



BroadbandUSA: Introduction to Stakeholder Outreach

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OVERVIEW

Communities across the United States are realizing that investing in broadband is a necessity, not a luxury. Without access to broadband, communities struggle to grow, attract businesses and homeowners, and provide key services that benefit residents, including distance education, government services and telehealth.

When a community makes broadband a priority, it is laying the groundwork to support residents and businesses now and in the future. Local governments can provide better services, reduce waste and increase citizen engagement. Businesses can reach new customers and even access global markets. Residents can access healthcare information and educational opportunities, and have more flexibility with their careers.

Still, as community leaders and local governments increasingly take on the responsibility to advance broadband access and adoption, they may find both support and resistance in their communities.

A successful broadband program requires more than a good idea and the resources to implement that idea. To most successfully deliver a broadband initiative, project managers and community leaders should engage the stakeholders the project will serve and make them a critical part of ongoing broadband efforts.

This toolkit provides insights into effective stakeholder outreach, including tools and proven best practices, to help communities gain support for broadband projects and share the importance of broadband with key stakeholders.¹ By communicating early and often, and tailoring messages to stakeholder interests, project leadership can build a supportive stakeholder base that will increase the likelihood of project success and long-term sustainability.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement involves organizations, individuals, neighborhoods, elected officials, businesses and others with an interest in or who are impacted by the project. Effective outreach helps establish:

- ✦ **Buy-in.** The success of the project is ultimately about the people or customers it serves. If the community actively communicates the value of the services the project delivers and involves residents in the process, support and buy-in will follow.
- ✦ **Two-way Communications.** Open a dialogue with key stakeholder groups to gather feedback, and respond as needed.
- ✦ **Transparency.** Residents want to know that the community's leadership are responsible stewards of community resources and that the project will accomplish what it sets out to do.

Stakeholder Outreach Planning

Successful projects begin with the end in mind. Stakeholders do not become key to program success at the end of the project, when the network is already built or the training class is developed. Communities should involve stakeholders at every stage of the process to better understand their needs and expectations.

Communities working to implement broadband programs, whether infrastructure or adoption focused, should follow a basic communications planning structure, beginning with establishing goals and objectives for communications efforts and ending with evaluating impact.

1. The majority of the best practices and snapshots included in the Introduction to Stakeholder Outreach come from NTIA's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP).

Stages of the Outreach Life Cycle

This Toolkit is grouped into five sections, based on the stages of the communications planning and implementation process.

➤ Section 1: Plan for Outreach Success

What does the community hope to accomplish from outreach efforts?

➤ Section 2: Know Your Stakeholders

Who are the key stakeholders? What do they want? What do they need to know?

➤ Section 3: Select Outreach Tactics

Which tools and tactics effectively meet stakeholder needs and contribute to meeting program objectives?

➤ Section 4: Identify and Engage Partners

Which organizations and individuals are invested in the success of the program?

➤ Section 5: Evaluate Outreach Impact

Did the outreach activities reach the right people? Were they effective?

Each section includes tools, best practices and guidance to help communities develop their own outreach strategies.

Communities can use this document, "Introduction to Stakeholder Outreach," to learn what worked for other communities and continue the important work to increase broadband access and adoption across America.

If you have additional questions about the information in this toolkit, please contact us at BroadbandUSA@ntia.doc.gov or 202-482-2048

How Can BroadbandUSA Help?

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) BroadbandUSA program promotes innovation and economic growth by supporting efforts to expand broadband access and meaningful use across America. BroadbandUSA serves communities, industry and nonprofits that want to expand broadband infrastructure and promote digital inclusion. BroadbandUSA's services are driven by the needs and interests of state and local broadband leaders, and focus on supporting planning efforts, helping to identify funding, and implementing local broadband programs.

BroadbandUSA also holds regional workshops that bring local stakeholders together and provides solution-neutral guides and tools. These efforts equip state and local leaders with information to make key decisions, guidance on how to use broadband to meet their community's needs, and connections to federal, state and industry stakeholders to advance their overarching goals such as economic development, job creation, educational outcomes, healthcare delivery and public safety.

If you are interested in receiving assistance from BroadbandUSA, please contact us at BroadbandUSA@ntia.doc.gov or 202-482-2048. For more information, visit our website at www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandusa.

BroadbandUSA is publishing a series of guides and tools for communities determined to take steps to secure the robust broadband services and digital literacy skills needed to compete in today's global economy. These publications provide practical advice for developing programs that will meet the needs of communities:

- **Introduction to Public-Private Partnerships.** Explore models for building broadband networks by combining public and private resources. <http://go.usa.gov/3fTjF>
- **Guide to Federal Funding of Broadband Programs.** Identify federal programs that could support community broadband access and adoption efforts. <http://go.usa.gov/c2FVQ>
- **Planning a Community Broadband Roadmap.** Learn to develop a Community Broadband Roadmap to help plan new broadband initiatives. <http://go.usa.gov/xDQN4>

PLAN FOR OUTREACH SUCCESS



BEST PRACTICE

Prioritize Community Needs

Help stakeholders understand how your project meets the needs of the community.

Base your outreach on the needs of the community.

The Government of American Samoa collected information from town hall meetings to create a survey on broadband attitudes and barriers to broadband adoption in the community. This information helped it develop outreach to address the community-specific needs and concerns.

Connect the economic development dots during outreach efforts.

C.K. Blandin Foundation used an economic development framework to help shape its conversation with Minnesota communities. Rather than focusing solely on the broadband improvements, it shared how broadband can impact community vitality through workforce development, infrastructure improvements, innovation, and advocacy.

Stakeholder engagement is a critical element of all successful broadband projects. It is even more critical for community-sponsored projects because the stakeholders are deeply invested in the community's future. So how can a community engage stakeholders and encourage buy-in? It all starts with planning.

Communications planning requires a clear understanding of the problem the project intends to solve, the interested stakeholders, and the project's communication needs. The process begins with establishing goals and objectives and analyzing the community's ability to achieve those goals.

The What: Goals & Objectives

Programmatic goals are the organizing premise for the broadband program and express how the project plans to use broadband to enhance the community. Communications goals should tie back to a programmatic goal and focus on what the community should do from an outreach perspective to help the program be successful.

For example, a broadband program goal might be: *"Establish a new high-speed fiber network ring to increase local broadband access and decrease cost of service."*

Based on that high-level goal, the community can establish a specific goal for communications efforts. For example, a communications goal might be to *"increase awareness of community broadband activities and encourage community members to subscribe and participate."* For a typical broadband program, a community should try to focus on one to two communication-specific goals to keep efforts manageable.

Objectives should be more targeted than the goals and should be *measurable*. Use the objectives to help establish achievable timelines and evaluate the effectiveness of communications activities. For example, the sample communications goal is comprised of two key pieces: 1) awareness and 2) subscribership. Supporting objectives might include, *"increasing attendance by 20 percent at town hall meetings related to the broadband program"* or *"increase community broadband subscribership by 30 percent."*

The How: Capabilities & Resources

Once the community identifies goals and objectives for the communications efforts, the next step is to assess capabilities and resources available to the program and identify any gaps. Simply stated, what does the community need to be successful?

While communities should perform this analysis at the beginning of the project, it is important to revisit the findings throughout the project life cycle, particularly at key moments in progress (e.g., launching new classes, groundbreaking, offering new service) to see if anything has changed and requires adjustment.

