# SETTING UP INITIAL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

## A GUIDE FOR STATES AND LOCALITIES

This is the second document in a two-part series on stakeholder engagement for States and Localities as they prepare for upcoming Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) broadband programs. Both documents contain suggestions for engagement; Notices of Funding Opportunity will detail requirements for local coordination.

## OVERVIEW

Strong stakeholder engagement is critical to the development of an inclusive, ambitious, and responsive broadband plan grounded in a deep understanding of community needs. Before initiating stakeholder engagement, decide on the objectives, approach, and topics for the engagement.

## Articulate objectives for each engagement

Generally, there are two types of engagement objectives: (1) identifying and responding to community priorities and/or (2) optimizing the efficiency of your resources. Clarify your objectives and expectations for each engagement before and during your outreach.

### 1  IDENTIFY AND RESPOND TO COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Engagement to **incorporate a diversity of voices**, develop an understanding of community needs, and focus your efforts on practical solutions.
- ❑ How will you address needs of key locations, marginalized communities and groups?
- ❑ Which stakeholders have the experience/resources to build community relationships and trust-building?
- ❑ How can you engage stakeholders in identifying solutions, improving the responsiveness and sustainability of results?

### 2  OPTIMIZE THE EFFICIENCY OF YOUR RESOURCES

Engagement that **improves the efficiency of your effort's resources** by coordinating multiple projects, increasing capacity, supplying expertise, and more.
- ❑ What resources or expertise will you need?
- ❑ What are your capacity needs? Can you partner to meet those needs?
- ❑ What information do you need to more efficiently use funds? (e.g., identifying broadband assets or understanding ongoing construction projects)

## Choose an Engagement Approach

The best engagement approach is likely to vary by stakeholder, engagement objective, relationship, and even timing. There are 4 types of approaches, varying from lower touch to higher touch:

| | Communication | Consultation | Coordination | Collaboration |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Description** | Sharing information and/or updates with stakeholder(s) on an ongoing basis.<br><br>Best for giving visibility to interested stakeholders, often to inform their own efforts. | Direct and targeted outreach; Outreach may be most successful stakeholder-to-stakeholder.<br><br>Best for collecting input on specific asks or reaching stakeholders who may be initially unengaged. | Coordination of interdependent stakeholder efforts.<br><br>Best for reducing frictions and connecting stakeholders already active in broadband efforts. | Working alongside stakeholders, sharing decision making power, data, and lessons from failures.<br><br>Best for complex efforts, incorporating multiple perspectives, and fostering ownership |

**Lower Touch**                                                                 **Higher Touch**

# Engagement Approaches (continued)

| 📣 Communication | 🗣 Consultation | ⤭ Coordination | 🤝 Collaboration |
|---|---|---|---|

**Examples**

- **Communication**
  - State or local website
  - Social media posts
  - Newsletters
  - Brochures, flyers, or other print materials
  - Public informational webinars

- **Consultation**
  - Townhalls
  - Door-knocking campaigns
  - Regional road shows
  - Listening tours
  - Focus groups
  - Surveys soliciting input

- **Coordination**
  - Summits
  - Network creation (e.g. connecting individuals in different offices working on similar efforts)
  - Technical assistance

- **Collaboration**
  - Working group that co-develops plan(s) through meetings, drafting, and socialization
  - A sustained council or task force

As you decide on an approach, **keep accessibility and inclusivity top of mind**. For example, ensure materials are available in multiple languages and use a variety of vehicles, like calls, in-person, and virtual tools.

# Potential Engagement Topics
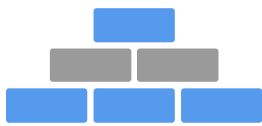
## Building a foundation

*Topics that can help build a fact-base or lay the foundation for future relationships.*

**Assess the current environment**: Identifying community needs with stakeholders can improve the quality of existing data. Ask:
- Who lacks broadband access or adoption today?
- What is the status of ongoing efforts? What are untapped opportunities?
- What is needed to close the digital equity gap in your community?
- What are the priority broadband use cases in your community (telehealth, education, workforce, etc)?

**Identify barriers**: Identify and assess roadblocks to deployment. What has delayed progress? Barrier identification may help inform policy or process changes.

**Build your stakeholder network:** As you talk to stakeholders, always ask "Who else should we be talking to?"

**Offer technical assistance (TA):** In consultation with stakeholders, identify ways to support their capacity and capabilities.
- Sample TA topics: broadband technologies primer, a review of existing broadband grant programs, or connecting them to the right provider contacts.

## Moving towards success

*Topics focused on defining success and moving towards collective action.*

**Define success and discuss potential solutions:** Work with stakeholders to understand what success looks like and build programmatic goals. Then, begin to problem-solve together.

**Collect plan feedback:** Solicit direct feedback from stakeholders on the broadband plan as it is developed. Sharing sections while the plan is still under development will improve plan relevancy, transparency, and buy-in.

**Share a call to action**: Leverage your conversations about anticipated IIJA programs as a call to action for broadband for all today. Collaborating on an existing program with stakeholders can help build strong working relationships in anticipation of incoming IIJA funds. For example, consider collaborating on spreading awareness of the Affordable Connectivity Program.

This document contains suggestions for engagement; the NOFO will detail requirements for local coordination.

# Want to learn more?

To stay up to date on the latest available information, including Notices of Funding Opportunity when released, visit our website.

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