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Navigating the Broadband Opportunity

May 10, 2023

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides more than \$65 billion for broadband infrastructure. The bulk of these funds will be administered by state governments. With states finalizing Five-Year Action Plans for federal review, cities are preparing for these new opportunities to expand access to reliable, affordable, high-speed internet service.

On May 10, 2023, the Local Infrastructure Hub hosted a webinar through its Tech and Innovation Center Series to bring together leading state and city government innovators from around the country to provide guidance for how local leaders can make the most of this historic opportunity for universal access to high-speed Internet and full digital literacy. Key insights for local leaders included:

- **Get your priorities and plans in order.** [Christine Burkette](#), the Digital Equity Director for the City of Detroit says states don't want to help you create a plan, they want "shovel-ready" projects ready to go. That means first mapping out what you want to do, and then working backwards to see how your state can support those goals. Digital equity plans developed by [Philadelphia](#) and [Kansas City](#) are good examples of how to get ahead of the curve.
- **Designate a point of contact for broadband and digital equity for state and federal officials.** [Nate Denny](#), Deputy Secretary of Broadband and Digital Equity at the North Carolina Department of Information Technology, says that with so many programs moving forward in such a short time, cities must ensure state officials know who to call to coordinate broadband efforts. The National Telecommunications Infrastructure Agency has also designated state-level program officers (find yours [here](#))—cities should insert themselves into these conversations to ensure their concerns are heard.

- **Nurture digital equity partnerships being built right now.** All three speakers highlighted the extensive engagement activities currently underway as states prepare plans required for Digital Equity Act funding. As [Josh Breitbart](#), Senior Vice President of New York State’s ConnectALL, noted, this “level of participation and engagement is unprecedented in U.S. infrastructure history.” But beyond the information on needs and priorities being gathered, this network-building is creating a resource that cities can tap to supplement resources provided by federal broadband programs, such as associations of county and municipal governments, universities, philanthropic organizations, and community-based organizations.
- **Anticipate long-term needs.** No city plans road projects based on today’s needs, but this is the norm for broadband. Josh Brietbart explained that cities need to think long-term about broadband gaps. He notes that with the rise of remote work, telemedicine, and distance learning, broadband requirements are changing faster than ever. It’s not enough to simply respond to current market conditions. Cities need to anticipate these shifts (see Cisco’s [Global Broadband Index](#)) and future-proof their plans accordingly.

Links from the Conversation

- New York State’s ConnectALL program — <https://broadband.ny.gov/>
- North Carolina Division of BRoadband and Equity — <https://www.ncbroadband.gov/>
- Detroit Office of Digital Equity and Inclusion — <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/department-innovation-and-technology/digital-equity-inclusion>

About the Tech and Innovation Center Series (T&IC)

The T&IC series is dedicated to helping local leaders navigate and understand the large quantities of information from the federal government on the nearly 400 funding opportunities available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The series is focused on how cities can leverage technology to improve their federal infrastructure funding proposals over the next 18 months. Programs will focus on helping cities improve their proposals in response to Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFO’s) by adopting state-of-art technologies, expanding their technology capacity, and integrating aspirational technology “moonshots” for their cities.

The Series is produced by the Jacobs Urban Tech Hub at Cornell Tech and U.S. Digital Response (USDR) as part of the Local Infrastructure Hub, a partnership of the US Conference of Mayors, National League of Cities, Results for America and Delivery Associates supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies, Ballmer Group, Emerson Collective, Ford Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation.