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Shovel Ready

Communities across the United States have shifted from “Why fiber?” to “How?”

This year, there was a subtle shift in tone at the **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** Summit, particularly the sessions that dealt with communities on the wrong side of the digital divide. One attendee at the April event commented that “the projects are more ‘shovel ready’ now and not just concepts.” Another told us, “People are more interested in tangible ways to secure funding for their communities.”

Earlier events – BBC Summits and economic development conferences, Fiber Connect conferences and others – inspired many communities to begin the search for better broadband. Today, not as many people need inspiration. More people need to know how to get from A to B – or, often, from C to D.

At the 2019 Summit, I heard attendees ask many questions like these:

“How can I make my telehealth service sustainable in the long term?”

“We’re a small fiber community. How should we prepare for 5G?”

“What gives an electric co-op an advantage as a borrower?”

“Can we partner with different local entities when we apply for ReConnect funds in multiple areas?”

“How can we take advantage of the Opportunity Zone program?”

“What’s the best way to finance private competitive fiber builds?”

DIGGING IN

There were detailed questions about selecting technology, about marketing services, about mitigating risk, about managing partnerships and about using fiber to market communities. Attendees wanted to dig in and apply the lessons learned by communities a few steps ahead of them on the path to broadband. And there were answers to (almost) every question.

It’s great to see so many people determined to build broadband networks and to reap their benefits. I’d like to think the industry has reached the tipping point that the team in Medina County, Ohio, identified in its Summit presentation. (See p. 20 for a fuller description of that project.) After the tipping point, more fiber networks will be built because people are thinking deeply about *how* to make them work and not focusing on *why* they need them.

If you’re at Fiber Connect in June, you’ll find still more experts willing to share their experiences and insights into the business, operational and engineering issues surrounding fiber networks. You’ll see the latest technology advances that can make the difference between “fiber sooner” and “fiber later.” And you’ll come away with new ideas about how to move your community forward. ❖

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