

Broadband Stimulus and the Path Towards “Broadband for All” in New Mexico

Richard Lowenberg, 1st-Mile Institute
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On September 30th, the federal government concluded the awarding of broadband stimulus funds, a \$7.2 billion portion of the Obama Administration’s \$787 billion total American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) allocation.

New Mexico fared relatively well in this process, which began in early 2009, with two subsequent application and funding rounds programmed through the USDA RUS Broadband Infrastructure Program (grant/loan combinations), and the USDoC NTIA Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP: grants for infrastructure, public computing centers and sustainable broadband adoption).

In total, New Mexico entities (telecom providers, state government, institutions, libraries, tribes, public housing, energy coops) have been awarded a total of \$180.3 million. Some New Mexico communities will also benefit from local site participation in the funded efforts of national or multi-state projects.

All grant and loan recipients will additionally invest substantial matching funds and loan repayments, resulting in at least \$300 million being spent for in-state broadband related projects over the next two to three years, with many ongoing and new jobs and economic opportunities being created.

While a number of deserving applications in this nationally competitive process, were unfortunately not funded, additional funding and private sector investment opportunities are expected over coming years.

The New Mexico Governor’s Office expressed its recommended support for project applications which were participating in or were being developed in accord with the State’s “Integrated Strategic Broadband Initiative”, the preliminary plan for which was prepared in mid-2008. Central to the Initiative is the precept that statewide coordination of our many local and regional, public and private sector projects, can result in greater bang-for-buck results and social outcomes.

Infrastructure

ARRA stimulus funds are going to support a number of broadband infrastructure projects in New Mexico. ENMR/Plateau, Baca Valley Telephone, Penasco Valley Telephone, Dell Telephone, Windstream Communications, US Cable, La Jicarita Electric Coop, Kit Carson Electric Coop, San Ildefonso Pueblo, Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) and the NCNM REDI Net intend to upgrade systems and to extend middle-mile fiber infrastructure, as well as reaching customers with enhanced fiber, DSL and wireless deployments in their geographically dispersed service areas. Technical, geographic and social aspects of these projects vary widely, but should result in many jobs, while additionally stimulating the economies of the communities to be served.

Open broadband networks are to be deployed by the NTUA, Kit Carson Electric and REDI Net. Open fiber and wireless networks involve public sector investment and ownership of infrastructure, which is open to competitive private sector services and content provision, generating private and public sector income, while ideally providing subscribers with greater choice and reduced pricing. Federal support for rural ‘electric’ coops to provide broadband infrastructure and services is also an important step forward.

These projects, while extending and enhancing broadband access and service capabilities, are also to address pricing, affordability and competitive interconnectivity issues, and are to provide enhanced

connectivity to numerous ‘community anchor institutions’, including government facilities, libraries, schools and colleges, healthcare centers, tribal centers and other identified sites.

Access, Adoption and Capacity Building

New Mexico applicants also received NTIA capacity-building grants to help narrow the digital divide. The State Library and partners (UNM Extended Ed., Global Center for Cultural Entrepreneurship and 1st-Mile Institute) received a Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) grant. Their “Fast Forward New Mexico” initiative will provide laptop training computers, and a rich complement of education and public skills development programs, at selected libraries throughout the state over a two year schedule.

Santa Fe Public Housing Authority received a Public Computing Centers (PCC) award to establish computer labs with training programs for its residents and neighbors. Additional NTIA SBA and PCC awards to entities with multi-state initiatives, will benefit New Mexico partner sites, to include the Boys and Girls Clubs of Santa Fe, public housing centers in Anthony, underserved Hispanic communities in Albuquerque, and will provide enhanced services for the deaf.

The State Department of Information Technology (DoIT) received two critically important awards. It received an NTIA infrastructure grant to upgrade deployment of a statewide public safety and emergency communications network. NM DoIT will also manage a five-year grant, received by all states (and some territories) from the NTIA States Broadband Data and Development Program (SBDDP). The program will integrate a number of tasks: comprehensive broadband data gathering, analysis and verification, GIS mapping, web site development, statewide planning efforts, technical assistance and capacity-building projects. In sum, this work will involve improved coordination and decision-making with all broadband providers and stimulus awardees, institutions, tribes, and communities, as well as the NTIA and FCC.

