COUNCIL on FOUNDATIONS

NEW AMERICA
FOUNDATION
OPEN TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE

Getting Connected:
The Role of Community Foundations in Broadband

Using Broadband to Rebuild Communities

The current national discussion to expand access and use of broadband occurring in Washington has created an ideal time for foundations to become engaged in the issue. The current economic recession, combined with an unprecedented effort by government to directly invest in the deployment and adoption of broadband, provides an enormous opportunity for community foundations to help support beneficial projects and initiatives in communities across the country.

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, home broadband adoption among adults has increased to 64 percent as of April 2009, with strong growth among low-income Americans, but subscription to broadband services in the United States remains low when compared internationally to countries like Denmark, Korea, and Canada based on data available from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and more can be done to increase access to broadband.[i] Some of the areas hit hardest by the recession have the lowest access to broadband. For example, 41 percent of residents in Philadelphia have no Internet access at home.

Broadband Subscribership
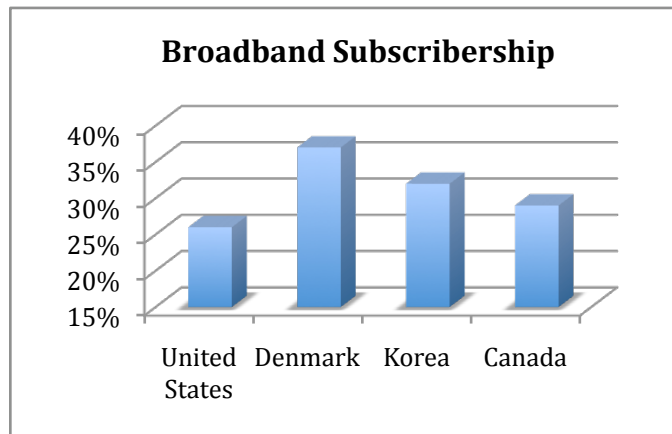
Source: OECD, 2008

Adults Use of the Internet During the Current Recession:

41% to Search for Jobs
23% to Sell Personal Items
25% to Protect Personal Finances
22% to Research Unemployment Benefits
25% to Improve Job Skills

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2009

Access to broadband in a community has become an increasingly important asset for promoting economic opportunity and development. A three-year study from the U.S. Department of Commerce found that access to broadband increased overall job growth by 1 to 1.4 percentage points, at a time when job growth only increased 5.2 percent.[ii] Additionally, 67 percent of adults have used the Internet as a resource during the current recession.[iii]

Several current national programs and initiatives offer an enormous opportunity for community foundations to leverage federal efforts to support innovative community broadband projects and decrease the digital divide. For

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Through its **Public-Philanthropic Partnerships Initiative**, the Council on Foundations acts as an intermediary, representing philanthropy to the administration and conveying information from the administration to philanthropy. The Council provides connections, convenings, communication, and capacity building for members participating in these partnerships. It represents a cross-section of philanthropy and is fundamentally prepared and able to serve as conduit, bridge, and capacity builder for its members.

example, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allocated $7.2 billion in funding to expand access to broadband services in unserved and underserved populations. Community foundations can serve as the project anchors, bringing together diverse groups to create holistic broadband projects that will benefit the entire community. Beyond broadband stimulus, a number of other federal programs are seeking to leverage broadband to improve access and outcome for healthcare and education.

Further, the current discussion regarding the development of a National Broadband Plan is an important opportunity for community foundations to influence long-term policy goals. Because the Federal Communications Commission must deliver a National Broadband Plan to Congress by February 17, 2010 community foundations can help provide much-needed support for on-the-ground community research and ensure community groups take part in the policy discussion.
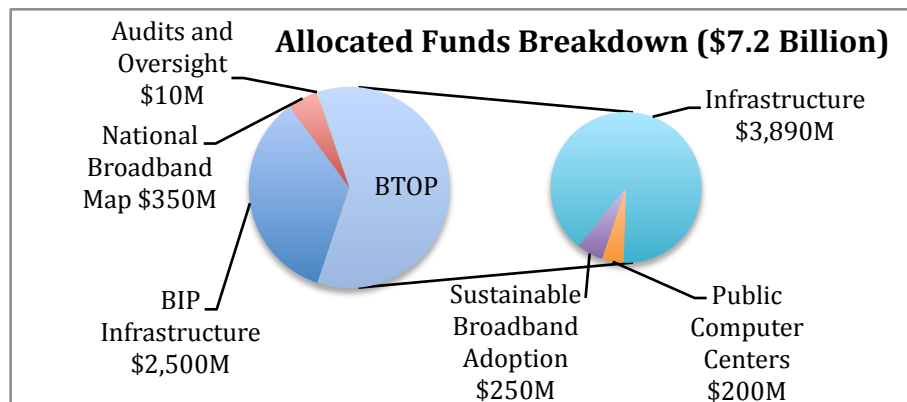
Broadband Opportunities