Internal Assessment

Many communities have an established process for communications efforts. However, whether establishing a new communications team or applying the current process, it is important to assess outreach strengths and weaknesses (including all existing communications activities) to build a baseline for new outreach efforts.

- ✦ What are your strengths?
- ✦ What are your community's in-house capabilities?



Montana State Library

Project Goal:

Provide more residents with the opportunity to access broadband and modern technology.

Resources:

- ✦ \$1,829,473 BTOP Grant
- ✦ \$665,000 from the Gates Foundation
- ✦ Partnerships with public and private organizations, including AARP Montana and the Montana Department of Labor & Industry.

Programmatic Goals:

- ✦ Increasing awareness of computer and Internet resources available at local libraries.
- ✦ Re-establishing the important role libraries play within a community.

Tactics

- ✦ Created print materials (e.g., bookmarks, table toppers, posters and banners).
- ✦ Offered thumb drives with preloaded library materials.
- ✦ Created two 30-second TV Public Service announcements (PSAs) for Montana TV stations and one 30-second radio PSA.

- ✦ What resources can your community use for the broadband program? (e.g., funding, staff)
- ✦ Are these resources enough to achieve communications and programmatic goals and objectives for the broadband program?
- ✦ What existing communications vehicles do you use to reach community members, partners and stakeholders? Do they work well?
- ✦ Are there any gaps in your capabilities that you need to fill to reach your goals?
- ✦ Is there existing support for the project? Opposition?
- ✦ Can community organizations help fill any gaps in your resources and strengths?
- ✦ What do you need to be successful? (e.g., more partners, more customers and other end users)
- ✦ What risks do you face in implementing a successful project? (e.g., lack of community support, scheduling delays, regulatory obstacles)
- ✦ How can stakeholder buy-in help you achieve your goals? Define the areas where you need support and buy-in.

External Assessment

Broadband programs are new endeavors for many communities. Even if community leaders and staff have a general understanding of the community landscape, it is critical to review external factors that could positively or negatively impact the project, including public sentiment. Once the community analyzes and understands the factors, it can leverage communications activities and efforts to address any potential issues or strengthen partnerships or positive sentiment.

- ✦ How can stakeholder involvement help you build on and complement your strengths?

The Who: Stakeholders

At this stage in the planning process, communities will begin to have a better grasp on potential project stakeholders. The next section provides insights into how to analyze, connect with and influence these stakeholders to achieve the communications goals.

Barriers to Community Adoption

As communities develop both programmatic and communications goals, it is useful to better understand the broadband gaps in the community. NTIA's Digital Nation data (<http://go.usa.gov/xkY6R>) shows that households that do not use the Internet at home cited the same main reasons for non-use for the last 15 years: need or interest (55% of offline households in 2015), expense (24% in 2015) or a lack of adequate computing equipment (7% in 2015).



Lack of Need/Interest

*Do residents think broadband can improve their lives?
Are they aware of uses?*



Expense

*Can residents afford to subscribe?
Are there any subsidies that can help?*



Lack of Equipment

*Can residents afford the necessary equipment?
Do they have the skills to use it?*

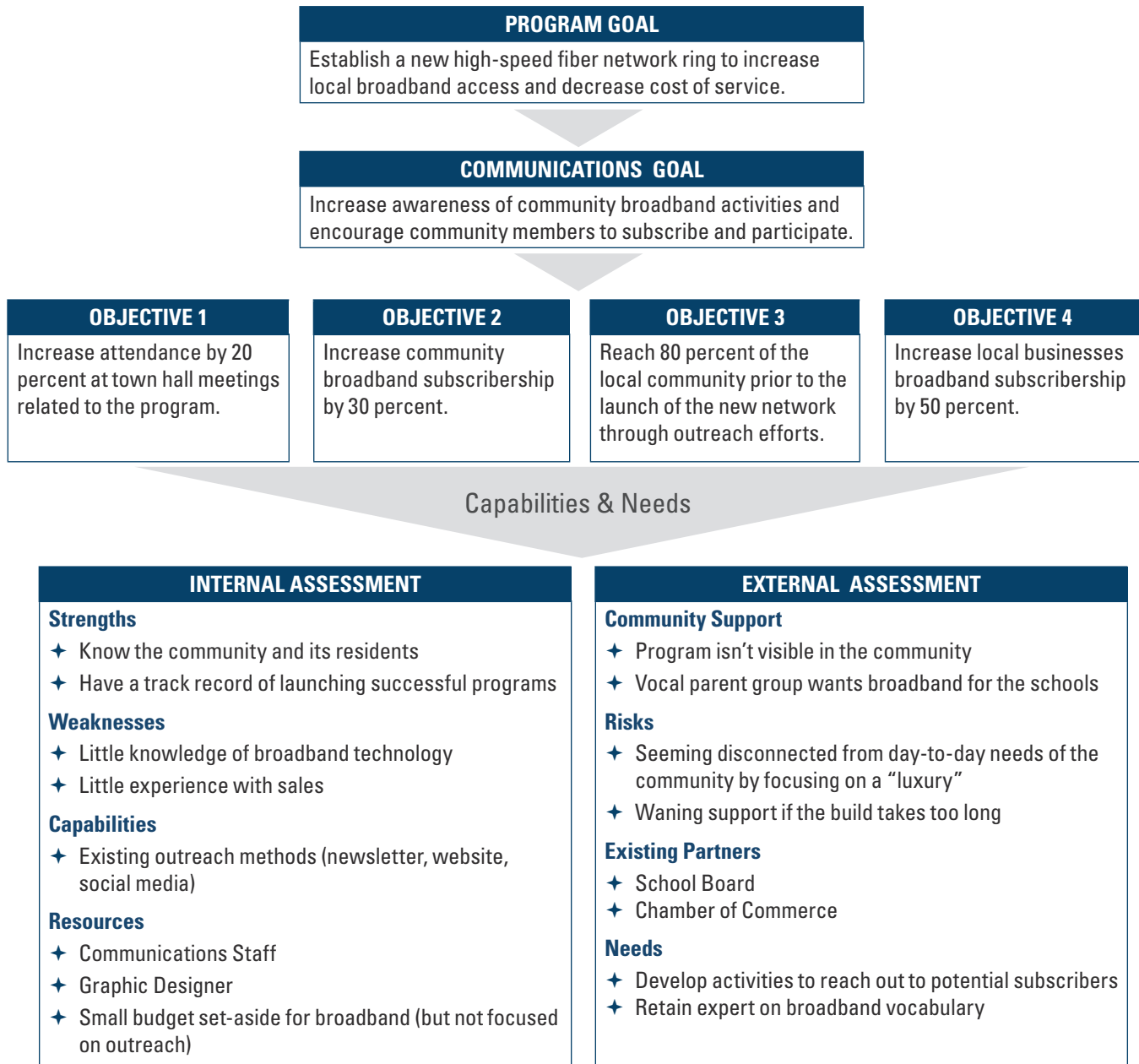
Communities should keep these questions in mind as they learn about the issue. The nature and scope of barriers to Internet adoption will shape the plan and the identification of key stakeholders and outreach tactics.

To learn more about overcoming barriers to adoption, please check out NTIA's Broadband Adoption Toolkit (<http://go.usa.gov/cp76e>).

