

# A Community Capacity Checklist

What comes after “We’d like broadband”? Here are issues for communities to consider.

By Bill Vallée / *State of Connecticut*

**M**unicipal leaders are already experts in evaluating infrastructure projects such as bridges, roads and schools, so they are, in general, well prepared to implement fiber networks.

However, providing telecommunications services has not traditionally fallen within the bailiwick of municipalities but has been the province of private companies. Broadband is just beginning to be regarded as a public necessity, requiring municipal leaders, businesses and residents to assess future internet access requirements even if current needs are satisfied.

The following checklist presents issues that municipalities should consider before entering into serious planning for broadband. Towns must carefully evaluate their capacity before they solicit authorization from legislative bodies to contract and finance projects.

Many excellent resources are available to towns starting to develop fiber network projects, including articles, primers and toolkits. But before engaging an expert or devoting in-house staff to a detailed exercise, a town must address these basic questions.

## IS YOUR TOWN READY TO PLAN FOR BROADBAND?

- Has town leadership assessed the demand for broadband by residents, businesses and community anchor institutions? Health



care, education, public safety, economic development and government services all have growing needs for broadband.

- Can the town develop relationships with representatives of these sectors who are knowledgeable about technology implementation and digital inclusion?
- Has the town assessed the ability of individuals and groups to access and use information and communications technology?
- Does the town have personnel and resources to evaluate, negotiate and construct a fiber network?
  - Does the town have the capacity to manage construction projects and enter

Before engaging an expert or devoting in-house staff to a lengthy, detailed exercise, address these basic questions.

- into public-private partnerships?
  - Can the town leverage the power of public-private partnerships to address broadband issues?
  - Does the town have experience partnering with private and public entities to increase expertise and reduce risk?
- Can the town develop accurate asset inventories and GIS mapping resources?
- Is infrastructure construction capacity available in the region?
- Does the town have borrowing capacity (good credit rating, popular and political appetite for borrowing)?
  - Does the town have expertise in obtaining grants, loans or other financing vehicles and structures?
  - Does the town have realistic borrowing expectations? Has it accounted not only for capital expenditures but also for future operations and management expenses, marketing, periodic infrastructure upgrades and efficient implementation of programs and services?
- Are there outreach programs to promote community engagement?
  - Does the town have a plan for marketing the project and fiber services?
  - Is the town prepared to assist in promoting the relevance of universal internet access and digital inclusion?
  - Can the town participate in community events to promote broadband development and inform the public about the project's progress?
  - Could the town forge a network of smart innovation centers to engage workers and entrepreneurs with high-quality collaboration amenities?
- Has the town evaluated its appetite for risk? For instance, does it intend to connect only municipal buildings and commercial entities, or is the

plan to connect all premises?

- Does the town embrace the concept of open access, or does it prefer to have a single internet service provider, at least until the market is fully developed?
- Has the town considered whether to

provide dark fiber, lit fiber, telephone services, or video services? ❖

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