

Preparing Your Community for Broadband Success

The need for broadband connectivity has never been greater and closing the final segments of the broadband gap will require true public-private partnerships. States and communities have the ability to help their residents, not just through funding programs, but also by preparing their communities to receive broadband service. Here are things states should be considering along the way:

- **Get Right with Rights of Way:** Broadband projects frequently become mired in permitting and rights-of-way negotiation, which are frequently lengthy and slow down deployment of broadband to communities. State leaders should condition that local communities slated to receive broadband funding should be required to shorten permit approval timelines in advance of awarding funding.
- **Get Moving with Transportation:** States have a unique leverage point with their departments of transportation (DOT). States should make their DOT aware of the broadband deployment projects they are funding before they awarded so that DOT can develop a plan to efficiently permit broadband projects along affected state roadways. Further, states should take a forward-looking approach to future deployment by ensuring conduit placement in new transportation infrastructure.
- **Be the Engine for Railroad Negotiations:** Broadband deployments nearly always cross a railroad at some point but negotiations between private railroad owners and broadband providers can result in significant added delays and costs to a broadband deployment. The Federal Communications Commission's Broadband Deployment Advisory Council developed a [model code](#) for how states can best streamline the railroad approval process that states should consider adopting, in addition to direct outreach to railroad owners explaining the importance of their role in promoting broadband deployment to the community.
- **Remove Cost Barriers:** The broadband deployments to be funded are inherently uneconomic, or else they would already be served. Some communities, however, continue to view the broadband permitting and approval process as a revenue-generating opportunity, which is a disincentive for providers to serve the area. Broadband access creates many new opportunities for local revenue and cost savings, so states should condition local funding projects so that communities must commit to charging permitting fees that are designed to cover their expenses, not generate excess revenue.
- **Prep the Poles:** Broadband deployment in high-cost areas requires service providers to attach to existing utility poles. Many utility pole arrangements—including reasonable fees and attachment timelines and procedures—are governed by federal (FCC) or state law, yet poles owned by municipal and cooperative entities are not. States should work with all pole owning stakeholders, including legislators as necessary, to ensure pole attachment policies are swift and cost-based to promote efficient deployment. At the same time, states should not adopt new rules that force pole owners to pay for the pole attachment costs of new pole attachers. Doing so does not reduce broadband deployment costs, it just shifts the costs from one provider to another.
- **Be a Broadband Champion:** While nearly every state recognizes the need for broadband connectivity, different silos of the government that are adjacent or overlapping to broadband deployment (e.g., departments of environment, transportation) may not understand the roles they can play in promoting broadband deployment. Make sure all state agencies understand the critical mission and are working to streamline deployment.

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- **Don't Go It Alone:** States are at varying degrees of familiarity with their broadband planning process. For those just beginning, there is no need to start from scratch. Many states have important programs in place today that can be easily replicated, including, for example, Indiana's [Broadband Ready Communities](#) program, and other grant programs in places like [Minnesota](#), [New Mexico](#) and [Nebraska](#). Your local service provider frequently has a multi-state viewpoint on which programs are most effective and can provide key guidance as well.
- **Strive for 75% Sponsorship:** A government sponsorship of at least 75% is needed to create a positive business case for fiber-to-the-home projects. When states are not willing to provide this amount, state programs should foster additional sponsorship by local government. Projects should be managed as two-way or three-way partnerships. Extremely high cost (remote) addresses will require more government sponsorship.
- **Reimburse in Thirds:** A program should allow a winning proposal to be reimbursed in one-third portions. One-third at project launch. One-third when the project passes 50% completion. One-third when all customers in the footprint of the project can purchase improved service or when drops have been placed.
- **Drop:** A program should anticipate that only some customers will later choose to purchase, and that placement of cable (drop) along a driveway on private property is reimbursable by the project sponsors rather than by the end user (for a window of time).
- **Respect Projects in Progress:** Once an area has been awarded a grant or is designated to receive service per another program (federal or state), that area should immediately be deemed ineligible for a competing grant. The provider accepting the initial award did so presuming it would not face a publicly funded competitor. Limited grant funds get us closer to universal broadband sooner where separate government entities are not funding competing carriers to modernize plant in the same footprint.
- **Protest Procedure:** Allow existing service providers an opportunity to review other providers' pending applications and identify areas that have existing availability of service. Programs should focus on truly unserved or underserved areas rather than currently well-served areas.
- **Two-year Duration:** Grant programs should allow for a 24-month buildout once construction starts. This allows the provider necessary time for planning, engineering, construction, test, sales system inventory update and promotion. Programs should allow for extension in the event of circumstances beyond control of the service provider or for larger projects.
- **Data Standards:** Programs should outline a uniform approach to submission of proposals to allow for efficient review. Review of poorly drawn PDFs is laborious and error prone. Shape files or GIS files (e.g. Google Earth KMZ format) should be required. Lists of street addresses, street segments, or polygons of the area can be converted to Shape files.
- **Limit Subjectivity:** A program's scoring system should allow for objective scoring of proposals. Doing so increases transparency and attracts better proposals.