TOOL: CREATING THE VISION

A community should first develop a strategic vision for its broadband program and determine if it has the capabilities necessary to successfully meet the goals and objectives. A clear understanding of objectives and resources will help the community determine the stakeholders, best (and most feasible) outreach tactics and even partners. Capturing the information in a one page format (sample shown below) can also help project leadership communicate the vision to internal staff.

STRATEGIC VISION (SAMPLE)



KNOW YOUR STAKEHOLDERS



BEST PRACTICE

Talk the Talk

Effective outreach starts with understanding your stakeholders' preferences and holding interactive conversations.

Engage local advocates to communicate program benefits.

OneEconomy, a non-profit that brings technology to underserved, low-income communities, identified local residents in Guam to serve as liaisons to advocate for the program, lend credibility, and share insight about local stakeholder expectations and preferences. The program clearly stated the goals of activities up front and end products that the community could expect.

Host meetings to gather ideas and increase stakeholder interaction and interest.

The EdLab Group Foundation learned that stakeholders in Wyoming were interested in the "big picture." They convened stakeholders from across the state to share project information and discuss broadband trends, including challenges in health, education, agriculture and economic development.

Effective outreach requires identifying and getting to know the stakeholders that can impact project success. Community and project leadership should understand stakeholder needs, concerns and interests to select outreach activities that deliver the right message to the right audiences.

Remember, stakeholders may be important even if they are not directly impacted. For example, a non-profit focused on serving the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing may seem an unlikely champion for building a fiber ring, but they could be interested in indirect benefits, including Internet-enabled phones that ease communications challenges for their community. Stakeholders include any individuals and groups involved in, impacted by or holding a vested interest in the project.

Identifying Stakeholders

Communities should begin by developing a list of individuals and organizations that are connected to the project or who might be interested in it. These groups could include:

- ✦ Existing and potential partners, including incumbent service providers
- ✦ Community residents
- ✦ Funders
- ✦ Active community organizations
- ✦ Community activists
- ✦ Program beneficiaries

As the community develops the list, it is important to ask questions to identify stakeholders that are critical to project success:

- ✦ Who shares an interest in the types of services your project will deliver?

- ✦ Who shares an interest in the populations you will serve?
- ✦ Who could object to the project, both now and in the future?
- ✦ Who could provide resources or support to increase the project's success?

Answers to these questions should yield a list of potential stakeholders. Project and community stakeholders may be groups and individuals with whom the community already has established relationships. In other cases, the community may need to use intermediaries to connect to stakeholders or project beneficiaries. For example, local businesses would be key beneficiaries and stakeholders for a project constructing a new broadband network. If the local government does not have existing relationships or lines of communication with business owners, project leadership can use existing relationships with the local Chamber of Commerce to explain the project benefits.

To better identify existing stakeholder relationships in the community, consider the following:

- ✦ Is the stakeholder group already connected to the project?
- ✦ Could the project connect to the group through existing partnerships?
- ✦ Do you need to establish a new relationship?
- ✦ Is it easier to connect with an individual stakeholder or a group that can help reach out to multiple individuals?

These and other questions can help you better understand the project's stakeholder landscape.



BEST PRACTICE

Reach Out Early

Establish stakeholder support early and grow the relationships throughout the program.

Identify and enlist key champions and partners early in project to build a more effective outreach strategy.

Connected Tennessee found that champions, or community advocates for the project, provided an avenue of access to stakeholder groups and contributed to long-term sustainability.

Communicate with project collaborators early.

Maryland's Department of Information Technology found that reaching out to permitting authorities, rights-of-way owners, utility pole owners and state and local government officials early helped build relationships and gain a realistic understanding of timelines and processes.

Prioritizing Stakeholders

The next step is to prioritize stakeholders based on two primary criteria: interest and power.

Interest

- ✦ Which stakeholders already have a good understanding of the project and support your efforts?
- ✦ Do they care about the outcome of the project?
- ✦ Do they stand to gain from the project's benefits?

Power

- ✦ Does the stakeholder control an organization that could impact the project?
- ✦ Can they help make the project happen? Could they keep the project from happening?
- ✦ What do they need to know about your progress to maintain or give their support?

Communities should determine the level of stakeholder power and interest to plan how to engage. For example, the local Chamber of Commerce advocates for new community assets to increase commerce (high interest) and has access to a large constituency of business owners and community leaders (high power). With both high interest and high power, the community should actively engage the chamber. Conversely, an individual citizen may be interested in subscribing to broadband (high interest), but not have much influence over project implementation (low power). The community would want to keep the resident informed about progress and updates.

Stakeholder prioritization helps the community select the best outreach tools and tactics to reach each of the groups and identify the correct frequency for outreach activities. Power and interest rankings may change over the project's lifespan, requiring project leadership to adapt outreach activities for that particular phase.

Common Stakeholder Groups

For a community-sponsored broadband initiative, project leaders should engage with key influencers at the community level, including:

- ✦ Local Government Officials
- ✦ Government Agencies and Organizations
- ✦ Community Organizations
- ✦ Neighborhood Residents

These groups all have a vested interest in the growth and success of the community and can be champions for the project.

Government Officials

Interest: *Medium—High*

Power: *High*

State, tribal and local officials can become your most valuable partners if they understand your plans and milestones. Start at the local level—the community's mayor will be interested in the success of the project and the services it will deliver to the community's residents. Keep the mayor and other local elected officials informed of project progress and unexpected obstacles throughout the project's life cycle. By being proactive and forthright, project leadership can manage expectations and earn a position of trust with local officials.

Government officials may have varying levels of interest in the project, but they have a high level of power to impact the success of the project.

Government Agencies and Organizations

Interest: *Medium—High*

Power: *Medium—High*

State and local government organizations can champion the project and serve as advisors. For example, does the state have a broadband office? Could the project connect with NTIA's State Broadband Leaders Network (contact us for more information) for resources and best practices?

At the local level, key government organizations will

BEST PRACTICE

Manage Stakeholder Expectations

Let your stakeholders know what your project does and what it doesn't do.

Hold regularly scheduled status meetings with project stakeholders.

The City of Chicago held stakeholder meetings to allow project managers to create a team-focused approach to solving issues and ensure that the project activities continually served stakeholders' needs.

Conduct targeted outreach efforts.

Horizon Telcom conducted a three-month outreach campaign directed at businesses, schools and healthcare facilities along the Ohio network, and attended trade shows sponsored by chambers of commerce. They also held numerous "Lunch & Learns" with area business professionals to discuss the network benefits.

Engage with target audiences and partners through multiple channels.

Sho-Me Technologies in Missouri worked with chambers of commerce and regional technology planning teams to present at local conferences, post weekly social media updates and hold live Q&A sessions with the general public.

be critical partners and beneficiaries of community broadband projects. These organizations have a vested interest in the development and well-being of local residents. Communities can partner with school boards, libraries, workforce development agencies and healthcare agencies to reach a targeted group of existing stakeholders that could support the success and impact of the community broadband program.

Community Organizations

Interest: *Medium*

Power: *Medium*

Reaching each stakeholder individually is difficult, if not impossible. Reaching stakeholders through the organizations they respect and in which they participate is an effective alternative to deliver key messages and build relationships. Ultimately, project leaders should build the project's reputation as a valuable community asset. Partnering directly with community organizations can help increase visibility and impact.

