From: Gallardo, Roberto
To: BOCrfc2015
Subject: Broadband Opportunity Council - Comments
Date: Tuesday, June 09, 2015 7:57:09 PM
Attachments: MSUES_ICI Broadband Opportunity Countil Comments.pdf

To whom it may concern,

Attached are some comments regarding the importance of providing funding to address primarily broadband adoption in rural areas as well as last-mile connectivity.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Roberto Gallardo, Ph.D.
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Extending knowledge, changing lives

June 9th, 2015

Broadband Opportunity Council,

Broadband is the 21st century infrastructure. As more and more services and applications migrate to online platforms, not having access to or not knowing how to use the technology places communities and individuals farther behind in this digital age. This digital divide is a real threat to both community and economic development and consists primarily of (1) lack of access/affordability as well as (2) lack of education and knowledge on the technology's benefits and potential.

The extension service and the land-grant university system have been increasing awareness, educating clientele, and disseminating innovation regarding agriculture for the past 100 years. Therefore, it is an ideal candidate to continue to increase awareness and disseminate innovation but this time, in addition to agriculture-related matters, on the implications of the digital age.

With this in mind, the Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSUES) recently obtained a designation as an Intelligent Community Institute by a worldwide think-tank called the Intelligent Community Forum (ICF). The MSUES Intelligent Community Institute's mission is to help rural communities transition to, plan for, and prosper in the digital age through both outreach and research.

Based on the outreach and research efforts of the Institute over the past year, we propose the following comments to the Broadband Opportunity Council. Keep in mind these comments are primarily the result of working with rural communities:
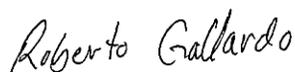
- **[Refers to questions 1, 3, 5, and 30] Invest in broadband education and awareness programs**. While access and affordability remain significant barriers, broadband education and adoption are also very important. Research has found adoption rather than availability to have a larger impact on decreasing the digital divide between urban and rural areas. Additional funds for awareness and educational efforts will allow the continuation and/or expansion of extension programs that provide train-the-trainer as well as direct technical assistance to audiences including residents, entrepreneurs, small business owners, and local governments. These funds will also allow the continuation and/or expansion of successful partnerships, with public libraries in particular and other community anchor institutions. Since this is a complex task, collaborative efforts are already underway and have proven to be effective and efficient in increasing awareness and knowledge. USDA and NTIA could provide funding for these efforts.

- **[Refers to questions 12, 13, 14, 18, 24, 26, and 30] Develop innovative mechanisms that allow to leverage middle-mile infrastructure to deliver last-mile connectivity**. Time and time again, through our extension efforts, small rural communities indicate a high level of frustration when realizing that broadband infrastructure (specifically fiber-optics) runs through their communities yet they cannot have access to it. In other words, last-mile connectivity is non-existent. This is a major issue since lack of broadband infrastructure undermines economic development competitiveness. Research shows that broadband contributes to economic growth in rural areas and impacts jobs and income thus not having access to it places communities at a disadvantage.

Mechanisms that involve state/local governments and/or smaller Internet providers as well as larger Internet service providers must be developed to fully leverage this infrastructure that may remain idle otherwise. Federal incentives to foster lease agreements between state/local governments and/or smaller Internet service providers and larger Internet service providers can perhaps be a component of this mechanism.

- **[Refers to question 8, 9 and 11] Revise eligibility criteria to build or enhance broadband infrastructure in unserved or underserved areas**. Funding opportunities exist such as the USDA Community Connect grants that could have a larger impact if eligibility criteria were revised, specifically existing broadband service in the area of interest. Existing broadband information is obtained from the National Broadband Map, which is incumbent carrier self-reported, raising concerns of its validity. Though an opportunity exists for the existing broadband service data to be validated by USDA field agents, many communities are not aware of this or believe it is too cumbersome to proceed. In addition, a revision that can be considered could include a distinction between wired and wireless availability.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or comments via email (roberto.gallardo@msstate.edu) or sending me a direct message on twitter (@robertoge).

Sincerely,

Roberto Gallardo

Dr. Roberto Gallardo
Associate Extension Professor & Director
MSUES Intelligent Community Institute