN COVID-19 Crisis Webinar that communicates the information and work being done to stakeholders around the state, and will also e-mail a newsletter on AZBSN activities and relevant information to the AZBSN mailing list.

Lokket, Inc. Wi-Fi Solutions

George Kaloudis and Erik Santiago discussed Lokket's Wi-Fi solutions for underserved communities. George is the co-founder and CEO of Lokket. Lokket is a for-profit company that was founded in 2004, has offices in San Francisco, San Diego, and Australia, and has deployed its solutions in 100 countries.

They offer cloud-managed Wi-Fi hotspots and fixed wireless access intended for under or un-served communities (including schools and health care) to connect as many people as possible to the Internet. Lokket works with partners to offer holistic solutions that can also integrate security cameras, renewable energy micro-grids, content delivery, and e-commerce, as well as provide devices (e.g. tablets) for the community. They provide modular solutions to supply whatever components are needed.

Jeff Sobotka asked how Lokket works with communities in the United States. George responded they send a customized presentation based on requirements, and then can deploy their own staff but usually work with local partners (for example students at schools can be interns on these projects). Jeff and Mala Muralidharan will communicate with Lokket further about potential for working with Arizona communities.

Steve asked George and Erik to send him information on Lokket's solutions.

Arizona Corporation Commission Initiative

Commissioner Lea Marquez Peterson discussed activities (initially described at the March 23rd AZBSN Leadership Team Meeting) she is leading at the Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC) to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

On March 16th, the ACC held a special open meeting to ask the telecommunications service providers and the electric/gas/water utilities they regulate to present their crisis preparedness plans. Commissioner Peterson asked the 20 Class A and B telecommunications service providers that are subject to ACC jurisdiction to clarify the broadband services that will enable residential and business customers to operate remotely.

The ACC received responses from the telecommunications service providers that are published on the ACC Docket AU-00000A-20-0050. These responses include commitments to not disconnect customers and waive penalties for customers that have difficulty paying during the crisis, as well as new broadband offerings for remote access. Commissioner Peterson has written a document summarizing the responses that is published on the ACC Docket, and will be updating this with new information over time. See https://azcc.gov/docs/default-source/lea-marquez-peterson-files/document-for-webpage---3-25-20.pdf

Steve Peters will provide a link to this document on the AZBSN COVID-19 website.

State Broadband Director Activities and Related Comments

Jeff Sobotka, the State Broadband Director at the Arizona Commerce Authority (ACA), discussed his activities in responding to the crisis. His role is to encourage telecommunications service providers to offer appropriate broadband services for those lacking broadband, as opposed to the regulatory role of the ACC. He has a strong working relationship with the service providers in the state.

Jeff is currently focused on various short-term solutions to the crisis. Some rural communities don't have adequate broadband infrastructure. Jeff will be writing up a document describing the new offerings from service providers that enable broadband access in different communities. For example, some cable companies (e.g. Cox, Sparklight) have opened up their public Wi-Fi hotspots for everyone to access. The Arizona State Library has constructed a map of libraries across the state that have Wi-Fi access available from parking lots while the library buildings are closed. Milan Eaton is providing information on the broadband capabilities of schools after the E-rate funded broadband infrastructure buildouts. Jeff will be looking at how to extend school/library Wi-Fi access over longer distances. It is important to inform students and the general population that their smart phones can be enabled as mobile hotspots for Internet access in their homes.

Jeff would like the AZBSN to act as a conduit to make this information available to key stakeholders and the public. Steve stated he will discuss this further with Jeff.

Lea Peterson asked if the needs are understood and whether Jeff is being contacted by families. Jeff responded he does not deal with individual families, rather he is trying to get the educational needs from the school districts. There is a major shortage of mobile hotspots and a number of school districts are trying to acquire them – enabling smart phones as hotspots could help deal with this problem if people are made aware this can be done. Nan Williams stated she can provide Jeff a list of CIO/CTO contacts for school districts around the state, and Jeff noted Milan Eaton can also provide such contacts.

Jeff added many communities are not aware of low-cost service provider offerings for Internet access that are available to them. Jeff needs to get buy-in from the service providers to provide information about the full range of their offerings in this crisis.

Steve stated the AZBSN/ACA websites can make all of this information readily available, and Jeff added that this information should be described in a simple, concise manner so it is easily useable by communities.