Community Residents

Interest: *High*

Power: *Low—Medium*

Community residents are key stakeholders for any community broadband program. Depending on their needs and interests, their view of the program could vary widely, from excitement to disinterest and even to animosity. If residents are unserved or underserved, their knowledge of broadband and its benefits may be limited. Age ranges may vary from children to seniors. The language spoken at home may not be English. Project leadership should understand how the residents prefer to receive information and what they need to know about the project to trust that the community is investing well. Inform the community's most active residents, and they will help carry the message to their neighbors. Late adopters of technology may rely on the word-of-mouth recommendations of their neighbors and friends to choose a brand or service provider. These groups are more likely to rely on neighborhood newspapers or discussions at local gathering places (e.g., barbershop or grocery store) to access news about local projects or training. Adapt the outreach to meet their needs.

Power and Interest During Project Implementation

MILESTONES:

Project Planning Begins

Network Complete



As discussed in this section, stakeholders have varying levels of power over, and interest in, a community's broadband efforts. There may be times during the project implementation timeline that certain stakeholders play a more important role. For example, a resident who may be a potential subscriber has low power to get the project started, but that power increases to help the project be a success after the network is complete.

Communities should revisit its power and interest rankings throughout the project to make sure that outreach targets the critical stakeholders at each phase.

TOOL: CAPTURING STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION

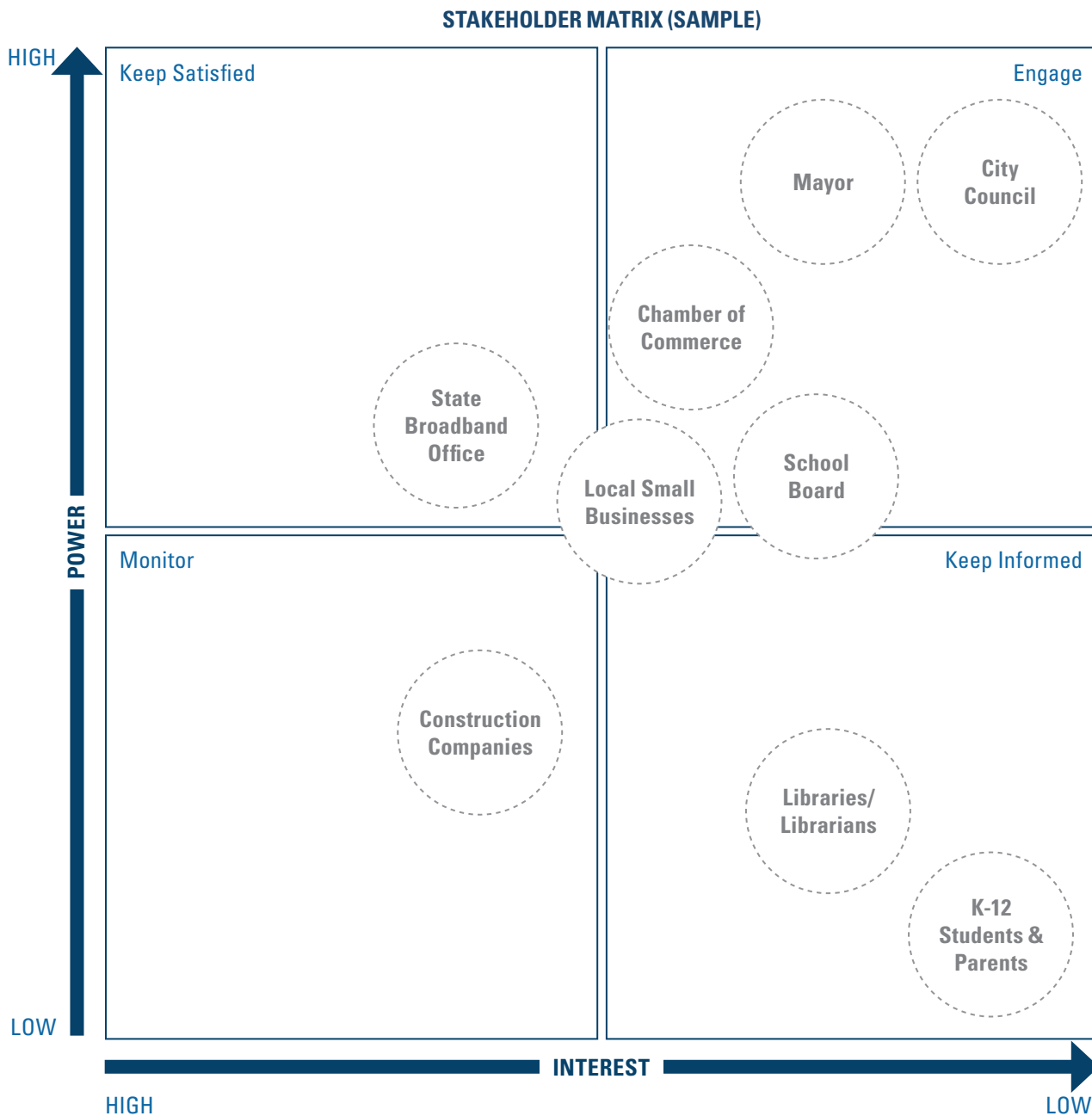
As a community identifies potential stakeholders, it should organize stakeholder information in a chart (sample shown below). While a community can tailor the information to a specific project, that chart should include the stakeholder role and relationship type at a minimum. Program roles will help the community determine the type and frequency of engagement. The community should also consider what the stakeholder can contribute to the project and what the project brings to the stakeholder.

STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION CHART (SAMPLE)

Stakeholder	Potential Role	Existing Partner?	What Can We Do For Them?	What Can They Do For Us?
Mayor	Decision Maker	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Help increase community support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Lend support to project ✦ Increase project visibility
City Council	Decision Maker	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Increase community economic growth ✦ Help attract businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Ease permitting and approval process ✦ Increase project visibility
State Broadband Office	Advisor	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Contribute to statewide broadband plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Offer advice and policy guidance
School Board	Advocate	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Provide high-speed access ✦ Increase distance learning opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Help gain support of K-12 parents ✦ Increase project visibility
Chamber of Commerce	Advocate	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Increase opportunities for economic growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Help gain support from local small businesses
Local Small Businesses	Beneficiary	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Increase ecommerce opportunities ✦ Provide high-speed access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Subscribe to network
Librarians	Beneficiary	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Provide high-speed access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Subscribe to network
Parents of K-12 Students	Beneficiary	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Provide high-speed access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Subscribe to network
Community Non-adopters	Beneficiary	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Provide high-speed access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Subscribe to network
Local Hospital	Beneficiary	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Increase telehealth opportunities ✦ Provide high-speed access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Subscribe to network
Construction Companies	Contributor	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Offer potential construction contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Support network construction efforts

TOOL: ANALYZING POWER AND INTEREST

Use a stakeholder matrix (sample shown below) to determine the ideal level of engagement for the project stakeholders. This exercise helps communities determine which groups will require the most attention and select the outreach tactics necessary to reach certain stakeholder groups. For example, groups that have a high level of interest in and power to affect the project should be kept actively engaged, receiving regular progress updates, and could also be potential partners. Other groups that may have interest but little power require general updates but do not require the same frequency and detail.



Please note: Stakeholder interest and power will vary by community. In one community, a mayor may be less involved in a project, requiring the project leadership to shift the mayor into “keep satisfied.” In another community, local libraries may have greater influence and be active project contributors, requiring project leadership to shift libraries to “engage.” Project leaders may even have to update the chart over the project life cycle to reflect that certain stakeholders could be more important at a specific stage.

SELECT OUTREACH TACTICS



BEST PRACTICE

Use Creative Outreach

Outreach begins with basic building blocks, but can also include creative alternatives to reach target stakeholders.

Find new ways to reach target stakeholders.

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development worked with the Native Language Archives to produce outreach signage in the indigenous language.

Strengthen the message.

The New Jersey Office of Information Technology found that basic impact messaging did not resonate with stakeholders. Instead, the team developed maps that showed community organizations that they had insufficient broadband access and speeds to meet future needs. The maps showed that organizations needed the program to help them stay relevant.

Reach the community through daily activities.

The City and County of San Francisco used social media, videos and multi-lingual marketing on buses to encourage participation in training programs.

Outreach tools and tactics are the means to the end. They are the methods to reach stakeholders and the tools that will help achieve project communications goals and objectives.

Identifying stakeholders and understanding their interests and influence equips communities to do the following:

- ✦ **Tailor messages to the audience.** A technical presentation may work for government officials but would not be appropriate for the general public. Tailor the content and messages without sounding too simplistic or condescending.
- ✦ **Match the communications tool to the stakeholder.** Residents may prefer a newsletter or social media, while local officials may prefer press releases to reach local news outlets.
- ✦ **Communicate at the right time.** Timing is everything. Begin explaining the project's future service and technology offerings at the beginning.
- ✦ **Keep the spotlight on the community.** Outreach and promotion efforts should focus on the ways that the project will positively impact and improve the community.

Project staff should keep residents and other key stakeholders in mind when selecting outreach tactics. While there are many different categories of outreach tools and tactics, most communities should focus on five key categories:

- ✦ **Information Materials.** Print and electronic materials that deliver project information, updates and news to stakeholders.
- ✦ **Events.** Opportunities to mark milestones with special activities, sponsored by the community or partners.

- ✦ **Online Presence.** Accessible and customizable web platforms to host information and encourage interaction and sharing.
- ✦ **Social Media.** Low-cost, simple tools that provide an avenue for telling project stories, delivering updates and interacting with stakeholders.
- ✦ **Traditional Media.** Print, broadcast and online media outlets that deliver easily accessible information to stakeholders.

Information Materials

Outreach materials are the foundation of most communications efforts, helping to deliver project information, updates and news to stakeholders in a clear, consistent and concise manner.

Materials that provide basic information about the project are an important component of introducing the project mission, telling the project story to a variety of stakeholders and helping interested audiences acquire more information to facilitate participation in local community broadband efforts. These materials can provide valuable context and should outline how the project will benefit the community, list project partners and direct stakeholders to the website for additional information.

Outreach materials help update stakeholders on the positive changes resulting from the project, including neighborhoods recently connected to new broadband infrastructure, new computer workstations at libraries and new economic opportunities. In addition, outreach materials raise awareness about the project so that potential partners and other key stakeholders can better participate in the program and obtain the services designed to benefit them.



Be Transparent

Make a commitment to clear, timely communications.

Create an outreach package that details the benefits of broadband for community organizations and residents.

The County of Carver in Minnesota published an interactive map on its website, which kept interested parties aware of completed and planned infrastructure upgrades and connections.

Make it easy for stakeholders to connect and learn more about the program.

ConnectME needed to reach communities in remote, rural areas of Maine. The team broadcasted remotely-accessible community meetings from ConnectME headquarters in Augusta to spread the word of broadband initiatives and benefits.

Secure buy-in from local community leaders and keep communication lines open to share updates.

The College of Menominee Nation in Wisconsin used social media to share information and set up informational booths at community events attended by the public to raise awareness and address any questions.

Keep in mind how the target audience prefers to receive information, the languages spoken in the community, the general depth and breadth of the information that stakeholders will find relevant, and the resources needed to develop the work products.

- ✦ **Fact sheets and brochures.** Provide a project overview and highlight key aspects of the project, including the reason for the project, statistics on progress and benefits that the project will yield.
- ✦ **Frequently asked questions (FAQs).** Offer answers to address stakeholder interests or concerns, such as the location of community resources, areas to be affected by network construction and how members of the community stand to benefit.
- ✦ **Newsletters.** Highlight progress, list upcoming events, introduce broadband topics and emphasize the positive impact of the project on the community. For example, feature anecdotes that acknowledge the contributions of stakeholders and allow partners to share best practices.
- ✦ **Posters, advertisements and flyers.** Raise awareness among groups that may not actively seek information. Messages could serve as a call to action to get potential stakeholders involved.
- ✦ **Direct mail.** Send flyers, newsletters, postcards or other materials to reach stakeholders whom project organizers can easily access through community mailing lists or those of partners.

Events

Community events provide opportunities to establish contact with key stakeholders, mark project milestones, build awareness in the community and gain support for future project activities. They are a great way to educate key stakeholders and provide them with the first-hand information needed to become active participants, supporters or volunteers who can help make the project more successful.

Costs and level of effort associated with hosting events vary depending on several variables (e.g., number of participants, location). To be successful, each event should be tailored to the specific stakeholder group. For example, partners and key community influencers may expect a smaller group setting with project leadership, while residents will require a setting to let their voices be heard. Both types of outreach events have the potential for great impact, depending on the key stakeholder group.

- ✦ **Town hall meetings.** Provide a community focused setting to present the project's purpose and goals, and discuss how to deliver services that meet the needs of community organizers and residents. Such meetings allow project leadership to receive direct feedback and increase the likelihood of ongoing engagement.
- ✦ **Open houses, fairs and exhibits.** Spread the message about the project and reinforce its benefits to the community. These existing community events help the project reach stakeholders who might not otherwise seek out information about the project.
- ✦ **Groundbreaking events.** Mark the official commencement of construction, offer a chance to inform the community about the project and publicly acknowledge the support of individuals and partners. Invite the press to attend and cover the event to increase visibility.
- ✦ **Job Fairs.** Show how the community broadband project will help residents find new opportunities for employment and ongoing education.
- ✦ **Grand opening or milestone celebrations.** Introduce residents and key stakeholders to the new services and offerings. For an infrastructure project, this event could offer partners and key community influencers an opportunity to be the first to try the new high-speed access. For an adoption project, it might be a computer center opening or a sample of a new training course. These events create project "ambassadors" to help spread the word.



State of Nebraska

Project Goal:

Provide more residents with the opportunity to access broadband and modern technology.

Tactics:

- ✦ Developed “Library Broadband Builds Nebraska Communities” blog to keep in contact with participating libraries.
- ✦ Shared information about the program, its benefits and its activities.
- ✦ Posted calendar to website with events and updates.
- ✦ Shared promotional materials on its website.

Results:

- ✦ Helped increase program visibility, resulting in providing training to more than 4.1 million people in basic computer skills, office skills, employment and job search skills, and accessing health and government information online.
- ✦ Continued to share tips and information among libraries to support digital literacy activities and promote their programs.

- ✦ **Cultural events and celebrations.** Reach out to target audiences and share information about the project specifically aimed at the group’s needs. This is an opportunity to establish or build relationships with local community organizations.
- ✦ **Demonstrations of broadband capabilities.** Share capability information at regular organization meetings (e.g., schools, local trade associations) to encourage community members to become involved in the project.

Online Presence

An online presence is the platform to make project information easily accessible to a broad group of stakeholders. Web platforms also enable the use of interactive tools, including blogs, videos or calendars, to help highlight important milestones or address specific stakeholder issues.

Program websites should include high-level program information:

- ✦ **Project Overview.** Provide general information on the project, the organization’s mission and contact information for inquiries. This is an opportunity to emphasize the services the project will provide and how the public can tap into these services.
- ✦ **Project Updates and Highlights.** Summarize the latest progress and accomplishments of the project, which may include major updates to construction, launches of new initiatives and other major milestones.
- ✦ **Calendars or Upcoming Events.** Post event invitations online to increase attendance, provide more detailed information for potential participants and increase the impact of these activities.

Showcasing project developments helps the public understand the project’s impact:

- ✦ **Outreach materials.** Post outreach materials (e.g., fact sheets, flyers, brochures and FAQs) to give more in-depth information about the project. Consider translating materials into multiple languages.
- ✦ **News stories.** Highlight positive media coverage and showcase the impact the project is making on the community.
- ✦ **Training and technical materials.** Post training materials and webinars about specific aspects of the project, including digital literacy.

Social Media

Social media tools are low-cost, accessible methods to engage stakeholders and increase awareness of project goals and accomplishments. Social communications tools provide an avenue for telling project stories, delivering updates and creating a dialogue with stakeholders to obtain feedback on the community broadband initiative. These tools also allow stakeholders to tell their own stories about interactions with the project and how it has made an impact on their lives. Remember to also include social networking site icons and links on the website and in outreach materials, which allow stakeholders to find project information easily.

- ✦ **Blogs.** Share informal project information and anecdotes with stakeholders. Try to post two to three times per week, and plan posts according to upcoming events and milestones when possible. Project leadership can also invite guest bloggers, such as a project partner or community activist, to diversify content and bring new readers.
- ✦ **Twitter.** Share concise, timely updates with a wide audience. Consider sharing information about project events, milestones, and even job openings, as well as linking to key sites and media coverage. To be effective, the project should post at least three times a week.



Keep It Simple

Complicated, expensive outreach activities are not required for you to be successful. Existing communications channels can be the simplest way to reach stakeholders.

Study how target stakeholders consume media and adjust outreach accordingly.

Across the country, the Mission Economic Development Agency conducted outreach over the radio and advertised in church bulletins to reach the Latino community. After giving announcements at the end of church services and holding informational sessions at coffee houses, participation and awareness of the broadband project increased.

Conduct regular outreach with the community to keep people aware and interested in the services and programs.

The Cambridge Housing Authority in Massachusetts sent flyers, which described available resources and encouraged participation, three times per year to more than 5,500 public housing residents.

- ✦ **Instagram.** Share snapshots of the project, including photos of events or of current construction work. This medium is less about providing information and more about connecting with stakeholders using an app that is already part of their lives.
- ✦ **Facebook.** Create a page to share information and marketing materials, including posters, photos and videos.

Traditional Media

Paid and earned media helps raise awareness of the project, especially among stakeholders who stand to benefit most from project efforts: those who might not have Internet access. News coverage can be a cost-effective way to reach targeted stakeholders and inform the community about project objectives, services or milestones. By providing content to local media, the project can proactively develop and distribute stories about events or project-related news.

- ✦ **Press Releases.** Spur interest and possible coverage from media outlets by releasing basic information about the project and news, such as announcement of an event or milestone, as well as contact information for the organization.
- ✦ **Joint Announcements.** Use collective resources from multiple organizations to increase the significance of the news and reach new audiences. The announcements may stand alone or complement, for example, a press conference or a speech at a groundbreaking event.
- ✦ **Media Advisories.** Distribute alerts to media outlets about upcoming events. Include the five key points of the event: (1) what will happen, (2) why it is happening, (3) where it is being held, (4) when it will occur, and (5) who will be in attendance.

- ✦ **Media Kits.** Package relevant background materials for media outlets to use when crafting their stories. Post the package to the website or print hard copies to help media representatives access relevant and accurate project information.

Communities should also consider which media outlet is appropriate for each opportunity. The decision could depend on the stakeholder the project wants to reach and also on the type of outreach activity. For example, seniors are more likely to watch the local evening news, while teenagers are more likely to listen to the local pop radio station. Similarly, a local newspaper is a good outlet for project construction updates, while a radio show interview could help encourage attendance at an event.

- ✦ **Interviews.** Deepen your relationship with your community by sharing first-hand information about the project. To prepare for interviews, it can be helpful to develop talking points to best stay on topic and deliver the key information about your project in a clear and concise manner.
- ✦ **Op-eds/Bylined articles.** Share project impact information to raise the project's profile and credibility in the community.
- ✦ **Case Studies.** Offer a human interest story by demonstrating the project's impact on a specific user or group of users who have utilized project services. Studies also can be posted on the website to supplement news items or other project information, and links to the case studies can be included in press releases or other dissemination of information.

TOOL: MATCHING OBJECTIVES TO STAKEHOLDER NEEDS

For each communications objective, the community should determine 1) the stakeholder group critical to reaching the objective, and 2) the appropriate tools and tactics to reach that group. A single objective may require outreach to several stakeholders and a single activity may reach stakeholders in different roles (e.g., advocate and beneficiary). As a community begins to select outreach tactics, it can be helpful to use a chart (sample shown below) to track the tactics used for each objective and stakeholder.

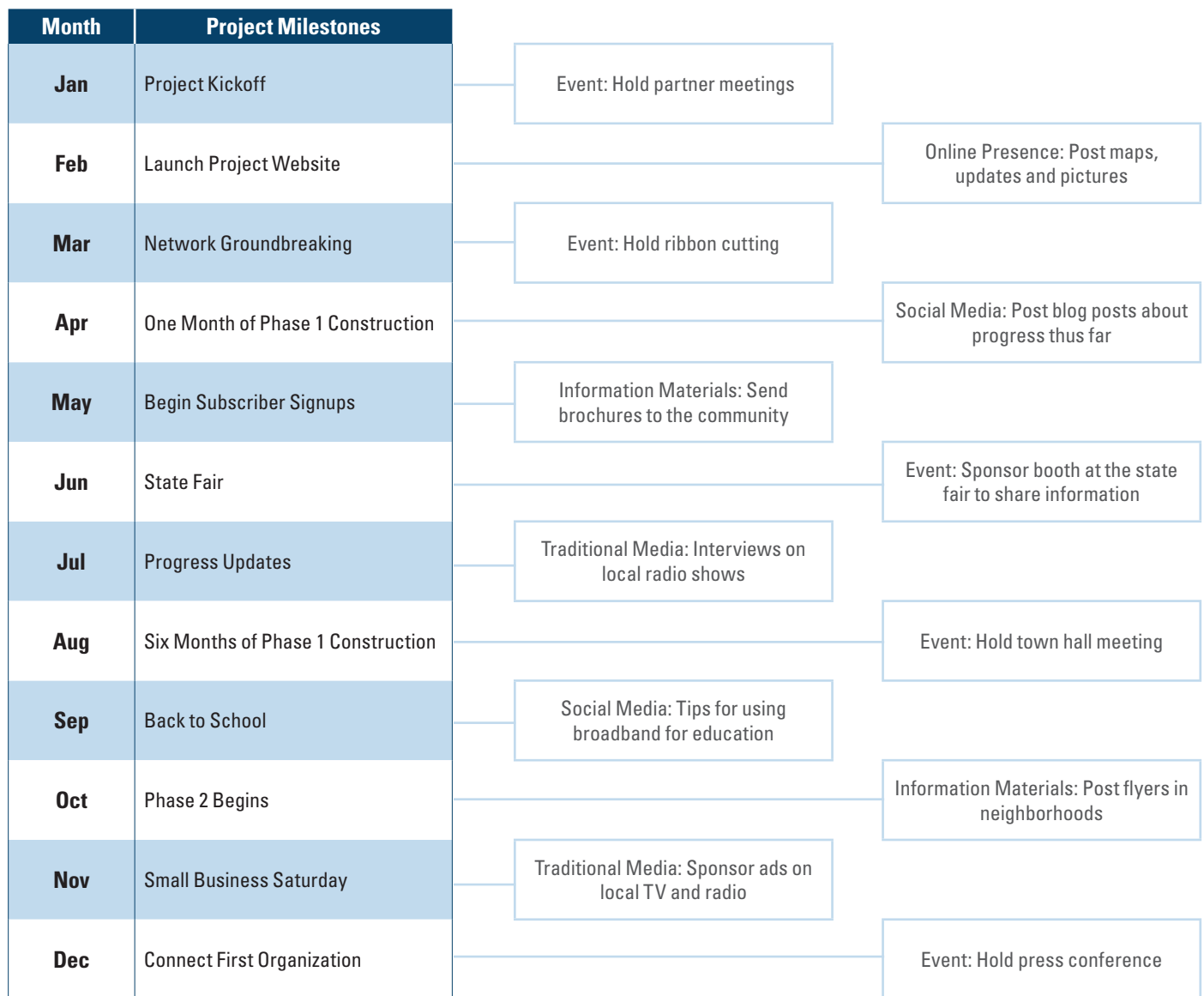
TOOLS AND TACTICS WORKSHEET (SAMPLE)