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allocated $7.2 billion to the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and the Department of Commerce's National Tele-communications and Information Administration (NTIA) to expand access to broadband services to unserved and underserved communities across the United States through RUS' Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) and the NTIA's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). BIP will provide loans or grant/loan combinations to rural broadband infrastructure projects and BTOP will provide grants to fund broadband infrastructure, public computer centers and sustainable broadband adoption projects.

Community Institutions

Other Funders

Civic Leaders

Community Foundation

The Community Foundation is the common link among all these entities, providing resources and support to bring them together to create a holistic broadband project.

Regional Grantmaker Associations

Local Government

Grant Writers

Engineers

Broadband Grant Programs First Round Overview

Total number of applications: 2,186
Total funding available: approx. $4 billion
Average application size: $12.7 million
Median application size: $2.7 million

Applications for the first round of funding were required to be submitted by August 20, 2009 and RUS and NTIA are expected to announce grant winners November 1, 2009. A second round of funding is expected to be announced shortly after. Revised applications requirements are anticipated. All funds must be awarded by September 30, 2010.

Although requirements may change for the second round of funding, applications guides and requirements for the first round of BTOP funding is available from the New America Foundation's Open Technology Initiative at:
http://www.newamerica.net/node/18284

Allocated Funds Breakdown ($7.2 Billion)

Audits and Oversight $10M

National Broadband Map $350M

BTOP

Infrastructure $3,890M

BIP Infrastructure $2,500M

Sustainable Broadband Adoption $250M

Public Computer Centers $200M

Source: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

How Can Community Foundations Become Involved?

The current Federal Grants favor collaborative projects that extend the benefits of the Internet to non-traditional combinations of stakeholders. As an essential point of intersection for a community, foundations can play an important role in educating communities, gathering useful data, and supporting beneficial projects. To become involved foundations can:

- *Gather information*
  - o Learn more about the various broadband stimulus programs through the New America Foundation's Open Technology Initiative's guides at:
    http://www.newamerica.net/node/18284
  - o Review the public database of proposals to learn about different projects and gather ideas for your own project or potential partnerships. Look for known and trusted organizations who can share their experience in preparing an application. Executive summaries from the first round of applicants are publically available at:
    http://www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants/applications/search.cfm
  - o Support a community broadband needs assessment by incorporating surveys and focus groups. The most qualified broadband projects will address a clearly documented need in a community. Because each region's characteristics are unique, your best resources will be local.

- *Raise awareness*
  - o Send an announcement to your grantees alerting them to the current federal grant programs.
  - o Convene a conference call of your grantees or a public forum to discuss the current opportunities, field questions, and promote collaboration. Include speakers with existing proposals and promising ideas, along with national experts.

- *Take leadership*
  - o Offer technical assistance to your grantees to help them understand the opportunities, conceptualize a proposal, and complete an application.
  - o Provide matching funds for quality proposals.
  - o Develop a collaborative application. You can use a Request for Information to gather proposal ideas from your grantees or potential partners.
  - o Apply to be a BTOP reviewer: The federal government is asking for volunteers to review proposals. You cannot have a conflict of interest with a submitted proposal, but you do not need to have technical or engineering expertise. Individuals with experience reviewing grant applications are excellent candidates. For more information on applying to be an application reviewer, go to:
    http://broadbandusa.gov/reviewers.htm

Foundations Getting Involved

ZeroDivide Foundation has a 10-year track record of supporting community technology projects in California. They used BTOP as an opportunity to expand to 12 additional states, aggregating innovative community media and broadband adoption proposals from 44 partner organizations into a single $16 million proposal. ZeroDivide used a Request for Information to find these partners and has pledged the required 20% matching funds. If their BTOP application is successful, they will also provide networking opportunities and technical assistance for their partners.
http://zerodivide.org/broadband_initiative

Blandin Foundation, which strengthens communities in rural Minnesota, is the lead applicant on a $5 million regional proposal for broadband adoption and education. Blandin regularly convenes seminars, webinars, and conferences for those interested in community broadband, and discusses the issue on its blog.
http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org

Media and Democracy Fund, which promotes a just media environment and democratic media policy, is providing technical assistance to its grantees through a grant to the Open Technology Initiative.

