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# Memo

To: State broadband offices

From: Jake Varn, The Pew Charitable Trusts

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Subject: Engaging regional and local stakeholders in capacity building

The following memo details a variety of strategies, programs, key considerations, and relevant examples to support local engagement and capacity building efforts.

## Local Engagement and Capacity Building

Local engagement and capacity building are investments of time, resources, and expertise to support regional and local stakeholders in their work to develop digital equity and broadband access. These stakeholders can include local governments, Tribal nations and organizations, representative associations, anchor institutions, and providers. Local engagement and capacity building are distinct efforts but can build on each other and be planned together.

- Local engagement: identifies and educates communities and stakeholder groups through tailored resources and coordination campaigns. Engagement activities can identify and support local efforts and inform state activity.
- Capacity building: supports regional and local stakeholders through a direct investment of dollars, expertise, or resources to support community leaders.

### *Purpose and Importance*

Local engagement and capacity building are important activities for state broadband offices. These efforts can bring immense value to regional and local stakeholders. These efforts can:

- Inform and support coordination between state and local policy; avoid duplicative work and reduce potential barriers; better align state initiatives and guidance to meet local needs.
- Direct scarce resources where most effective and eventually promote the self-sufficiency of local and regional partners.
- Support state broadband office goals and requirements, including planning efforts, compliance obligations, and data collection.

## Considerations for Effective Engagement and Capacity Building

The scope and scale of an outreach and capacity building framework can be adjusted to meet the needs of the communities and stakeholders it will support. Effective engagement and capacity building strategies:

1. Balance the potential to build on existing resources, structures, and partnerships where available with opportunities to create new initiatives to maximize resources and create a broad scope of partners and stakeholders.
2. Tailor outreach, education, and program strategies to meet the local community's needs and to develop agendas, timelines, and long-term goals that allow for success.
3. Emphasize consistent and efficient messaging to create a uniform approach and create opportunities to partner with regional organizations for "train the trainer" models.

## Delivery Methods

Engagement and capacity building can take a variety of forms, namely falling within three categories: education, information distribution and feedback loops, and administrative support and tools.

- Education: information-focused materials and events, including convenings, conferences, fact sheets, white papers, governance committees and task forces; as well as action-focused materials such as toolkits and template documents (e.g., sample memorandums of understanding, data reporting forms, etc.).
- Information distribution and feedback loops: regular opportunities to share and collect information from stakeholders, including digital communications, listening sessions, and surveys.
- Administrative resources and tools: resources and tools to engage or physically assist entities, including targeted grant funding, planning support (e.g., feasibility studies, financial modeling, budgeting tools), data sharing and mapping resources, governance support (e.g., model task force and committee structures, "broadband ready community" designations) and technical assistance.

## Stakeholder and Partner Opportunities

Although stakeholders and partner entities may be the primary audience or recipients of these efforts, they can also support the goals of the state broadband office to maximize outreach and impact. Depending on their mission and network, statewide, regional, and local organizations can help with events and educational materials and can provide complimentary resources. Further, partner organizations and anchor institutions may be able to support "train-the-trainer" models by receiving assistance from the state broadband office and, in turn, distribute that assistance to a wider audience.

## Funding and Resources

Federal funding is specifically available to support state office programs for technical assistance and to conduct local outreach and capacity building, as well as direct funding and subgrants to local entities:

- Economic Development Administration: [Planning and Technical Assistance program](#).
- Treasury Department programs: Coronavirus [Capital Projects Fund](#) and the [Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery program](#).
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration programs: [Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment Program](#), [Digital Equity Act](#), and [Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program](#).

Nongovernment funding may also be available to directly support or augment these efforts, including from philanthropic foundations, impact investors and public-private partnerships, and consortia and regional planning groups.

*This memo was prepared in collaboration with CTC Technology & Energy.*

## APPENDIX: Examples and Resources

### Outreach, surveys, engagement

**ConnectMaine Authority:** holds stakeholder engagement meetings and workshops to solicit input on grant programs and align programs with state goals and stakeholder needs:

<https://www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/engagement>.

See also: <https://www.maine.gov/connectme/board-meetings/agendas>.

**Washington Statewide Broadband Office:** Digital Equity Forum funding and outreach to those with “lived experience” and digital navigators to coordinate outreach efforts to hard-to-reach and low-income communities:

<https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/digital-equity-forum/>.

See also, broadband action teams: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/>.

**Nebraska Rural Broadband Task Force:**

<https://ruralbroadband.nebraska.gov/about/index.html>.

**Connect New Mexico Council:** requires collaboration with local community members, Tribal entities; consists of state agencies covering several disciplines, legislative leaders, and tribal members:

<https://www.doit.nm.gov/programs/broadband/connect-new-mexico-council/>.

