
**Public Policy Committee
Pillar Position Statement**

Date: January 1, 2024

Issue: Broadband

Position:

The EDC encourages efforts at the local, state and federal levels that will bring better access to affordable, reliable broadband infrastructure to Chaffee County. This includes taking steps to ensure “shovel-ready” broadband projects exist as this funding becomes available.

Strategy 1: Leverage other infrastructure & funding.

- a. Advocate for the adoption of “Dig Once” policies in each jurisdiction, encouraging the installation of conduit and other broadband infrastructure in road, CDOT, and other right-of-way projects throughout the County, and notification of utilities prior to initiating major projects.
- b. Elevate and promote opportunities for tapping state and federal grant funds to grow broadband connectivity in Chaffee County by leveraging the resources of current providers and local government.

Strategy 2: Broadband as a utility provider.

- a. Advocate for broadband infrastructure to be required for new development in the same way as electricity, water, and sanitary sewer service is.
- b. Support the advancement of “shovel ready” broadband infrastructure projects that will be attractive when one-time funding opportunities arise.
- c. Advocate for “digital equity” in all broadband projects, encouraging a fair distribution of digital access for all members of our community.

Rationale:

From public safety to remote work, health care, and education; Broadband has become critical infrastructure for communities. Remote work alone has been cemented into the mainstream of every-day life and is impossible to achieve without high-performing, consistent broadband connectivity. Beyond remote work, local businesses, especially those that underwrite a year-round economy through technology and manufacturing, rely on broadband connectivity to remain competitive, attract talented workforce, and reach growth targets.

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Federal & state funding opportunities for broadband have reached once-in-a-generation levels and the EDC is eager to bring together the private and public sector to expand connectivity utilizing existing provider infrastructure and supporting new infrastructure.

Background:

The EDC was vital in the formation of Colorado Central Telecom (CCT,) now Aristata Communications, during its early years. The formation of CCT is one of the reasons the valley has enjoyed the benefits related to the proliferation of remote work and remote workers in recent years.

Historically, rural regions of our country have been overlooked in the deployment of this critical infrastructure.

In recent years both state and federal officials have increased their focus around broadband deployment. As recently as May 2022 the Federal Government announced the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), an initiative included in the recently passed infrastructure package. The program includes the country's 20 leading internet providers—covering more than 80 percent of the U.S. population across urban, suburban, and rural areas—who have agreed to either increase speeds or cut prices, making sure they all offer ACP-eligible households high-speed, high-quality internet plans for no more than \$30/month. ACP is the largest high-speed internet affordability program in the nation's history. Experts estimate that 48 million households—or nearly 40 percent of households in the country—qualify for the program.

Closer to home, the State of Colorado also offers grants through the Office of Information Technology (OIT), which allows communities to take steps to address local challenges, with a special focus on middle and last mile infrastructure. For example, the building of two new tower sites that would increase access for Chaffee County residents and businesses was approved for funding in 2016.

Dig in Deeper:

Learn more about current local broadband work by exploring these resources.

- General:
 - [Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Information](#)
 - [Colorado Broadband Office Learning Center](#)
 - [Colorado Broadband Office](#)
 - [USDA Broadband Information](#)
 - [Press Releases](#)

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- [Public Safety Applications/FirstNet](#)
 - [Aristata Communications](#)
 - Buena Vista:
 - [2017 Broadband Assessment and Feasibility Analysis](#)