What does it take to complete an application?

The current grant opportunities through the Broadband Initiatives Program and the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program require a diverse set of skills, from business planning to engineering to community engagement, not to mention grant writing. Before seeking outside technical assistance, you should convene local partners and assess what skills and resources you already have, and then seek partners to fill in the gaps. As much as possible, look for local partners: individuals or organizations that understand and have a long-term stake in the community.

Just completing an application will take a lot of time and resources. The grants are highly competitive, so you should consider potential benefits of the application development process that go beyond federal funding, such as developing a cohesive vision for community technology or strengthening local relationships. BTOP is just one part of an ongoing national discussion about the future of information and communications technology.

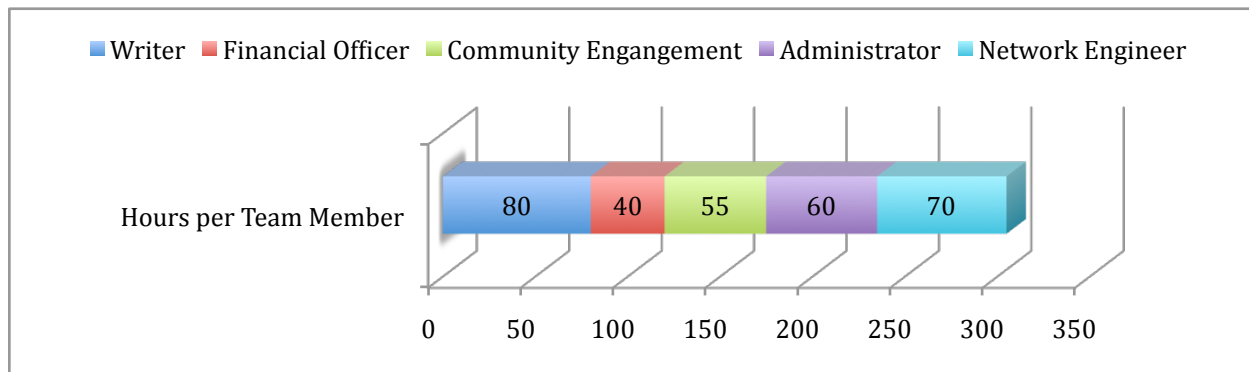**To turn an idea into a proposal, you need a team with specific expertise:**

Writer who can tell the story of your proposed project in a concise and compelling manner.
Financial Officer who can prepare budgets and assist with the development of the business model.
Administrator who can compile the required documentation, including licenses, contracts, and organizational charts.
Community Organizer / Evaluation Specialist who understands who you are trying to serve and how to measure success.
Network Engineer who can design and explain the technology behind your proposal.

■ Writer ■ Financial Officer ■ Community Engangement ■ Administrator ■ Network Engineer

Hours per Team Member | 80 | 40 | 55 | 60 | 70 |

0   50   100   150   200   250   300   350

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For more information about broadband development stimulus and funding, or other public initiatives, please email the Council at partnership@cof.org.

For more information about the Open Technology Initiative and the services we provide, see
http://newamerica.net/programs/oti

Important Resources

http://www.broadbandusa.gov
http://www.usda.gov/rus/
http://www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants/
http://www.ntia.doc.gov/recovery/BTOP/BTOP
_QuarterlyReport_090818.pdf
http://www.benton.org
http://www.newamerica.net/node/18284

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[i] Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Home Broadband Adoption 2009*, (June, 2009); available at:
http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2009/Home-Broadband-Adoption-2009.pdf
[ii] U.S. Department of Commerce, *Measuring Broadband's Economic Impact*, (February, 2006); available at:
http://www.eda.gov/PDF/MITCMUBBImpactReport.pdf
[iii] Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Internet and the Recession*, (available at: July, 2009) available at:
http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2009/The-Internet-and-the-Recession.pdf