

Digital Literacy Thoughts

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The White House and Commission have correctly made digital literacy and access a high profile objective. The FCC's Intergovernmental Affairs Committee (IAC) has selected this as one of the topics for our analysis. While we are considering options and opportunities, the following are some personal suggestions based on my work with telecommunications providers and constituencies in Kansas.

The need to expand the number of Americans able to use the Internet for work, education, health care, e-government, recreation, and more is well documented. As the Pew Research Institute documents from their surveys that there are two primary reasons for the lack of Internet use - lack of access to a computer and/or connectivity and inability or unwillingness to use a computer. These problems are particularly prevalent among the elderly and the economically disadvantaged.

Many organizations seek to increase the number of users (e.g., public libraries, senior centers), but have relatively low rates of success given the magnitude of the problem. The FCC has an opportunity to assist in this endeavor without investing significant funds through a two-pronged approach:

1. The FCC could include as one of the criteria for telecommunications companies to receive Connect America funds is inclusion of a plan in their application detailing the prospective marketing (i.e., outreach to non-users) proposal to connect "hard to convince" persons whose homes the fiber or other communications technology the company will pass and a proposal to address the digital illiteracy of those prospective customers. It is anticipated that the digital literacy and outreach programs would be conducted in partnership with local agencies (e.g., senior services agency) and that technical support (including, "how do I turn this thing on") would be provided by the company and in partnerships with local agencies (e.g., public library).

2. The FCC supports the cable industry's "Connect to Compete" project, but this worthy initiative does not other technologies and providers. The FCC can facilitate development of a technology-neutral "Connect to Succeed" or "Connect for Life" program that includes wire, fiber, wireless, satellite, and other technology providers, in addition to the cable industry. The Connect to Compete program is supported by the cable industry, but a "Connect to Succeed" (or other named program) could be supported by all providers and content providers, thereby increasing the number of potential "salespersons" reaching out to persons

currently unconnected. The FCC could partner with the above organizations, as well as AARP, NAACP, Urban League, La Reza, tribes, ISPs, equipment vendors, and other constituency advocates.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions.