

EXPAND BROADBAND ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AND ADOPTION

The Opportunity and Why It's Important

At a time when broadband communication has proved vital to daily living and the state economy, Oregon is ideally positioned to make this essential service more available to more Oregonians. Hundreds of millions of federal dollars have been allocated to improve broadband access and adoption for unserved and underserved areas in Oregon. At the same time, private sector firms are constantly investing in facilities to expand and upgrade broadband services, and they are by far the largest source of funding for broadband expansion and innovation. These new public dollars flowing through federal, state, and local programs can be especially valuable if invested in conjunction with private investments to close gaps that plague some areas and populations. It's critical that private-public funding be deployed in an overarching strategy – with goals, metrics, and interconnected plans of action – to address three interrelated needs.

- **Access:** putting in place the physical infrastructure to provide households with high-speed internet in every corner of the state.
- **Affordability:** leveraging federal subsidies to those who otherwise would be unable to afford access at the commercial rates typically available.
- **Adoption:** providing community-based technical assistance, equipment, and software, as well as promotion of internet benefits and literacy for those currently unserved or underserved.

Current Status

- Several federal departments are promulgating guidelines, project criteria, and timelines for states to use in awarding grants to private and public entities.
- Implementation of 2022 Oregon legislation includes realignment of Oregon Broadband Advisory Council and additional program and project management staffing for the Oregon Broadband Office.
- Agreements between State of Oregon and federal agencies are in progress with deadlines for submission of applications and program proposals due through summer and fall 2022.
- Regional meetings jointly sponsored by private sector service providers and local governments are scheduled from June through August 2022 for project collaboration and ways to resolve obstacles.

Recommendations

Build out the strategy and work plans to mobilize a strong network of government entities, service providers, individuals, and non-profit and community-based organizations. Identify specific needs and the barriers to adoption. In collaboration with trusted, culturally competent organizations, create a practical, long term adoption strategy for affected communities and user groups across the state.

Address such questions as why is having and knowing how to use information communication technology important to various users for various purposes.

Direct the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council to leverage the various federal funding streams across all jurisdictions and interest groups, with focused attention on access and adoption.