

BCN Advisory Council Minutes 3/19/2009

Attendees:

Jamie Poindexter, Bob Bocher, Larry Bader, Mike Mietz, Tim Schell, Bruce Reines, Greg Barniskis (phone), Carol Nelson (phone), Tom Taibl, Bruce Mathew (phone), Joan Wade (phone), Elena Pokot (phone), Ed Meachen, Matt Rains, Oskar Anderson

Broadband Stimulus Update

Handout: Hard copy “Broadband Funding in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) (Version of March 12,2009)” www.ala.org/washoff

- There is a workgroup that is meeting sponsored by DOC, Governor’s office of Recovery and Reinvestment, PSC. This group is taking “point” with respect to state stimulus activities.
 - Federal broadcast of “kickoff” – first of a week of meetings gathering input
 - The final federal process has not yet been written
 - Three different grant request periods (perhaps each representing one third of the total funding): thru June 2009, a second ending Sept-Nov 2009, and another in 1 year. The actual funding is to be spent by 2012.
 - Currently there is a lack of definition for terms like “broadband”, “limited access”, “underserved”, etc.
 - Projects already underway and funded are not eligible.
 - Real action will have to wait for direction from the Governor’s office (above) on how to proceed, rules, process, etc.
 - The PSC Survey link is now available.
<http://psc.wi.gov/recoveryAct/sfBroadband.htm>
 - How critical will maps of such areas be to grant applications? Mapping may actually be after the grants have been assigned. It may well happen in parallel. Expectation is that PSC probably already has much of this info. Other states use “Connected Nation”. Information privacy is a concern.
 - Grant volume will be very high. What will the role of states be working with NTIA? Will it be a formalized grant, or just an endorsement of some sort?

- Discussion
 - Should multiple projects be bundled to group together smaller projects that would not likely get funding on their own? There are also drawbacks of doing bundling.
 - There was also a discussion on affordability, especially given the fact that some level of match will be required, and ongoing maintenance and support will not receive funding.
 - DOT described some of the impacts we have seen with respect to the recovery act, and some inclination of expected reporting requirements.

- What are the areas of input where the BCN advisory council and/or BCN customers might participate.
 - At the state level, we are still waiting for guidance. Apparently we can expect to hear more towards the end of the week.
 - BCN Advisory Council has not sent out a letter, as we had considered doing in December
 - Are there some goals that BCN Advisory Council could suggest?
 - What is there from a BCN perspective that we can do help?

- What kinds of options might we have?
 - In anticipation of possible funding and as a result of some of the earlier BCN Advisory Council discussions about possible “network futures”, DOA indicated that it has approached AT&T about fiber to every library & public school. Approximately 380 libraries, 80-90 schools do not currently have fiber.
 - AT&T then described their work in doing some planning: fiber, network gear, etc. They are interested in looking at applications (internet, managed video/distance education), and what monthly costs would be with and without stimulus assistance. They are also interested in looking at what this would mean with respect to converting agency locations to fiber. They are also looking at what it would take to support HD, yet retain analog support. Finally, they are also considering what is involved in video storage and streaming – should that be built into the network, and would stimulus funding be available for that?
 - AT&T is also looking at health information exchange. Is there a possibility of interconnection with BCN (editorial: or, I imagine, sharing some pieces of infrastructure with BCN while remaining logically separate)? If so, could this help us bring BCN costs down? Would the privacy requirements make it a reasonable fit with BCN?
 - There is a sense that folks are looking for projects with long-term impact and benefit.

- WADEN has also conducted some discussions regarding what the next round of classroom updates might need or be looking at. Things like flexible video conferencing, along with the existing more structured scheduling. This then led into a more general discussion of how to better leverage the BCN video capabilities.
 - DOA staff indicated that they are looking at putting together something to get the word out more on video conferencing.
 - The brochure is expected to need to address different perspectives: technical, getting started, who to contact, etc.
 - School districts are also having discussions about how they can collaborate more. Videoconferencing seems likely to be a part of that.

- The current BCN videoconferencing capability is a “best kept secret”. Some do not perceive it as easy to use or to get started with. State agencies are getting more interested: DOJ has recently expanded their use by adding two sites. Some things are easier to manage with a fixed room, but not every agency has that kind of room. ISDN is hard to use and poor quality, yet some apparently continue to use it because they are not well aware of other options or cannot afford the initial investment.
 - School districts already have a support structure in place. State agencies don’t have that in place, though UW Extension ICS has provided some support.
 - Another issue is perceived value: there has to be a good business case, especially if dedicated space is to be developed.
- Release of grant rules can be expected soon. What should we do to come up with grant ideas quickly.
 - Once things start to move, action will be required fairly quickly.
 - Grant writer(s) will be needed.
 - BCN has a large number of stakeholders. How do we incorporate their views without bogging down the process?
 - The discussions should include business area experts, technical experts and vendor partners.
 - Time is short. We should get started over next week or two.
 - The consensus was that the group should be “smallish”, but with ways to get input and be inclusive so people don’t feel shut out.
 - Can DOA provide / find some of these resources?
 - Approach: should we have a lot of grants, or fewer larger grants (see earlier discussions of bundling) or fewer, more focused, yet more far-reaching requests?
 - The first grant period is likely to be April-June 2009, with a comment period (editorial: on the grant requirements/processes?) thru April 13th. So it seems likely that the official grant notice for submissions will be after that.
 - The first round may offer a better opportunity, because it seems likely that many organizations that may be interested in grants may not be ready for the first round?
 - Should we come up with different sizes for grant requests at first, for the best coverage – keep our options open at first?
 - The recovery act gives some insight into important keywords, such as: underserved, education, awareness and training
 - Should there be (or will there be?) different processes for different size grants?
 - We probably should be prepared to provide relatively short grant documents, since reviewers will have to deal with a lot of them in a relatively short period of time. More detail could always be attached as addendum.
 - For each project, there will presumably be an infrastructure piece, but there will also often need to be a training piece.

- There are also apparently references to Telepresence in the language. Is there an opportunity for organizations there? Would there be value commensurate with the cost?
 - In considering a grant application, sustainability and matching funds also need to be considered, as grant evaluators are likely to (appropriately) focus there.
 - Our vision is to have the list together to give us a “leg up” and so that we can do some evaluation (for?) or feedback to submitters for later rounds.
 - It also seems likely that there could be competing grants with similar or related objectives.
- Actions
 - Hopefully this week we will learn more about the paths things are likely to take. There was a suggestion to send information out to the list, or append to the minutes.
 - Schedule a meeting/teleconference with the BCN Executive committee and DOA to start some discussions of building a special quick reaction team.

DOA Updates

- The ARRA is consuming time and is the primary focus right now.
- Budget issues are not anticipated to impact network operation this coming fiscal year.

Other business

- School / Library technology conference next week. Bob Bocher, Mike Mietz and vendor staff will be available. 5 sessions on videoconferencing for students. (editorial: A “flyer” was sent to the mailing list on Friday)
- Discussion of mailing list protocol, moderator approval. The Secretary agreed to increase the attachment size limits so that fewer messages would require moderator approval.