Stakeholder(s)	Tools and Tactics					Description
	Info Materials	Events	Online Presence	Social Media	Traditional Media	
Objective: Increase attendance by 20 percent at town hall meetings related to the broadband program.						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Parents ✦ Community Non-adopters 				X		Begin the town hall discussion early by posting short videos to social media or encouraging residents to submit advance questions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ City Council ✦ Community Non-adopters 		X				Ask City Council members to hold kick off meetings in their neighborhoods and invite residents to the next town hall meeting.
Objective: Increase community broadband subscribership by 30 percent.						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Community Non-adopters 	X					Post information and project updates at grocery stores or local barbershops. Set up a booth at farmers markets and street fairs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ School Board ✦ Community Non-adopters 		X				Sponsor digital literacy workshops at the local community college or high school in the evenings to showcase broadband benefits.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Community Non-adopters 					X	Work with local news stations to feature interviews with local community members about broadband benefits.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Community Non-adopters ✦ Seniors 		X				Work with high school volunteers to demonstrate Internet tools at senior centers or to community groups.
Objective: Increase local businesses broadband subscribership by 50 percent.						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Chamber of Commerce ✦ Local Small Businesses 					X	Work with local TV and radio stations to feature local business websites on “shop small” and “shop local” segments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Chamber of Commerce ✦ Local Small Businesses 	X					Develop checklists for small businesses to help them establish an online presence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Chamber of Commerce ✦ Local Small Businesses 		X				Partner with state and local economic development organizations to sponsor entrepreneurship workshops.
Objective: Build support in neighborhoods impacted by construction activities.						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Community Residents ✦ Local Small Businesses 				X		Use Twitter and Facebook to share construction updates and allow residents to ask questions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Community Residents 					X	Submit articles to neighborhood newsletters on progress and benefits.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Community Residents 		X				Hold a town hall meeting in the neighborhood prior to construction.

TOOL: PLANNING ACTIVITIES AROUND PROJECT MILESTONES

Milestones that occur throughout the project life cycle provide a unique opportunity to reach stakeholders with news, updates, progress reports and other important information. The community can also identify major local events (e.g., state or county fair) to engage stakeholders during months that the project does not have any major milestones. When possible, try to use a mix of tactics so that the project covers multiple channels to reach key stakeholders.

STAKEHOLDER MATRIX (SAMPLE)



IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE PARTNERS



California Emerging Technology Fund

Project Goal:

Increase broadband adoption in vulnerable and low-income communities in southern California by partnering with businesses and non-profit organizations to provide digital literacy classes and create broadband awareness campaigns.

Goals:

- ✦ Encourage coordination between the organization and its partners.
- ✦ Share resources with partners.

Tactics:

- ✦ Created a social networking portal on its “Get Connected Today” website that served as a repository for resources and improved collaboration among its partners.
- ✦ Used the portal to communicate and share information with partners.
- ✦ Posted digital inclusion training curriculum, a community event toolkit, data collection templates and networking opportunities.

Joining forces with local organizations can increase the success and visibility of community broadband efforts. Community residents trust these organizations and their leaders to have the community’s best interests in mind, and support from these groups can lead to increased support for the project. Partnerships are based on a spectrum of involvement, from coordinating with the organization to extend messages and progress information to members, to sharing resources and taking an active role in advancing the project goals.

Partner Selection

When considering potential partners, communities should target the organizations that best align with project goals and stand to benefit from the project. The groups listed below are examples of community organizations that have a broad reach into and can help increase support from certain target stakeholders:

- ✦ **Educational Institutions.** Local K-12 schools and community colleges are respected organizations that impact the lives of community residents. Especially in the case of digital inclusion projects, educational institutions can take on a more active role in the project by offering training, including digital literacy or job-skills classes.
- ✦ **Chamber of Commerce.** Business owners trust the local chamber of commerce to support activities that benefit local businesses. Partnering with the chamber can help project leadership reach business owners and communicate the broadband project’s features and economic benefits.

- ✦ **Service and Faith-Based Institutions.** These organizations and their members will most likely benefit from the new broadband programs. Their involvement can also help engage hard-to-reach populations in unserved and underserved communities.

- ✦ **Economic Development Authorities.** Communities looking for active partners and resource sharing should consider working with local and regional economic development groups. They have a vested interest in increasing economic development in the area and often have experience supporting large projects.

- ✦ **Commercial Operators.** Local, private companies can also be supporters and partners for the project, depending on the need. For example, commercial telecom operators have experience with broadband operators and can help the project be more successful.

It is critical to encourage two-way communication as the community builds and maintains relationships with partners. The nature of the partnerships may change or grow over time, and communication will help the organizations adapt. It is also important to keep the partners in the loop on decisions and progress updates.

Remember, some partners will be critically important at one phase of the project but maybe not at another. Select partners that are critical to particular activities and use tailored activities to increase awareness and likelihood of involvement.

Partnerships take effort to cultivate but in return bring supporters, advisors, resources and other stakeholders that take a vested interest in the community’s broadband efforts.

To learn more about creating effective public-private partnerships, please check out BroadbandUSA’s “Introduction to Effective Public-Private Partnerships for Broadband Investment” (<http://go.usa.gov/3fTjF>).

TOOL: REACHING STAKEHOLDERS THROUGH ORGANIZATIONS

As communities consider potential partners, they should determine the types of stakeholders that the organization reaches and the type of support it could provide (sample shown below). Based on this information, the community can identify the critical partnerships and work to establish those relationships first, rather than focusing on all of the partners at once. As noted, some of the partners may be important at different times. For example, a potential funder may be a high priority during the planning stages but less important when trying to gain new subscribers.

