May 4, 2020, AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force Teleconference Report

Attendees

Steve Peters, Oris Friesen, Henry Goldberg, Mark Goldstein, Melissa Armas, Tracey Beal, Sherri Bakker, Terra Brewer, Kirk Busch, Michael Cohen, Steve Crooks, Jerry Crow, Mark Dallmeier, Dan Doehler, Terence Ford, Tim Harrington, Ian Hathcock, Holly Henley, Steve Hill, Monroe Keedo, John Kelly, Lea Marquez Peterson, Sophia Mayberry, Mala Muralidharan, Cody Pedersen, Lynda Santoro, Brian Sherman, Steve Smith, Jeff Sobotka, Dan Stormont, Graham Taylor, Cory TerEick, Nicole Umayam, Marisa Walker, Nan Williams, Karen Ziegler

Website and Task Force Meetings

Steve Peters explained he is in the process of re-working the "COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force" website. The Updates/Resources webpage will include relevant information received. Website information is intended primarily for people on the task force and stakeholders that are involved in planning activities.

It was agreed that overall task force meetings will continue to be held on Monday mornings at 7:30 am for at least the next four weeks.

Updates: State BB Director, State Library, ADE, NTUA, Public Safety

State Broadband Director

Jeff Sobotka, State Broadband Director, provided an update on his current activities. Jeff continues to work on providing digital access for students, and is working with the Navajo Nation on wireless connectivity. He is looking at how Arizona can be best-positioned to apply for federal grants/loans programs in the education and telemedicine areas. Jeff is continuing to collaborate with the Arizona Telemedicine Program on creating webinars to explain USDA telemedicine grants and help people write grant applications (there will be a USDA webinar on May 5th and an Arizona Telemedicine Program grant writing webinar on May 20th). Steve Peters stated he will post information on the website and send out e-mails informing stakeholders about such webinars.

Jeff discussed the "Broadband Actions Teams (BATs)" that have been formed around the state. There is a Telehealth BAT that is considering infrastructure needed to support telehealth (a presentation on this is posted on the task force website). The Telehealth BAT is considering the telecommunications needs as well as the issues service providers face in meeting those needs (e.g. there are spectrum capacity issues for the Navajo Nation). This BAT is looking at both short-term solutions and longer-term infrastructure that can be built.

There are also BATs that have been established by various counties. These BATs are modeled after the Payson BAT, which includes economic development and service provider representatives, that has been working on constructing a fiber ring for high-capacity and reliable middle-mile connectivity to support the economic development needs of the region . For example, the BAT in Yuma will be focused on agriculture economic development, and the Page BAT will be focused on the tourism business.

Lea Marquez Peterson asked who is funding these BATs. Jeff responded the BATs are established by the counties but there may be a role for the Arizona Corporation Commission to play in funding their activities.

Arizona State Library (amended after the meeting)

Mala Muralidharan, E-rate Administrator for Public Libraries at the Arizona State Library, provided an update on her activities. The deadline for new E-rate grant applications was April 29th, and Arizona schools and libraries applied for approx. $96 million in funding. The state master contract for telecommunications is not yet awarded, so many of the E-rate applicants had to prepare their own contracts. This is very arduous for smaller libraries that do not have the resources to do it.

There is work going on at the federal level on new E-rate bills and white papers (Fund for Learning and SHLB) to address the "homework gap" issue including Internet for the home, end-user devices, and network security. Senator Markey is introducing legislation for the purpose of remote learning. Rep. Meng introduced a bill a week or so ago. Markey's bill requests $4 billion and Meng's bill $2 billion. This homework gap existed before the COVID-19 crisis, but is heightened with current school closures and students now needing to work entirely online from home.

Holly Henley stated the Arizona State Library is working on preliminary plans to distribute the CARES Act Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) funding for libraries. This will be a phased approach:
1. Express grant to purchase Chromebooks to loan out, toolkits for virtual engagement, germ buster kits that libraries need;
2. Expanded grant that they can apply to the Arizona State Library for grants for equipment like hotspots and devices with data plans, that can be checked out by patrons; portable shelters, sneeze guards, etc. The State Library is also working on a pilot with the State Museum to create virtual tours. This will help other museums to model their tours based on this pilot.

Jeff Sobotka remarked that Arizona is viewed as a model nationally for midsize to smaller states in its library digital access activities.

Arizona Department of Education (ADE)

Sophia Mayberry, Project Manager in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction at ADE, stated the ADE is continuing with their research survey of state schools to understand the digital divide issues of Internet access and devices needed by students to continue learning during the COVID-19 school closures. They have received hundreds of responses, and are in the process of cleaning up the data for future use.

Sophia stated they are considering how to use the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act funding for technology for schools. They are currently trying to prioritize the communities in need and how to spend the funding. Jeff commented the first step is to understand the scope of the problem from the survey

Sophia is continuing to work with Jeff Sobotka and the Governor's Office on obtaining hotspots and laptop donations, and distributing these to where they are most needed. Jeff commented they are getting more donations of hotspots and expect to be in a good position in the fall. Jeff added that AZ StRUT has been an incredible partner in providing hotspots and laptops for students.

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<u>Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA)</u>

Monroe Keedo, Research and Development Engineer for the NTUA, stated NTUA provides all utility services for the Navajo Nation, which covers about 27,000 square miles. Telecommunications is a key issue for the Navajo Nation to provide services for education, telehealth, economic development, etc. NTUA Wireless has established 20 Wi-Fi sites enabling students to have Internet access for their schoolwork. NTUA Wireless is considering how it can provide solutions for education with E-rate funding, as well as telehealth solutions.

