Next Century Cities

LIBRARIES

This is our tribute to librarians, featuring The American Library Association, Oil Creek Library District, Pennsylvania Library Association, and The Public Library Association

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November 18, 2020
Connecting Residents in Oxnard, California

BY RAJA BAMRUNGPONG
INTERIM INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR

Please give us a brief overview on the status of broadband connectivity in Oxnard.

The City of Oxnard, like many in the U.S., faces challenges while addressing broadband connectivity for residents and businesses. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 80.3% of Oxnard households have a broadband Internet subscription, which highlights the fact that there is still work to be done to address the digital divide.

This and other similar data empowered the City Council to recently adopt a Fiber Master Plan, which provides a blueprint for how the City can leverage its investment in fiber optic infrastructure for the benefit of government innovation, businesses, and possible future educational and residential use.

Oxnard’s existing 38-mile fiber network serves as a communications link for major City facilities and systems, including the traffic systems, fire stations, information technology data centers, and remote police locations. The majority of the existing fiber network system across the City was built in 2013, with an additional expansion added in 2016.

The goal of the master plan is to expand the fiber optic infrastructure throughout the City, and ultimately provide high-speed internet access to communities where it is currently lacking through an investment in public-private partnerships.

Oxnard is served primarily by Frontier as the local exchange carrier (LEC) who purchased the Verizon assets including FiOS plant. The City is also served by Charter dba Spectrum as the Cable MSO, and the major cellular providers (AT&T, T-Mobile, Verizon).

Continue reading Oxnard's story [here](#).
America’s libraries boost broadband access and use—during a pandemic and beyond

BY LARRA CLARK
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, PUBLIC LIBRARY ASSOCIATION & AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION'S PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY OFFICE

The Williamsburg (VA) Regional Library put its mobile hotspots on the road at the end of March 2020 when COVID-19 public health restrictions closed the doors to its three physical locations. Working with local schools, the library mapped a schedule of 25 different locations where people were doing community food giveaways, including schools, grocery store parking lots, and dollar-store parking lots. Its two outreach vans were out six days per week, providing internet access in two-hour increments per location. In May they added free printing services.

But it’s not just broadband, of course. The McCracken County Public Library in Kentucky doubled the number of kits with laptops and hotspots it lends over the past three years. The Hawkeye Community College Library in Iowa checked out 143 laptops to students to continue their studies online after classes moved online. Library staff reported to the ALA in a May 2020 survey that “this helped some students persist who may not have in this new learning environment.”

In 2019, the Denver (CO) Public Library recorded 63,000 hours of public computer usage, so library director Michelle Jeske knew this need persisted when her buildings were closed.

Cuyahoga County (OH) Public Library reported that county residents logged nearly 30,000 WiFi sessions from their parking lots over two months in the spring. More than 150 libraries applied last spring for a new grant program funded by Microsoft to help rural public libraries boost their WiFi access.

America’s libraries are an indispensable strand in our digital safety net. A March 2020 survey by the Public Library Association, a division of the American Library Association (ALA), found that 93% of respondents have kept their WiFi networks open when their buildings are closed, 44% moved their routers to improve this Wi-Fi access, and more than one in five lend internet hotspots.

Continue reading Larra’s piece here.
Examining Policies and Priorities with the American Library Association

WITH ALAN INOUYE
SENIOR DIRECTOR FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Could you tell us about your role and some of the major projects that fall under your responsibility within the American Library Association?

I am the Senior Director for Public Policy and Government Relations at the American Library Association (ALA). I have general responsibility for our policy, legislative, regulatory work that we undertake. Our current priorities include COVID-19 relief for libraries, because many libraries are experiencing financial difficulty. Most libraries are funded by local or state governments, K-12 schools, or colleges & universities—all of which are under budgetary pressure that is expected to intensify in 2021.

Providing internet access for those without is also a COVID-19 priority for ALA.

Libraries are doing what they can, but we could do much more with additional funding (such as from federal COVID-19 relief) and waiver of some regulations. So advocating for this funding is a key priority for ALA.

If you had the opportunity to talk directly to FCC or Congressional leadership, how could they best support libraries?

One area is to bolster the capacity for digital literacy education. For example, Senator Patty Murray has a bill, "The Digital Equity Act." It would provide increased support for digital inclusion training, workshops, and staff capacity to libraries and other community organizations. People need access to devices and internet access, but after that they need the ability to use this technology to useful ends.

Continue reading about ALA and its broadband-related policy work [here](#).
A Fireside Chat with Christi Buker of the Pennsylvania Library Association

Can you tell us more about the Pennsylvania Library Association?

Part of what we do is represent all types of libraries - school libraries, as well as public libraries, and academic libraries. That’s important, because it is a whole connection point that different libraries are doing activities to help bring access to residents.

We advocate for libraries to receive more funding, and a big part of what their funding is focused on during COVID-19 is helping communities have access to the internet with the number of schools that are doing online learning, hybrid learning, and families and adults that are working from home regardless of whether or not they have school-aged children. They are trying to provide internet access support.

Pennsylvania is oftentimes looked at as highly-populated and well-defined, but we have a significant number of rural areas in Pennsylvania that do not have strong internet access. So part of what the Association is doing is helping our libraries, particularly public libraries find ways to strengthen their internet, their equipment, their technology knowledge. In many of our smaller libraries, whether they’re rural or not, there is very lean staffing, and sometimes the library director might be working as the only full-time staff person in the building. That library director might be wearing the hat as director, the IT person, as well as the maintenance person or sometimes serving as a children’s librarian, so their technology knowledge is not always robust.

Continue reading about Pennsylvania Library Association’s story here.
If you could tell us a bit about your role and what you do with the Oil Creek Library District?

I am the District Consultant. The shortest way to describe that is I am the “librarian’s librarian”, so I am a resource for them. I don’t work directly with the public for most things. I work with the libraries so that they can then take the things to the public. In my district, I also run our district electronic databases and OverDrive. We’ve been working a lot in the broadband area. We’ve been doing this for years, but the pandemic let somebody actually listen to the megaphone that we’ve been trying to bring to this issue for a long time.

Continue reading about the Oil Creek Library District and their work here.
**Western Governors Applaud FCC for Revisions of TV White Spaces Rules.** The Western Governors Association publicly declared support for the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) revisions to its rules on TV White Spaces devices. TWGA previously submitted comments urging for an increase in allowable transmitted power and permitted antennae heights for fixed TVWS devices in rural areas. (Western Governors Association)

**Texas Tribune Hosts Broadband Panel During “The Future of Rural Texas.”** The Texas Tribune held a week-long symposium on issues concerning rural Texas municipalities. During the conference titled “The Future of Rural Texas,” one panel highlighted the significant role that broadband expansion plays in strengthening rural communities. The discussion, ‘Broadband is a Lifeline’ can be viewed in its entirety [here](#). Texas is home to several rural NCC municipalities including Bryan, Gainesville, and Mont Belvieu. (Texas Tribune)

**Rural Broadband Signed into Law in Pennsylvania.** Pennsylvania House Bill 2438 was signed into law by Governor Tom Wolf. The law loosens restrictions on electric cooperatives' ability to attach broadband units to existing utility poles. Rural Lancaster is an NCC member municipality. (GovTech)
NCC is Working to Connect Members

**NCC Invited to Provide Keynote Remarks on Increasing Broadband Access & Adoption Among Underserved Populations in NYC.** On November 14, 2020, NY Senator James Sanders Jr. invited Next Century Cities’ Executive Director to provide keynote remarks on addressing the digital divide in Southeast Queens. Other speakers included NY Senator Diane Savino and NY Assemblyman Clyde Vanel who, respectively, addressed the importance of incorporating privacy education into digital literacy training and emphasized the importance of reducing price, increasing competition, and addressing the skills gap.

**NCC Offers Additional Recommendations for Governor Cuomo’s Reimagine Commission on Broadband.** Beyond the need to declare that broadband is the essential service and eliminating barriers for community networks, NCC highlighted opportunities for the State of New York to support local efforts to address connectivity gaps. NCC’s recommendations include increasing competition, making detailed and verified broadband service data available, and ensuring that state broadband subsidies focus not only on K-12 students, but are also accessible for everyone who needs reliable, high-speed broadband for telehealth, distance learning college courses, and working from home.

**NCC Replies to Chairman Pai’s Response to the Narrow Remand of Restoring Internet Freedom Order.** NCC’s Policy Counsel, Ryan Johnston, issued a response to the Federal Communications Commission’s decision on the narrow remand of the *Restoring Internet Freedom Order*. Johnston remarked, “With connectivity being more important than ever and the Commission touting its own accomplishments in connecting the unconnected, this Order now relegates low-income consumers and BIAS-only providers to a dark, uncertain corner of telecom policy.” Read Ryan’s October 30th statement here.

**Broadband Connects America Allies Urges Congress to Ensure Continuity in Broadband Access.** On October 30, 2020, Next Century Cities joined Broadband Connects America (BCA) allies in a letter to House and Senate leadership. The letter urges members of Congress to ensure that no company can retire telecommunications or broadband technology without ensuring an alternative of equal or better quality is available to all customers in its service area.

**Staff Moderates Mountain Connect 2020 Panel with Local Leaders.** NCC’s Francellla Ochillo and Corian Zacher moderated a panel titled, “Local Officials Are Working to Ensure That Residents Can Adapt to New Connectivity Demands & Thrive in a Post COVID-19 Landscape.” The Mountain Connect Conference panel discussion featured Candelaria Mendoza, Smart City Coordinator for the City of San Antonio, Texas; Ricky Santiago, Digital Inclusion Manager for the City of Louisville, Kentucky; and Zach Friend, Second District Supervisor for Santa Cruz County, California. All reiterated the importance of collaboration between local and state governments with community partners.

**NCC Participates in Broadband Resiliency Roundtable.** NCC’s Executive Director, Francellla Ochillo, joined Regina Costa, Telecommunications Policy Director, TURN; Travis Litman, Chief of Staff to FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel; Svetlana Matt, Legislative Director, Office of Rep. Jerry McNerny; Tom Power, SVP and General Counsel, CTIA on a panel moderated by Harold Feld, Senior Vice President, Public Knowledge. During the October 27, 2020, discussion Francellla highlighted local perspectives and the importance of incorporating resiliency plans into long-term connectivity strategies.

**NCC Hosts Advocacy Workshop for State Library Association.** On October 20, 2020, Next Century Cities’ Executive Director, Francellla Ochillo hosted a training workshop for librarians at the 2020 Pennsylvania Library Association Conference. Her presentation, “Using Your Library Story to Empower Your Advocacy” was followed by a live-streamed Q&A session in which participants discussed the power of storytelling in their advocacy. The slide deck from the presentation can be viewed here.
During the first week of November 2020, Next Century Cities highlighted efforts across the United States to accurately map broadband availability data. State and municipal governments are working hard to correct inaccuracies in the federal broadband data collection, gathering information from a variety of stakeholders in order to develop a clear picture of the digital divide in their communities.

Their work is more important than ever as Federal Communications Commission officials, members of Congress, and state, local, and Tribal leaders agree that inaccurate data does not only impact broadband deployment, but can limit funding opportunities for unserved and underserved communities.

The week began in Montana where local officials, farmers, and concerned citizens are coming together to draw attention to inaccurate maps across the state. These communities rely on accurate maps to receive federal funding that is crucial for expanding broadband access. In Oregon, local residents answered the call for more accurate maps directly as they came together to map their broadband speeds and availability.

In one community, Eugene, Oregon, for example, these efforts transformed their broadband network from the 22nd slowest in the state to one of the fastest in the country. 2,000 miles away in Wisconsin, over 40% of rural residents lack access to fast, affordable, and reliable broadband. Their Public Service Commission overcame this challenge by collecting data directly from consumers to plan future investments.

In West Virginia, the National Radio Quiet Zone leaves many residents without access to wireless solutions to help close the digital divide.

Continue reading about #ShowMeYourMaps here.
A LAW STUDENT’S PERSPECTIVE ON THE MANY OBSTACLES TO THE ACCESSING BROADBAND

BY NAIROBI CRATIC  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN LAW SCHOOL  
2L STUDENT, CLASS OF 2022

According to New America’s 2020 Cost of Connectivity Report, the average price of internet in the United States is $68.38/month. Despite the United Nations declaring internet access a human rights issue nearly ten years ago, for millions of Americans, the internet is not affordable, accessible, or reliable, and COVID-19 has only exacerbated the already dire need for a national broadband plan.

As a second-year law student with virtual classes, I witness classmates who tether iPads to their laptops to boost spotty internet, drive to hotspots and sit in their car for class, and use the phone option to call into class, preventing them from seeing Powerpoints displayed by professors or using the chat function to ask questions. Even professors fall victim to frozen screens and poor connections, making it difficult to learn already complex legal topics.

Internet issues extend outside of the classroom and into missed internship interviews, for example, with some employers who do not consider inconsistent internet an acceptable excuse. Professors have become more flexible by not requiring cameras to be on during class and recording classroom sessions, however, there is only so much that an institution can do to support its students without affordable and reliable broadband.

