

Broadband Initiative on Navajo Nation Notes

Thursday, July 14, 2022
10 a.m. – 4 p.m. (Arizona Time)
In-Person and Zoom Meeting
Holbrook High School | Roadrunner Roost Room (located at the Front Office)
455 N. 8th Ave. | Holbrook, AZ 86025

Welcome and Introduction – Supervisor Lena Fowler & NN Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr.:

- Ms. Fowler gave an overview of today's meeting and Mr. Begay overviewed his topics for today.

Comments - Dawnafe Whitesinger, Navajo County District 5 Chairwoman:

- Ms. Whitesinger thanks those that are supporting the broadband cause. She recognized the challenges that rural communities are facing. She overviewed the challenges of students physically getting to school and what it means to be rural with the lack of convenience. The pandemic highlighted the need for broadband but how can we better serve this need? Broadband can improve schools, healthcare, and promote business growth.

Navajo Legislative Update – Kee Allen Begay Jr., NN Council Delegate:

- Mr. Begay began his update with the need for broadband. There are still communities that need to be helped. All communities big and small can't be overlooked. Notes that officials he has recently met with concerning broadband. Updates that the updated NN legislation has passed. Overviewed that he was in support of it and the \$10 million that will be dedicated to the smart highway initiative. Notes that the NN President does have time to changes items on the legislation. On a side topic, Mr. Begay talked about the difficulties of Navajo citizens face when they must travel long distances for voting. He would like to see all Navajos to have accessibility to voting. He comments on a communication issue between NN elections and county elections office.

Navajo Nation Broadband Update:

- **Sonia Nez, NN Broadband Office Manager** - Ms. Nez gave an update on the Middle Mile, challenges of Right-Of-Ways, and works on ARPA projects. They are currently having multiple discussions and are working with Strongbow Strategies. The office is working on getting their information centralized and appreciate the input and the benefits that it'll provide to the people. This includes a list of their projects and grants that Strongbow Strategies is helping to write.
- **Tico Charlee, NN Telecommunication Regulatory Commission** – Mr. Charlee comments that despite the funding that they have, they may not meet deadlines due to the time it takes to order supplies and get the work done. Policies are another delay they are experiencing. The Right-of-Way process is time consuming, but they are looking at how to streamline the process. They have developed one process, but they need to make sure it is legal. The broadband office has also revised their telecommunications and they are working with the land department and Department of Justice. Complications are arising with other organizations and communities that are also trying to implement their own process.

State Updates:

- **Arizona Commerce Authority Broadband Office – Jeff Sobotka, AZ State Broadband Director:**
 - Mr. Sobotka notes that there needs to be a regulatory with Navajo Nation to understand what can be done. He provided an update on grants. There are two projects with that were recently awarded funds. The first project to be awarded grant funding was with Apache County. They were awarded over \$9 million to build and expand their network. They took advantage of the e-rate programs that already existed and utilized the existing fiber. The second project to receive grant funds was with Navajo County. They hired a consultant and will have WANRack help build the infrastructure. Mr. Sobotka updated on the BEAD program infrastructure. It will help serve the underserve first and identify communities who live close to the Middle Mile. It does require a 25% funds match but with the NN they may be able to meet this funding. The Digital Equity funds has two NN departments that have applied but other tribes have also applied for these funds. Mr. Sobotka is also asking for the NN to have some regulatory clarity. One of issues Apache Supervisor Shepherd noted was their lack of revenue and grant restrictions that makes them ineligible for a lot of funding. Ms. Fowler comments that Coconino County can't also do matching funds most of the time, and this restricts them from state funding. Mr. Sobotka indicates Apache County needs a Middle Mile plan with regulatory certainty and Coconino County needs to partner with a service provider and he is looking at ways around matching funds.
- **Utah Broadband Center – Rebecca Dilg, Director:**
 - Ms. Dilg updated on the Utah Education and Telehealth Network. They used the e-rate funds and service providers to build the network from the current infrastructure. They are using this system to help provide for their rural areas. Mr. Carella comments on ReConnect Program funding that is available that requires no matching funds that is available to tribes, but unfortunately not to counties. The only concern is infrastructure plans need to start after they apply. Ms. Lynne Yocam gave an update on the fiber installation around the NN and Utah border. They are currently mapping their fiber lines which helps when applying for funding. They are running into some issues with laying their fiber lines due to the geology of the land around the Monument Valley area. With Navajo Mountain, they are needing a better tower and are looking for partnerships to make the next plans.

County Updates:

- **Navajo County:**
 - They gave a brief update that in January they applied for ARPA funds. They also have a Middle Mile plan that will connect to the Hopi reservation and will be able to provide more opportunities in these areas. Lastly, they were awarded a \$9.7 million grant that they were thankful to receive.
- **Coconino County:**
 - Ms. Fowler indicated they are still working with SpaceX to distribute Starlink units to qualifying students. The county is still working on the highway 89 proposal. This includes going from highway 160 to the Four Corners area. They originally submitted a grant, but it was not approved possibly due to not enough matching funds. Mr. Ansari commented that NTUA is still looking at other funding opportunities for the underserved.

Next Steps:

- Next meeting in Flagstaff in August 2022.

MEETING ENDS