**Digital Equity New Mexico:** planning must be “inclusive of state/local agencies, tribes and public education:” <https://www.digitalequitynm.com/state-reports.html>.

**Texas Broadband Development Office:** conducting a Texas Broadband Listening Tour 2022 and survey <https://comptroller.texas.gov/programs/broadband/>.

See also: <https://comptroller.texas.gov/programs/broadband/communities/tour.php>;  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Texas-BDO-2022>.

**Washington, D.C.:** Tech Together project, partnership between D.C. government and nonprofit community, academia, and industry to close digital divide: <https://www.techtogetherdc.com/>. This project includes Wi-Fi in low-income housing development as a partnership between Office of Chief Technology Officer, District of Columbia Housing Authority, and DC-Net to survey residents regarding what type of digital literacy programs should be offered and other community outreach: <https://www.techtogetherdc.com/connecthopkins>.

**New York State Library:** hosts digital equity roundtable conversation; also partnered with State Education Department to conduct digital equity summits in 2021 and released report on digital equity with focus on collaboration with local entities:

<https://nyslibrary.libguides.com/c.php?g=1190632&p=8820198>.

See also: <https://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/DigitalEquityNY.pdf>.

**Get Connected West Virginia:** community outreach survey and legislative advocacy coordination, data analysis: <https://www.broadbandwv.com/>.

**New York Southern Tier 8:** regional economic development organization created regional broadband collaborative and conduct connectivity survey and mapping:

<https://southerntier8.org/>.

See also: <https://southerntier8.org/regional-news/broadband-infrastructure-adaptation-community-planning-positioning>.

**North Carolina Department of Information Technology, Division of Broadband and Digital Equity:** Statewide survey of broadband availability, and an outreach guide to help encourage communities with limited access to also take the survey: <https://www.ncbroadband.gov/north-carolina-broadband-survey>. See also the outreach guide:

<https://www.ncbroadband.gov/broadband-survey/broadband-survey-outreach-guide-materials>.

**Everyone On:** a nonprofit research and education organization focused on the digital divide and disadvantaged communities: <https://www.everyoneon.org/2021-national-study>.

Digital resource library: <https://www.everyoneon.org/digital-learning>.

**Michelson 20MM Foundation:** funds and coordinates collaboration efforts, outreach, and education on digital equity and tribal issues: <https://20mm.org/digital-equity/>.

See also, article on Tribal bootcamp funded by foundation:

<https://20mm.org/2022/03/03/tribal-nations-broadband/>.

## Education materials and webinars

**ConnectMaine:** Resource list for the public on funding, technology, needs assessments, etc.: <https://www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources>.

**Nebraska Rural Broadband Task Force:** online tutorials Broadband 101 and 102 and other written resources: <https://ruralbroadband.nebraska.gov/resources/index.html>.  
And additional technical training at: <https://broadband.nebraska.gov/involve-your-community#your-community>.

**Nebraska Broadband:** community broadband planning guides and education materials: <https://broadband.nebraska.gov/involve-your-community>.

**Nebraska Library Commission:** county by county fact sheets to help start community discussions: <https://ruralbroadband.nebraska.gov/resources/DigitalInclusionWorkbookFillable.pdf>.

**Nebraska Information Technology Commission, Community Council:** Nebraska Digital Inclusion Planning Guide and Workbook (July 2021):

<https://ruralbroadband.nebraska.gov/resources/DigitalInclusionWorkbookFillable.pdf>.

**Texas Broadband Development Office:** email list for updates and resources and comprehensive funding sources list: <https://comptroller.texas.gov/programs/broadband/funding.php>. Texas broadband toolkit: <https://comptroller.texas.gov/programs/broadband/toolkit/>.

**Harris County, TX:** Digital literacy, equity, and financial resources: <http://broadband.harriscountytexas.gov/Digital-Resources>.

**N.Y. State Library:** tools to support digital literacy and digital equity projects in local communities and “train the trainer” materials for the Affordable Connectivity Program: <https://nysllibrary.libguides.com/digitalequity/acp>.

**N.Y. State Library:** brought in experts to host a training webinar series for libraries in New York on digital equity, navigators, partnerships, data collection, asset mapping. These webinars are mandatory to receive American Rescue Plan Act funding: <https://nysllibrary.libguides.com/c.php?g=1190632&p=8816196>.

**Get Connected West Virginia:** broad coalition of stakeholders to support broadband education, including Generation West Virginia: <https://www.broadbandwv.com/> and <https://generationwv.org/resources/>.

**Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Digital Expansion Authority:** webinar series discussing several topics, including public-private partnerships, grant funding,

community and regional stakeholder planning, and mapping:  
<https://adeca.alabama.gov/broadband-webinars-and-workshops/>.

