As grantees and supporters of the 2010-2013 Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) in Detroit, we write to you with knowledge not only about communities affected by poor broadband infrastructure and low adoption rates, but also with experience of the impact of public investments in broadband. We believe that a more holistic understanding of the needs, resources, and assets of low-income communities is necessary for creating a diverse broadband marketplace that creates opportunity and builds equity in all of our neighborhoods.

Central to a more effective approach to an equitable broadband marketplace is an understanding of the **intertwining need for attention to both access and adoption**. Without training, support, and resources allocated to facilitating adoption, expanded access will have limited impact. Providers will not receive adequate returns on investment in low-adoption areas, and those areas will be de-prioritized. American Community Survey numbers from 2013 show a broadband market failure in low-income urban neighborhoods, with adoption rates as low as 30-40% in places. In an age when the Internet is a necessity for basic civic and economic participation this dynamic runs the risk of creating "digital redlining."

To **understand the dynamics of adoption** beyond a simple dichotomy of subscribed vs. not-subscribed, the Broadband Opportunity Council should listen to communities -- e.g., groups like the Detroit Digital Justice Coalition, that have a legacy of engaging directly with communities on digital justice issues -- to enrich an understanding of diverse media and technology ecosystems.

In our experience, adoption of networked technologies means addressing digital literacy by building on the legacy of community organizing and existing social support networks. Leading up to BTOP, the lack of equitable digital infrastructure in Detroit resulted in 60% of households without connectivity. But thanks to grassroots efforts by dedicated community organizations and neighborhood block clubs, and catalyzed by the investment from BTOP, Detroiters have started to build the infrastructure needed to begin to address the digital gap. The creation of alternative computing centers and technology training programs that focus on collaborative design and media creation has played a major role in helping newly connected people to understand the relevance of broadband in their lives.

Growing out of the BTOP-funded Detroit Future Media program, the Detroit Community Technology Project (DCTP) offers alternative technology trainings, providing neighborhood leaders with the skills to organize, build, and maintain **community wireless networks as sites of local organizing and skill-building**. Community-led (not municipal) networks in seven different neighborhoods are currently providing Internet connectivity to approximately 200 low-income Detroiters. The DCTP has also successfully trained over 150 media makers and community technologists using popular education techniques and place-based organizing methods. The combination of addressing digital literacy while building digital infrastructure builds capacity while laying the groundwork for new socio-economic relationships to develop; this unique approach has nourished the soil of Detroit's digital ecosystem, allowing new life and new possibilities to grow.

Yet with the sunset of BTOP, efforts like ours are in search of ongoing support. From talking with colleagues and allies across the country, we know that we are not alone. Without strategic, targeted

coordination designed to expand the capacity built through BTOP, we run the risk of losing the benefits of that investment. Future investments by federal, state, and local governments -- as well as private-sector partners -- can contribute to shoring up locally-led connectivity efforts.

Understanding that the BOC will leverage such partnerships in addition to federal and municipal investment, we provide the following guidelines for **community benefits in public-private partnerships.** We recommend the collaborative creation of Community Benefits Agreements to ensure that benefits of investment take root within communities to ensure a healthy ecosystem, by requiring:

- **Clear delineation of roles**, especially a recognition of the importance of community anchor organizations. We believe deeply in the role of social support infrastructure at all stages of the broadband adoption process: identifying need, implementing solutions, and building sustainability. Community anchors and advocates that are trusted by local residents are essential parts of building a holistic broadband ecology.
- **Criteria for procurement** that incorporates open data sharing and requires open access, without locking residents into one choice of provider or even two through hardwiring or infrastructure design.
- **Leadership roles** for coalitions, social justice, and civic tech groups to advance local digital justice policies and leverage broadband assets to meet community needs.
- **Shared goals and metrics** for understanding the value and effectiveness of the partnerships, with agreed-upon benchmarks and resources for ongoing evaluation of progress with input from all stakeholders.

As in the case of ground-up broadband organizing in Detroit, we believe that a **diverse and locally engaged marketplace** offers the best environment for a healthy and resilient digital ecosystem. That means not only more than two or three providers who offer similar services at similar rates, but a range of options for different ways and means of interacting with the digital world, including ground-up and locally-organized efforts. We encourage the BOC to focus not only on fixed home broadband service, but to think about what kind of digital environment best serves holistic goals for community health: local economic development, entrepreneurship, media and arts organizing and community development. Once again, engaging directly with local people - and seeking to understand the impact and needs of connectivity for families, neighborhoods, and communities (not just individuals) -- will help to illuminate new spaces for innovation and opportunity.

Sincerely,

Diana Nucera
Director, Detroit Community Technology Project

Greta Byrum, Senior Analyst
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[1] Principles of the Detroit Digital Justice Coalition: Access, Participation, Common Ownership, and Healthy Communities.

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