PARTNER WORKSHEET (SAMPLE)

Organization	Type of Support	Connected Stakeholders	Priority
School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Convener: Host events with school leadership ✦ Advocate: Share information with local schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Local Schools ✦ Local Libraries 	High
Chamber of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Convener: Host events with local businesses ✦ Advocate: Share information with local businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Local Businesses 	High
Regional Planning Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Advisor: Share best practices and planning tips/considerations ✦ Convener: Bring groups together to discuss broadband at a regional level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Local Elected Officials ✦ Local Businesses 	High
Economic Development Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Advisor: Share information about how to increase economic growth ✦ Funder: Award grant funds to community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Local Businesses ✦ State Offices 	Medium
Internet Service Provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Funder: Help cover network construction costs ✦ Manager: Provide support to network to increase sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Existing Customers ✦ New Customers 	Medium
Local Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Advocate: Communicate broadband benefits to non-adopters/potential subscribers ✦ Programmatic: Serve as training venue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Youth ✦ Seniors ✦ Non-adopters 	Medium
YMCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Advocate: Communicate broadband benefits to non-adopters ✦ Programmatic: Serve as training venue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Youth ✦ Non-adopters 	Low
Senior Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Advocate: Communicate broadband benefits to non-adopters/potential subscribers ✦ Programmatic: Serve as training venue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Seniors ✦ Non-adopters 	Low
Big Brothers Big Sisters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Advocate: Communicate broadband benefits to non-adopters ✦ Programmatic: Serve as training venue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Youth ✦ Non-adopters 	Low
Churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Advocate: Communicate broadband benefits to non-adopters/potential subscribers ✦ Programmatic: Serve as training venue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Parents ✦ Seniors ✦ Non-adopters 	Low

EVALUATE OUTREACH IMPACT



BEST PRACTICE

Ask for Feedback

Collect and learn from stakeholder feedback throughout the project, and adapt as needed.

Build an advisory committee to gather and leverage best practices.

The Olive Hill Community Economic Development Corporation in Massachusetts formed an advisory committee to guide the project and gather best practices and lessons learned from impact evaluations and user surveys.

Proactively gather feedback to increase communication.

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection broadband coordinator consistently requested feedback from partners and worked to identify opportunities for increased collaboration that could accelerate program impact.

Ask targeted questions about outreach efforts.

The Office of the State Library of Louisiana found through class evaluation forms that most people heard about training from the newspaper or library signage.

Outreach occurs in a dynamic environment. New issues, new stakeholders, new partners and new opportunities all contribute to changing circumstances. Communities should evaluate the effectiveness of outreach activities throughout the project's life cycle.

Evaluation methods help the community:

- ✦ Understand the evolving needs of stakeholders and partners
- ✦ Select tactics to share important project information
- ✦ Tailor messaging to the audience
- ✦ Ensure that resources are used on effective tactics

Results-Focused Measurement

Typically, evaluation efforts gather **quantitative** (e.g., numerical measures) and **qualitative** (e.g., impact and effect measures) information. It is important to track both types of information to get a complete picture. For example, a community may send flyers to stakeholders every week, which would result in a high quantity of outreach. However, if the sentiment of social media posts related to the project is negative, the community still has work to do. The frequency of contact may have overwhelmed the stakeholders, or the message on the flyers may not have resonated with the target audience. Quantitative measures tell the community what it did. Qualitative measures tell them if it worked.

A community should select measures that are concrete, results-oriented and easily measureable. For example, while it would be helpful to know that "an open house event convinced 50 residents to become project supporters," it may be difficult to gather that information. Instead, a community

could track social media commentary to determine that "social media posts about the open house show increased knowledge of and support for the project."

Evaluation Tools

Communities can perform evaluation and analysis internally or can identify third-party evaluation tools. Third-party tools range from free to costly, depending on the outreach tactic and the type of measure. Social media sites and websites often offer free basic data and analysis. More detailed sentiment analysis tools that help determine the quality of the outreach and media support can be costly. Still, a community can get a fairly well-rounded assessment using the free tools.

Certain evaluation tactics are more difficult than others. For example, it is easy to track the number of visitors to a website. It is more difficult to determine what they thought about the website. In this scenario, a survey could provide helpful insights but the usefulness of the information is affected by the quality of responses. Site visitors who are already engaged in the project are more likely to respond and provide detailed answers. The site visitors that the project really wants to engage may not care enough to provide responses.

Evaluation is often time consuming and does not provide a roadmap to the ideal outreach plan. Still, data and user feedback is critical to adapting, tailoring and improving outreach to key stakeholders, partners and community residents.

Communities can use the information to advance (or even tweak) project and communication goals, shift priorities and, most importantly, improve outreach efforts to increase the visibility and success of the project as a whole.

TOOL: MEASURING OUTREACH IMPACT

For each measure, communities should set benchmarks, determine the frequency of the data collection and analysis, and identify sources for the data (as shown below). Each variable will differ based on the community's goals and needs, the time in the program and the resources available. It is important to set realistic benchmarks and to update the measures and benchmarks based on the evaluation results.

IMPACT MEASUREMENT TRACKER (SAMPLE)

Online Presence				
Measure	Benchmarks	Frequency	Type	Source
Visits	5,000	Monthly	Quantitative	Website Analytics Tool
Unique Visitors	2,500	Monthly	Quantitative	Website Analytics Tool
Average Visit Duration	5 minutes	Monthly	Quantitative	Website Analytics Tool
Pageviews	20,000	Monthly	Quantitative	Website Analytics Tool
User Interest	N/A	Monthly	Qualitative	Website Comments
User Satisfaction	N/A	Quarterly	Qualitative	Web Survey

Online Presence				
Measure	Benchmarks	Frequency	Type	Source
Retweets	75	Weekly	Quantitative	Social Media Analytics Tool
Impressions	5,000	Weekly	Quantitative	Social Media Analytics Tool
Favorites	30	Weekly	Quantitative	Social Media Analytics Tool
Shared Via Email	5	Weekly	Quantitative	Social Media Analytics Tool
Replies	2	Weekly	Quantitative	Social Media Analytics Tool
Follows	20	Weekly	Quantitative	Social Media Analytics Tool
User Support	N/A	Monthly	Qualitative	Comment and Tweet Analysis
Sentiment	N/A	Monthly	Qualitative	Comment and Tweet Analysis

BroadbandUSA hopes this Introduction to Stakeholder Outreach provides communities with practical information, tools and guidance to improve stakeholder engagement and outreach for broadband programs. BroadbandUSA welcomes feedback and requests for other guidance as part of our ongoing support to communities that are advancing the important work to increase broadband access and adoption.

CONTACT US

NTIA's BroadbandUSA program is dedicated to helping communities achieve their broadband missions. NTIA can offer assistance to communities as they plan for broadband efforts, including stakeholder outreach activities. If you have additional questions about the information contained in this guide, please contact us at BroadbandUSA@ntia.doc.gov or 202-482-2048.

ABOUT NTIA

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is the Executive Branch agency principally responsible for advising the President on telecommunications and information policy issues. NTIA's programs and policymaking focus largely on expanding broadband Internet access and adoption in America, expanding the use of spectrum by all users, and ensuring that the Internet remains an engine for continued innovation and economic growth.

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