<u>Public Safety</u>

Karen Ziegler, Public Safety Program Manager at the State of Arizona Department of Administration (ADOA), stated she continues to work on the FirstNet service rollout for public safety first responders as well as expanding the 911 program.

Subcommittees Mobilization

Steve thanked Cory TerEick, Advisor/Consultant at MSS Management Consulting Services, and Terence Ford, Regional Services Account Executive – Enterprise Services Solution Sales at Insight, for their work on moving ahead with the mobilization of the COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force subcommittees.

Cory stated they are in the process of arranging kickoff meetings with the subcommittee champions. Lea Marquez Peterson, the champion for the Funding and Resources subcommittee, stated she has received a slide presentation from Jeff Sobotka on federal funding programs, and their subcommittee will be considering funding/resources from corporate sponsorships and foundations in addition to federal/state funding.

Terence added that Insight will be working with the subcommittees on rolling out the use of the Microsoft Teams collaboration platform.

Connectivity Approaches and Professional Development Issues

<u>Connectivity Approaches</u>

Steve Peters brought up the issue of the use of mesh networks (discussed at the last task force meeting) to provide community Internet access based on Wi-Fi hotspots connecting to schools or libraries with fiber or satellite access to the Internet. Jeff Sobotka responded that mesh networks are one approach depending on the community goals and backhaul availability. Jeff added that fiber access from schools and libraries, which have been funded by the E-rate program, may be the only good Internet connectivity available for a rural community. Mesh networks are an excellent use of this fiber access for community needs, but the potential for this will depend on federal government funding regulations.

Jeff and Mala Muralidharan noted (as mentioned at previous task force meetings) that Cisco is working on a pilot project with five libraries to extend their Wi-Fi signals from the Wi-Fi access points in the libraries outside the library to the parking lots. Mala reviewed the five libraries involved in this project: Huachuca City (in Cochise County), Coolidge (in Pinal County where there are many small businesses), Duncan (in Greenlee County near New Mexico), Tolleson (has poor Internet service and is in Maricopa County), and the Mission Library (which covers tribal areas and is in Pima County). Mala added that the Arizona State Library is also working with the Arizona Blockchain Initiative on a pilot mesh networks project with some Phoenix library branches.

Jeff commented that CenturyLink has provided information on backhaul capacity in rural communities when considering possible mesh networks. Jeff added that each school district would make its own decision about extending its school network to the community with a mesh networks approach. Sophia Mayberry remarked she will talk to Milan Eaton about how school districts may look at this approach.

<u>Professional Development and Technology Support</u>

Steve Peters noted there needs to be training for parents on how to use technology (digital equipment and Internet access) for their children's schoolwork. Jeff Sobotka added that there also needs to be support for families when devices or connectivity don't work.

Sophia Mayberry, stated CARES Act funding may be used for teachers' professional development training to use technology for teaching. ADE only works with the school districts. The technology support for parents is a local issue that would be managed by school districts.

Nan Williams, Executive Director of the Arizona Technology in Education Association, explained that ISTE (discussed at previous task force meetings) is proposing national funding for professional development of teachers, and has requested $2.13 billion in funding from Congress for this.

Next Steps

The next AZBSN COVID-19 Digital Access Task Force overall meeting will be held on Monday, May 11th at 7:30 am, and subsequent overall task force meeting will be held on Monday mornings for at least the following three weeks.

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

Appendix: Chat from Zoom

From Lea Marquez Peterson to Everyone: (07:36 AM)
  I can't hear you. Dialing in...

From John Kelly to Everyone: (07:49 AM)
  If we move to TEAMS, it will be easier to manage that kind of collaborative info in a way where people can comment and be additive within the group.

From Mark Goldstein to Everyone: (07:56 AM)
  The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society has a recent article quite telehealth relevant, "COVID Exposes "Healthcare Gap"" by Craig Settles at https://www.benton.org/blog/covid-exposes-healthcare-gap.

From Mark Goldstein to Everyone: (07:57 AM)
  U.S. House Committee on Energy & Commerce: Pallone, Clyburn, and 10 House Dems Announce Plan to Connect All Americans to Affordable Broadband Internet (4/30/20) - https://energycommerce.house.gov/newsroom/press-releases/pallone-clyburn-and-10-house-dems-announce-plan-to-connect-all-americans-to.

From Nicole Umayam, AZ State Library to Everyone: (08:03 AM)
  State Library CARES Act press release: https://azsos.gov/about-office/media-center/press-releases/1168

From nanwilliams to Everyone: (08:08 AM)
  I would concur about not knowing the scope is the first step of the problem… the national group is pushing for all of the states to do data collection so we have a better understanding of the gap

From Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone: (08:13 AM)
  Sen Markey has a $4 billion companion bill to Rep Meng's Emergency Educational Connections Act. You can view an overview of the press briefing along with the video recording in our new blog post: https://www.shlb.org/blog/2020/05/The-5.25-Billion-Cost-to-Connect-Students-at-Home-During-COVID-19/

From nanwilliams to Everyone: (08:19 AM)
  https://action.cosn.org/ctas/all-students-displaced-by-pandemic-need-access-to

From Cory TerEick to Everyone: (08:19 AM)
  If the Champions have a meeting scheduled or have a planned meeting date/time, please add them to the chat. Thanks!

From Brian Sherman to Everyone: (08:30 AM)
  Have to drop, thx to all for your hard work! Be well.

From Mark Goldstein to Everyone: (08:30 AM)
  May the Fourth Be With You!

From Malavika Muralidharan to Everyone: (08:32 AM)
  Thanks All