

EWD RLC Report: Bridging the Digital Divide

#	Brief Description	Intended Audience	Recommendation Type	Details
1.	Provide immediate and tangible support for existing broadband initiatives in order to rapidly accelerate statewide availability.	State Government, Local Governments, Telecom partners	Funding, Governance, Process, Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accelerate the important current timeline and goals for BEL to align with urgent need for all educational and economic development processes in Louisiana to have full internet access• Fully engage the Commission (or appropriate agency) to lead and coordinate the collaboration effort necessary to achieve full access for all• Expand the use of LONI, where available, to public sector subscribers• Use Cares Act Funds for LONI system to make broadband access available to schools in rural communities• Aggressively develop opportunities for resources to provide funding support for the infrastructure needed for full and effective implementation• Review all permitting requirements with the intent to streamline the processes for approval and project implementation

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2.	Incentivize partners to pursue installation of broadband infrastructure and implementation of broadband access	State Government, Local Governments, Telecom partners	Funding, Governance, Process, Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow models started in Mississippi and Arkansas to expand high speed broadband service to rural markets• Codify cooperation and collaboration between utilities/co-ops and private telecom providers• Develop financial incentives for providers that include rural or less profitable areas• Create private/public partnership opportunities in the interest of developing a complete penetration of services to hard to reach areas.

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3.	Implement and support alternative methods for broadband connectivity	State Government, Local Governments , Telecom partners	Funding, Governance, Process, Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand RF network availability for both long-haul and last-mile connectivity where traditional cable/fiber networks are cost-prohibitive• Increase mobile network capacity in rural and underserved areas• Pursue innovative and emerging broadband opportunities (e.g. Space X Starlink)• State level campaign to educate public currently not successfully using internet, on ways and methods to gain wireless access, until full broadband is available

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4.	Commit dedicated resources to the expansion of broadband access across the state	State Government, Local Governments	Funding, Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aggressively identify and pursue available federal, state, and private grants and other funding specifically targeting broadband connectivity (e.g. Rural Digital Opportunity Fund)• 50% tax credit payable after CY22 for connectivity options made available to rural residents. This would be an incentive for private industry to speed up Internet access• A very small, limited fee on telecommunications users to assist in the payment of last-mile connectivity infrastructure.

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5.	Promote opportunities which encourage more rapid, widespread adoption of broadband technologies	State Government, Local Governments , Telecom partners, Residents, Businesses	Funding, Governance, Process, Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruit, or encourage expansion of, companies with well-paying “remote work” opportunities• Increase both public-sector and private-sector adoption of “remote work” opportunities for pre-COVID traditional “in-office” roles• Education (Preschool, K-12 and higher ed) should align their focus to produce a stronger STEM student and graduate, as they prepare them to succeed in the workplace of the future• Further educate the end users to become active subscribers and users of the expanded services as they come on line