Broadband plans and discussions tend to sway towards rural deployment, however, there are many in cities across the country who do not have access to affordable and reliable broadband.

In 1985, President Ronald Reagan created the Lifeline program to subsidize phone service for low-income Americans. It was expanded to include an internet subsidy in 2016. In 2017, several major telecommunications providers pulled out of the Universal Service Fund’s (a fund to increase access to telecommunications for all Americans) Lifeline program, as they planned to offer their own low-income internet service options.

Students like me, who participate in Medicaid, also qualify for the Lifeline subsidy. However, the eleven companies which offer Lifeline in Madison, Wisconsin, do not offer broadband, leaving us to search for other options.

Continue reading Nairobi’s perspective here.
There are lots of ways that Congress can help to expand broadband. Here are a few places to start.

Create New Funding Opportunities That Work With State Funding, Not Against It

New funding opportunities should not come with caveats that prevent communities from pursuing other funding opportunities. One barrier to infrastructure development is the inability of localities to simultaneously gain access to both federal and state sources of funding when needed. The Connect America Fund (CAF) awards are an example.

Funding through the CAF program is available in only those areas where there are “no unsubsidized competitors,” meaning that if there is any other provider in an area accepting funding from any public source, federal dollars are not available to them through the CAF program.

This harms competition as it does not incentivize carriers to build out their networks into areas they may otherwise be able to, if eligible for federal funding. Additionally, it makes providers who are eligible for both state and federal funding hesitant to accept state funding given it may cut off their access to federal funding programs that may help pay for any uncovered costs, or would allow them to build in better service to the communities they propose to deploy in.

Continue reading the Policy Note here.
In Case You Missed It

THE COST OF CONNECTIVITY IN THE NAVAJO NATION

The Open Technology Institute recently issued a report on broadband availability in the Navajo Nation where only 49 percent of residents have fixed at-home internet service. Researchers analyzed internet service plans in 109 Navajo chapters, revealing serious inaccuracies in federal connectivity data.

CLOSING THE K–12 DIGITAL DIVIDE IN THE AGE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

In collaboration with EducationSuperHighway and Boston Consulting Group, Common Sense Media developed a report on the state of broadband connectivity among students in all 50 states and the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the existing digital divide.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN CONNECTICUT

Dalio Education and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities conducted a study on the state of broadband connectivity in the state of Connecticut. The study found that 57,000 Connecticut families do not have access to at-home internet, and the percentage of disconnected families increased in low-income households.

PROTECTING STUDENTS’ PRIVACY AND ADVANCING DIGITAL EQUITY

The Center for Democracy and Technology issued a report highlighting the increased risks for data breaches in the COVID-19 era of at-home-learning. The report outlines steps that education leaders and policymakers should take to protect student data and privacy.
Member Opportunities

**Mozilla Festival Call for Panel Proposals.** Groups and individuals are invited to propose a session for Mozilla Festival (MozFest) 2021. Workshops will cover a wide range of topics relevant to trustworthy AI and the internet health movement. The 2021 Call for Proposals closes on November 24, 2020.

**The Federal Communications Commission’s Care Pilot Program.** The FCC began accepting applications for the Connected Care Pilot Program. The program will support telehealth by funding services and equipment, including Internet service for patients and healthcare providers, information services, and certain network equipment. Applications are due on December 7, 2020, at 11:59 p.m. ET.

**Request for Proposals for Project OVERCOME.** Project OVERCOME is designed to expand broadband underserved communities. Grants will support the buildout of five proof-of-concept network deployments in both rural and urban communities. US Ignite will oversee the selection process as well as the build-out phase of the winning concept proposals. Project teams will be chosen based on the use of innovative technologies, such as mesh networks and new spectrum access solutions, in addition to creative deployment models that leverage both public and private sector partners. Grant proposals are due on January 8, 2021.

**City of Condon Request for Proposal.** The City seeks a single partner to enable or directly provide high-speed broadband services over a fiber network or wireless network to end users within the City limits. Proposals will be accepted through 4:00 p.m. on January 11, 2021. Please submit the proposal as attachments to an email sent to Kathryn Greiner, City Administrator, admin@cityofcondon.com.

Does your municipality have a broadband story to share? We would love to hear it! Contact our Communications Director, Brittany-Rae Gregory, at brittany-raesnextcenturycities.org.