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Communities Magazine

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Broadband Communities (ISSN 0745-8711) (USPS 679-050) (Publication Mail Agreement #1271091) is published 7 times a year at a rate of \$24 per year by Broadband Properties LLC, 1909 Avenue G, Rosenberg, TX 77471. Periodical postage paid at Rosenberg, TX, and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to **Broadband Communities**, PO Box 303, Congers, NY 10920-9852.

CANADA POST: Publications Mail Agreement #40612608. Canada Returns to be sent to Bleuchip International, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. Copyright © 2020 Broadband Properties LLC. All rights reserved.



Working Together

Broadband partnerships can take many forms. Communities in search of better broadband should familiarize themselves with a wide range of successful solutions.

As I've remarked in earlier editor's notes, the absence of a coherent broadband policy has driven U.S. communities to get creative in their quest for better broadband. Over the years, this magazine has documented many of these creative efforts; some are resounding successes, and others produced disappointing results or foundered altogether. Even projects that didn't meet their goals often ended by improving residents' broadband choices, as existing providers upped their games.

Because delivering high-performance broadband requires an array of assets, skills and legal capacities that aren't always found in one place, partnership has become an increasingly popular strategy. Broadband partnerships among multiple entities – whether public, private or not-for-profit – can take different forms, depending on what each party has and what it lacks. For example, one party may have better access to capital while another has name recognition and customer service skills. One party may control the rights of way while another excels at operating networks. One party may have backbone fiber and another may have fiber in the neighborhoods.

NEW MODELS, NEW PARTNERS

This issue of **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** explores new kinds of partners and partnership models that are gaining traction. In the cover story, on p. 18, an article adapted from a new report published by the Benton Institute

examines models in which a public entity owns infrastructure and one or more private entities provide service. In another article (p. 26), **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES'** Sean Buckley explains how and why electric companies – both co-ops and investor-owned companies – are partnering with telcos and municipalities to serve rural customers. (Short answer: electric companies have poles, easements, underserved customers and, often, fiber – but not all of them want to be in the broadband business.)

Partnerships show up elsewhere in the magazine as well. For example, coverage of **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES'** first-ever virtual summit (p. 34) includes many real-life stories of providers and communities finding each other, negotiating deals and working together productively. On p. 50, the marketing director for UTOPIA Fiber details the skills and mindsets needed to succeed as a provider on a public open-access network. And on p. 54, the CEO of SiFi Networks argues for private open-access networks (that is, public-private-private partnerships) as the most practical way to finance smart-city applications.

If you're a community in search of better broadband or a provider hoping to serve an underserved area, but you haven't been able to put the entire puzzle together, you may find that another entity can supply the missing pieces. I hope these stories start you on the path to a beautiful partnership! ❖

Masha Zager

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