Request for Virtual Conference Proposals: Author Stipends Available

Making it Count: Applying Science to Support Universal Affordable Broadband Adoption

Objective: Inform the development and Management of Digital Equity & Broadband Adoption Programs

Framing:

Several new Federal programs are and will be distributing funding with the objective of closing the digital divide by providing affordable broadband access for all. The newest programs include those in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021:

- The Broadband Infrastructure Program,
- The Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program
- Connecting Minority Communities Program.

These programs were added to the existing suite of broadband programs that are detailed in the following document:

Guide to Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities in the U.S. (February 2021.). *Internet Society*. Retrieved March 23, 2021, from https://www.internetsociety.org/resources/doc/2021/guide-to-broadband-funding-opportunities-in-us/

There are other bills pending in Congress (especially H.R. 1783, the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act, which authorizes over $94 billion to ensure unserved and underserved communities have affordable high-speed internet access). However, these new programs to close the digital divide beg the question, "What can be done to ensure that these funds will be used most effectively to ensure broadband adoption uptake for the greatest number of currently-underserved people?"

This convening focuses on how research and extension programs can help inform and aid with implementation and evaluation of broadband adoption programs, as well as how to better inform decision-making around broadband investment choices that are being made, both now and into the future. In our first virtual conference, participants developed a series of research questions concerning access and adoption of rural broadband and smart agriculture technology. Those research questions are detailed here and include inquiries concerning targeting investments with better data, building more effective partnerships within rural communities, the promise of new technologies for changing the economic factors to enable rural access, and how workforce needs will change as rural economies become more connected.

For the follow-on conference, we have chosen the following topic:

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The series of presentations and papers will inform current deliberations over how to structure, monitor, and evaluate the new suite of internet access and adoption programs. Up to 18 speakers will be awarded stipends of up to $1,500 to develop papers covering the topics on the following page. The papers will then be considered for a special issue of the journal *Choices*. Teams of authors are welcome to apply; however, only one stipend will be provided per abstract.

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Topics:

- **Investments in Digital Literacy**: How are investments to promote digital literacy impacting adoption? What are the skillsets most needed? How do we best reach underserved audiences? What changes in individual mindsets need to happen to move the needle on their willingness to pursue access/adoption?

- **Rural Broadband business models and execution:** what innovative business models, partnerships, and implementation tactics demonstrate the capacity to accomplish universal broadband access and adoption given the increase in federal funds? What changes in community mindsets need to happen to move the needle on their willingness to pursue funding?

- **Federal-state policy and funding interaction**: As federal funding and policy changes affect incentives for broadband provision, how might state policies and funding impact the effectiveness of these policies and funding mechanisms? What processes and programs can be engaged in local communities to meet end user needs?

- **Data and Models to support program evaluation**: What information should agencies be collecting now to ensure that the effectiveness of new programs and funding can be assessed? What models or evaluation methods are best suited to the task?

- **Impact on adoption of Precision Agriculture:** How are forthcoming federal, state, and private sector investments in broadband infrastructure and adoption enabling current and emerging smart and precision agriculture technologies? How might we evaluate how these investments affect adoption and effectiveness of these technologies?

- **Labor market effects and response**: How will rural broadband funding and access affect the demand for workers with specific skills in the short-term (telecom equipment manufacturing and infrastructure buildout), medium-term (providing businesses and households access), and long-term (as we move toward adoption)? What investments are required to meet those needs and what education assets are best positioned to meet them?

To respond, please [submit an abstract online](#) with the elements below:

- Abstract (500-word limit)
    - Author(s) with contact information
    - Research questions
    - Data Sources
    - Key Findings

Approximate Schedule:

- April 30: RFP Released
- June 30: Speaker Stipends Announced
- Nov: Papers Chosen for Special Issue
- May 30: Responses Due
- Oct: Virtual Conference
- Jan 31, 2022 Final Papers Due to Editors