Steve stated a major issue is how we engage with the range of stakeholders around the state. Jeff responded he is working with the service providers, and the Governor's Office could be making information available in the media. Steve and John Kelly noted there is an "Arizona Together" organization that could be helpful in getting information out to the public (https://arizonatogether.org/)

John Kelly says he is focusing on students being able to work from home so they don't lose weeks of learning. Many of these students don't have the devices to work from home in addition to lacking Internet access. School districts don't know exactly what is needed and have different challenges and architectures. Steve noted there is an open letter from education leaders around the state asking the legislature to approve emergency funding for school districts to solve the digital-divide challenge during the school closures. John Kelly said he thinks Chad Gestson, superintendent of the Phoenix Union High School District, is leading this effort and coordinating with Gabriel Trujillo, superintendent of the Tucson Unified School District. Steve

commented that it is critical to know how large the school districts' needs are across the state to determine how much funding should be requested from the legislature. Steve asked if the Governor's $10 million broadband grants proposed budget could be used for these purposes – Jeff responded this is a mid-term (rather than short term) issue and Mark Goldstein noted if the budget is approved funding would not be available until July 1st. Jeff emphasized his major focus currently is getting students online to finish out the school year.   Steve added there are also issues with enabling teachers and university professors who have never taught online to function in this crisis, and Nan Williams remarked that AzTEA is working with school districts on effective ways for faculty to engage with students online.

State Library and National Activities

Mala Muralidharan, E-rate Administrator for Public Libraries of the Arizona State Library, overviewed activities of the State Library and some activities at the federal level.

At the federal level, there are various activities that impact schools and libraries. Following a letter from SHLB (Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition), the FCC confirmed that schools and libraries can allow community access to their Wi-Fi networks and it has also waived the gift clause allowing schools and libraries to accept Wi-Fi hotspots, networking equipment, and other services, without jeopardizing their E-rate funding (the gift waiver also applies to rural healthcare providers).

Arizona public libraries receive E-rate funding and as a result are able to provide broadband Internet access. Nicole Umayam has constructed a map of the state's libraries that have enabled Wi-Fi access that can be used by students and the general public while library buildings are closed from their parking lots or just outside the library (https://sites.google.com/view/azdigitalinclusion/covid-19-library-resources/library-wifi-map?authuser=0).

There is the possibility of boosting Wi-Fi access signals beyond school/library parking lots, and Jeff Sobotka is discussing this with service providers.

Mala noted there is a dire shortage of mobile hotspots, and that there needs to be more funding for this as well as ensuring the public understands that their smart phones can be used as hotspots.

Nationally, there are 10 million households that have low-speed or no Internet access. The federal government is considering subsidy programs to address this.

Many low-income students lack devices to connect to the Internet for working from home (smart phones are not effective for doing school work). There is a major need for tablets and refurbished laptops. Melissa Armas noted her Arizona Blockchain Initiative organization is working with AZ Strut that refurbishes computers for student use, and Steve added ER2 recycles used computers.

Karen Ziegler and Derek Masseth commented school districts are governed by the State Board of Education Procurement Code.

Mala stated the libraries are content providers for students and the public, and provide a variety of e-resources (e.g. e-books) that can be accessed with library cards. Many content providers are lifting restrictions on accessing such content during this crisis so students can do their homework and for use by the general public.

Mala concluded saying all this information will be posted on their website azlibrary.gov/erate.

Jeff Sobotka remarked he appreciates the efforts of the State Library to make all this information available during this crisis.

Arizona FirstNet Program and ADOA Role

Karen Ziegler, Arizona FirstNet Project Manager at the State of Arizona Department of Administration (ADOA), stated she is working with AT&T to provide hotspots for public safety first responders. She is working with the Arizona Hospitals Association to provide connectivity for police and fire departments at hospitals to access FirstNet.

The ADOA Office of Grants and Federal Resources will be publishing information on new federal funding programs addressing this crisis as the information becomes available.

Next Steps

Steve will be coordinating regular AZBSN Leadership Team emergency meetings to make rapid progress on this work during the COVID-19 crisis. The next meetings will be on Monday March 30that 7:30 am, and on Monday mornings after that in April with other ad-hoc meetings as needed.

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