These many initiatives will go a long way to improve statewide broadband access, services, affordability and competition, while being expected to help bridge the economically and socially undermining digital disparities in our rural and urban communities.

Next Steps

Though resulting in important big-steps forward, these initiatives will not solve all of our rural or urban, un-served and underserved networking needs, and should therefore be understood as critical, but only partial steps along a path towards “Broadband for All” in New Mexico.

There will be much more to accomplish in the coming years. The State, communities, businesses and broadband providers can play a critically important, mutually benefitting role, as aggregated statewide efforts can help make local and regional networking initiatives more economically viable and sustainable.

It is vital that our state’s broadband stimulus projects proceed as needed, and are to be completed successfully in the coming years. Additionally and concurrently, we must all now participate in and steward needed next steps for broadband network development, for increasing of adoption rates, for improvement of user skills, for development of local content and for promotion of online, economic entrepreneurship opportunities.

While the Obama Administration and the FCC wrangle with the politics of a National Broadband Plan, New Mexico can meet the need for on-the-ground example-setting, which if done well, can take us from a current ranking of near last among all states, to a top ten place within the next three to five years.

The following table provides a (draft) listing of all New Mexico broadband stimulus awards.

New Mexico: USDA-RUS-BIP + USDoC-NTIA-BTOP Awards		
Round 1 Awards		
• State Of NM DoIT	\$ 1.9 million + \$ 2.9 m. Round 2	NTIA SBDDP
• NM State Library	\$ 1.5 million	NTIA SBA
• Santa Fe Civic Housing Auth.	\$.2 million	NTIA PCC
• ENMR/Plateau	\$11.3 million	NTIA Infrast.
• Baca Valley Telephone	\$ 3.3 million	RUS BIP
• Penasco Valley Telecom Co.	\$ 9.6 million	RUS BIP
• San Ildefonso Pueblo	\$ 1.2 million	RUS BIP
• <i>Western Telephone</i>	<i>\$11.5 million (rescinded)</i>	<i>RUS BIP</i>
• Navajo Tribal Utility Authority	\$32.2 million (UT-AZ-NM)	NTIA Infrast.
• Mission Econ. Dev't Agency (Anthony, NM)	\$ 3.7 m. (nationwide)	NTIA PCC
• One Economy Corp. (Albuquerque, NM)	\$28.5 m. (nationwide)	NTIA SBA
• Communication Service for the Deaf	\$15.0 million (nationwide)	NTIA SBA
• University Corp. for Advanced Internet Dev't	\$62.5 million (nationwide)	NTIA Infrast.
Round 2 Awards		
• NM DoIT	\$38.7 million	NTIA CCI
• ENMR	\$16.5 million	NTIA CCI
• NCNMEDD - REDI Net	\$10.5 million	NTIA CCI
• Kit Carson Electric Coop	\$63.7 million	RUS BIP
• Dell Telephone Coop	\$.4 million	RUS BIP
• Windstream Communications	\$ 2.3 million	RUS BIP
• La Jicarita Electric Coop	\$11.8 million	RUS BIP
• US Cable	\$ 4.5 million	RUS BIP
• Zero Divide (Santa Fe Boys & Girls Clubs)	\$ 1.4 million (6 states)	NTIA SBA
• Hughes Network Systems	\$58.8 million (nationwide)	RUS BIP
• Wildblue Communications	\$19.5 million (west/mid-west)	RUS BIP
NM was awarded \$29.0 M. + part of \$141.9 M. in Round One, and \$151.3 M. + part of \$79.7 M. in Round Two.		
NM Total Broadband Stimulus loan and grant funds awarded to date: \$180.3 M. + a small portion of \$221.6 M.		

(This is not a final, authorized list of awardees or amounts. Corrections and comments are requested. RL)