

# What Will Fiber Disrupt Next? Find Out at Fiber Connect 2023

Fiber Connect 2023 will bring together industry leaders and others who want to learn about the possibilities and challenges of building fiber-based broadband for homes and businesses.

By Deborah Kish / *Fiber Broadband Association*

Every year, the Fiber Broadband Association (FBA) holds the only fiber broadband conference in the U.S.: Fiber Connect. Industry leaders and those looking to learn more about fiber gather to discuss the issues, challenges and opportunities that fiber broadband provides as the broadband industry works to bring it to every home in the U.S.

Last year, Fiber Connect's overarching theme, "When capacity is unlimited, the possibilities are limitless," spoke to the ways fiber drives economies and how anything is possible when everyone is connected to fiber. That's because services and applications can connect people to valuable resources and improve the standard of living.

This year, the FBA is kicking it up a notch. The pre-conference workshops are a must-attend, focusing on sustainability options and the reasons fiber is the most environmentally friendly broadband technology option on the market. Community broadband is another focus as FBA continues its research series on how communities thrive on fiber. The workshops will also address the opportunities, challenges and stakes for municipal and utility broadband operators.

The "Tower Talks" session will speak about the opportunities, needs and challenges tower operators face regarding middle-mile and fiber. The "Fiber Broadband Toolkit" session is a must-see, particularly for those contemplating deploying fiber and those in the early stages of their fiber network build. This is a soup-to-nuts session:

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**From workforce development to broadband policy to supply chain challenges, Fiber Connect will cover a broad range of issues.**

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Participants will discuss everything from funding to planning and legal to regulatory. It's designed to help new entrants better prepare for how to start and handle or avoid potential bumps they could experience along the way.

### INTRODUCING OPERATOR LIGHT TALKS

New this year are the "Operator Light Talks," aka the "Ted Talks" of Fiber Connect. These 18-minute sessions will feature six network operators – Frontier, AT&T, EPB, Lumos Fiber, Ting Internet and Google Fiber – discussing how they enable disruption and innovation in their market through fiber.

### FIVE-YEAR PLANS: STATES, WORKFORCE, AND FUNDING

Thanks to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, every state and entity is working toward bringing high-speed, reliable broadband to every U.S. home. In addition, the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program provided funding for workforce development. On Wednesday at Fiber Connect 2023, the FBA will host its "State Broadband Summit." During this event, regulatory and policy experts will discuss federal and state programs.

State broadband offices are wrapping up their five-year network plans, so the FBA included "The Five-Year Plan" Summit session. Broadband leaders from Louisiana, Kansas, Florida and Arkansas will discuss their goals, plans and the ways they plan to leverage BEAD Program funding.

In the "State Broadband Policy: Walking the Halls with Legislators," session, Kathryn de Wit of The Pew Charitable Trusts will sit down with leaders to discuss the importance of local community support; the role of public/private partnerships; and understanding state, regional and local political landscapes. Creating partnerships and learning the ins and outs of how local government works alongside communities will help close the digital divide.

For many in the industry, workforce development is at the top of their minds. As the industry gears up for the great fiber

build, it will need a trained workforce to meet its ambitious goals. The “Industry Leader’s Roundtable” will focus on the who, what, when and how of workforce development and the importance of training individuals and building a much-needed fiber workforce. The broadband industry struggled to earn its spot in the “Top 10 Best Careers” lists, so workforce development will be a track in the breakout sessions, where the discussions will include how to start a program and, more important, how to attract new people to the industry by looking outside traditional talent pools.

### WHEN FIBER LEADS, EVERYONE SUCCEEDS

In the day and age of increasing IoT devices per household, when everything is always on and connected, service providers will want to attend the “In-Home Experience” general session to learn ways to improve customer experience. Customer adoption of applications and services such as telehealth, entertainment and video conferencing for remote work means Wi-Fi is in the spotlight, and identifying best practices is important. This session will address real-world challenges and ways to mitigate them to ensure customer experience is not sacrificed.

Scaling fiber broadband services means looking at every aspect of existing infrastructure and the future of a network build. Network expansion has financial implications but if done right can lead to faster time to ROI. That means weighing a number of factors, from lowering the cost of connecting more homes to the impact on job creation, GDP and overall industry growth. The focus is creating a win-win for operators and the communities they serve.

### BREAKOUT SESSIONS: CASE STUDIES, INNOVATIONS, BOOTCAMPs, SUPPLY-CHAIN AND GETTING DIRTY

The breakout sessions at Fiber Connect 2023 cover everything from planning to deployment and focus on the issues

driving the fiber broadband industry forward. Topics range from high-level market trends and opportunities at a 50,000-foot view to what is happening on the innovation spectrum. The growing interest in bandwidth-hungry applications and services needs innovative, forward-looking technology development that will drive growth in the industry and offer digital equity to all.

Case studies will provide real-world examples of successful fiber deployments. The “In the Dirt” track will touch on deployment challenges service providers and contractors face, best practices, and ways operators can take fiber further, especially to new unserved markets. The supply chain and manufacturing breakout sessions will provide guidance and best practices to cover mitigation strategies, assisting companies in overcoming supply chain challenges. Moving through the end-

to-end deployment of fiber, marketing is a must-have in terms of building community will and exemplifying the best data on service activation, growth and the economic and community impact fiber provides.

Fiber Connect continues to grow year over year with rich content, best practices and advice – all with the success of the industry and all Americans in mind. 🌱



*Deborah Kish is the vice president of research and workforce development for the Fiber Broadband Association.*

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