**North Carolina Department of Information Technology, Division of Broadband and Digital Equity:** Community Broadband Planning Playbook: <https://www.ncbroadband.gov/technical-assistance/playbook>.

See also, a Broadband 101 primer: <https://www.ncbroadband.gov/broadband-101>.

**Missouri Broadband Resource Rail:** significant number of reference materials, funding toolkit and list of funding opportunities, resource navigator, webinar/posted materials on the Digital Connected Community Guide and course; charges a fee to access:

<https://mobroadband.org/digitally-connected-community-guide>.

See also, digital inclusion webinar series: <https://mobroadband.org/event/digital-inclusion-101-webinar/>.

**Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, Broadband Accessibility:** inventory of digital inclusion toolkits and resources: <https://www.tn.gov/e cd/rural-development/tennessee-broadband-grant-initiative/digital-inclusion-toolkit.html>.

**Benton Foundation:** Broadband 101 primer: <https://www.benton.org/blog/everything-you-wanted-know-about-broadband-were-afraid-ask>.

## Planning grants for digital inclusion and infrastructure

**ConnectMaine:** Community broadband startup grants support the early stages of planning, needs assessments and strategy-setting; and planning grants support creation of a business model, network design, and cost estimates:

<https://www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/planning-grants>.

**Washington Statewide Broadband Office:** Digital Equity Planning Grant Program: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/grants-and-loans/matching-grants-available-for-federal-broadband-infrastructure-financing-opportunities/>.

**City of Seattle:** <https://www.seattle.gov/tech/initiatives/digital-equity/funding-opportunities>.

**All in WA and Invest Ed:** grant program: <https://allinwa.org/announcing-new-digital-equity-initiative/>.

**North Carolina Department of Information Technology,** Division of Broadband and Digital Equity: has a grants page, including funding for local programs that support digital literacy, and “add on” funding to supplement funding from American Rescue Plan Act programs; BAND-NC to

provide mini-grants to North Carolina communities to fund local digital inclusion projects:  
<https://iei.ncsu.edu/band-nc/>.

See also: <https://www.ncbroadband.gov/grants>.

**California Public Utilities Commission:** local technical assistance grant programs:

<https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/industries-and-topics/internet-and-phone/broadband-implementation-for-california/local-agency-technical-assistance>.

Regional broadband consortia grants to support planning and funding research:

<https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/industries-and-topics/internet-and-phone/california-advanced-services-fund/casf-consortia-account>.

**New Mexico Technical Assistance Program:** US EDA/CARES Act grant provided 12-15 communities with education, technical assistance including design, additional funding options, planning, etc., combined with state funding for planning and grant writing (\$5 million) through the Connect NM Fund: <https://www.doit.nm.gov/programs/broadband/new-mexico-technical-assistance-program/>.

**Institute of Museum and Library Services:** funding from the American Rescue Plan Act granted to the New York State Library, which distributed \$5.5 million to nine regional library councils for “collaborative regional projects” to advance digital inclusion and access to digital resources:

<https://nyslibrary.libguides.com/c.php?g=1190632&p=8816220>.

**West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council:** created a GigReady Incentive Program that provides planning and technical assistance to help communities scope out projects, select partners, research vendors; available mostly for county and municipal governments and affiliated organizations (economic development corporations, regional planning and development councils, etc.), and regional consortia: <https://broadband.wv.gov/>.

**Southern Tier 8 & Appalachian Regional Commission:** Fiber project planning grant, grant writing. <https://southerntier8.org/economic-development-programs/broadband-infrastructure-improvement-planning>.

**PATH Foundation in 2020 in Virginia:** to fund planning with a county broadband initiative: <https://pathforyou.org/announcing-1-2m-in-broadband-program-planning-grants/>.

**T.L.L. Temple Foundation in Texas:** will fund planning, data collection, outreach, ongoing monitoring and support “locally led efforts” in counties to prepare for broadband projects: <https://tlltemple.foundation/economic-opportunity/>.

**Michelson 20MM Foundation:** provides planning and outreach and advocacy grants for nonprofits on digital equity initiatives; supports the National Collaborative on Digital Equity: <https://www.digitalequity.us/about/about-ncde/>.

See also: <https://20mm.org/digital-equity/>.

## Technical assistance and capacity building grants/funding

**ConnectMaine:** technical assistance for broadband utility district development  
<https://www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/BUDs>.

**North Carolina Department of Information Technology:** technical assistance to communities with one-on-one assistance and “on the ground” resources:  
<https://www.ncbroadband.gov/technical-assistance>.

**Nebraska Broadband:** created a regional planning structure to allow for unique needs of each area, <http://broadband.nebraska.gov/about-nebraska-broadband/regional-plans>.

**New Mexico, local initiative:** Doña Ana County: public-private partnership with New Mexico Department of Information Technology, sharing educational resources and broadband survey data with broad group of coalition partners: <https://www.donaanabroadband.com/>.

**East Texas Council of Governments:** funded from U.S. Economic Development Administration grant to do planning for a 14-county region; regional forums, data collection, local planning, and design and mapping: <https://www.etcog.org/broadband-planning>.

**Houston-Galveston Area Council, Regional Broadband Initiative:** 13 county, local, and Tribal governments work with the Gulf Coast Economic Development District on regional high-speed internet strategy: <https://www.h-gac.com/broadband>; and data and information on broadband funding and partnership, user adoption, gap analysis for local governments: <https://www.h-gac.com/broadband/local-governments>.  
See also: <https://www.h-gac.com/gulf-coast-economic-development-district/regional-high-speed-internet>.

**California Public Utilities Commission:** California Advanced Services Fund includes an adoption grant program to fund digital literacy and digital inclusion programs:  
<https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/industries-and-topics/internet-and-phone/california-advanced-services-fund/casf-adoption-account>.

**New York State Library:** used federal funding to create state digital equity portal, in partnership with Cornell University and nonprofits for data collection and mapping:  
<http://www.nysed.gov/news/2021/digital-equity-portal-launches-new-york-state>.  
See also: <https://blogs.cornell.edu/nysdigitalequity/home/>.

**Brazos Valley Council of Governments:** organized health care into a consortium to support local communities and broadband network for businesses, nonprofits, governments:  
<http://bvcognet.org/>.



**Generation West Virginia:** “Locally Driven Broadband Solutions” initiatives, supported by the Benedum Foundation to help “local leadership teams” with wraparound technical assistance and support in navigating the processes of grant writing, strategic planning, partnerships. <https://generationwv.org/broadband/>.

**Alabama Broadband Connectivity for Students:** state-provided call center and central resource hub to connect families with students with information, devices, and discounts, and to work with local communities and school districts; data collection for planning purposes: <https://adeca.alabama.gov/2021/03/29/abc-for-students-program-a-game-changer-and-life-saver-for-alabama-schools/>.

**Washington State Broadband Action Teams:** community-driven collaborations that report on community access and connectivity needs: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/>.

## Tribal resources

**Minnesota Border to Border Broadband Grant:** funding to the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa for broadband planning and infrastructure building: <https://blandinonbroadband.org/2020/01/25/mn-broadband-grants-in-fond-du-lac-cloquet-and-perch-lake/>.  
See also: <https://blandinfoundation.org/minnesota-reservations/fond-du-lac-reservation/>.

**First Nations Development Institute:** webinar on broadband grant funding: <https://www.firstnations.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/PPT-Funding-Broadband-Webinar.pdf> and <https://www.firstnations.org/projects/improving-tribal-broadband/>.

**California Public Utilities Commission:** Tribal technical assistance program and Tribal liaison office: <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/industries-and-topics/internet-and-phone/california-advanced-services-fund/tribal-technical-assistance>.

**Colorado Tribal organizations:** use U.S. Economic Development Administration grant for planning: <https://eda.gov/news/press-releases/2021/12/22/ute-mountain-ute-tribe-towaoc-co.htm>.

## Alternative funding: private foundations and impact investors

**Blandin Foundation in Minnesota:** wrap community outreach and collaboration services, analysis, technical training: <https://blandinfoundation.org/programs/broadband/>.

**Arctaris in Maine:** private impact investors that have funded five local projects using Opportunity Zone equity capital: <https://www.globenewswire.com/news->

[release/2022/01/31/2376096/0/en/GWI-Arctaris-Impact-and-FAME-Partner-to-Build-Fiber-Broadband-Networks-in-5-Maine-Opportunity-Zone-Communities.html](https://www.gwi.com/newsroom/release/2022/01/31/2376096/0/en/GWI-Arctaris-Impact-and-FAME-Partner-to-Build-Fiber-Broadband-Networks-in-5-Maine-Opportunity-Zone-Communities.html).

**Fuse Corps:** executive fellowship program aimed at serving local government and civic leaders with a social equity and justice focus, including digital equity:

<https://www.fusecorps.org/about/>.

**Community Tech Network (San Francisco):** community building, digital training, and equity work in low-income and disadvantaged communities:

<https://www.communitytechnetwork.org/> and

<https://www.communitytechnetwork.org/blog/digital-inclusion-austin-texas/>.

**City of Austin Telecom Regulatory Division:** working with Community Tech Network to implement its Grant for Technology Opportunities Program; grants to Austin-based nonprofits involved in digital inclusion work: <https://www.austintexas.gov/department/grant-technology-opportunities-program>.