

The NTIA created a six-step community development process for local and tribal governments to follow called “Planning a Community Broadband Roadmap: A Toolkit for Local and Tribal Governments”.¹ This document provides a high-level summary of the NTIA’s roadmap, focusing on the key aspects of each step. Please contact the Minnesota Office of Broadband Development (OBD) with any questions you may have.

The NTIA Planning Roadmap identified five key characteristics of a successful broadband roadmap. Those characteristics include:

- Build from the ground up
- Take time to develop the roadmap
- Seek strong partnerships
- Gather good data
- Identify broadband champions

Step One: Assemble a Team to Develop a Vision

Building an effective community broadband roadmap takes a mix of skills. It is important that the team possess a strong leader or leaders to resolve divergent views, create a strategy and implement a plan. This team will need to analyze the costs, risks, and potential benefits to the local economy, institutions and residents.

The NTIA points out that the most successful teams have shared these best practices:

- Rely on project champions
- Be flexible
- Network: Other governments that have had success should be contacted
- Leverage other planning efforts
- Be prepared
- Engage the community

Step Two: Assess Broadband Resources, Gaps, and Needs

The next step is to identify local resources and needs using community surveys, meetings, and focus groups. The objective is to understand existing broadband facilities and resources in the community as well as to identify the wants and needs of the residents and institutions.

- An inventory of local broadband resources (infrastructure, providers, training, etc.)
- Conduct a needs assessment
- Perform a gap analysis
- Draft an initial roadmap

Step Three: Engage Stakeholders

In this phase, the broadband planning team calls together larger groups of stakeholders, shares the current strategic vision and goals, discusses the findings from the assessment, lays out the case for the broadband projects, and gathers feedback.

¹ http://www2.ntia.doc.gov/files/ntia_planning_community_broadband_roadmap_051616.pdf

Expanding broadband networks, gaining access to higher broadband speeds, and boosting digital literacy does not “just happen.” It takes a concerted effort. The NTIA points out methods that have been most successful at engaging the public, including:

- Host many discussion groups
- Discuss the project roadmap within a community context
- Discuss technical aspects thoughtfully and clearly
- Build momentum by listening and earning trust
- Keep reaching out to stakeholders
- Use what you learn to lay the ground work for partnerships

Step Four: Evaluate Technology and Service Options

After the planning team has completed its assessment of the needs, the next step is to determine what technology is available locally and what resource “gaps” exist, building on the know-how gained in Step Two above.

The “right” technology and/or service to boost broadband adoption, expand public access to broadband and deliver a fast broadband connection varies depending on the community. In this phase, teams should ask questions and thoroughly vet the technology and service options that fit their priority mission

Step Five: Select an Organizational Model

The next step in the planning process is to choose an organizational model that provides the best legal and financial framework to implement and maintain a community project or infrastructure plan.

This stage of the planning process will be unique for every community. The Minnesota OBD recommends meeting and discussing with potential partners and your local broadband champions to come up with an organizational model that works for your community. Because this may be the most difficult step in the process, you may want to read more about the options in the NTIA Planning Roadmap document found on pages 16-19.

Step Six: Create the Project Plan

Similar to Step Five, this step will be unique for every community. Meeting with project partners, local champions, and reading more about this step in the NITA Planning Roadmap on page 20-22 will assist in creating a complete project plan.

Resources and Checklists

The Minnesota OBD would also recommend reviewing the resources page, as well as the planning checklists and timelines that can be found on pages 24-31 of the NTIA Planning Roadmap.

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