



Broadband Access in Rural Areas



Coconino County asks for grant support for various stakeholders to develop broadband in rural communities as well as information on whether infrastructure projects budgets will include resources for state and local governments to build broadband capacity.

Background:

- Broadband connectivity is no longer a luxury for streaming internet content or keeping up with e-mail or the news. It has become a critical connection to thriving communities in securing better economic prosperity, education and healthy communities. Broadband access is a necessity to start and grow a small business, take advantage of advances in agriculture, telemedicine and education. Broadband has become a vital part of 21st century infrastructure.
- It is estimated that 34 million Americans lack broadband internet access (defined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as a 25 Mbps connection). Of these, 23.4 million live in rural parts of our country.
- People who live in these rural communities increasingly are unable to take advantage of the economic and educational opportunities enjoyed by their urban neighbors.

Key Issue:

- High costs, the absence of new and alternative technologies, and market and regulatory conditions have an impact and can pose a challenge on efforts to expand broadband coverage.
- Many rural areas, including within Coconino County are underserved in terms of technology, which perpetuates the “digital divide” throughout the county mirroring a country-wide concern.
- Lack of reliable, commercial grade broadband prevents the region from engaging in today's economy.

Options to be explored could include:

- Identifying whether there will be grants for various stakeholders to develop broadband infrastructure;
- Obtaining information as to whether infrastructure budgets will be made available to state or local governments to build broadband capacity by themselves; and
- Subsidies for service providers – this currently seems to be the approach set into place as the CAF program, managed by the FCC which provides billions of dollars in subsidies to Internet service providers for areas where the cost of building networks is prohibitive.