

First Edition of New Mexico Broadband Connections

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To: [REDACTED]

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New Mexico Broadband Connections

Welcome to the first edition of New Mexico Broadband Connections, a regular newsletter of broadband updates specific to our state—and a collaborative effort among the [New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion](#), the Connect New Mexico Council, and the [Benton Institute for Broadband & Society](#).

The Benton Institute just celebrated its [40th anniversary](#) of ensuring that everyone in America has access to, and can use, the latest communications technologies. Beginning with the pioneering work of the late Charles Benton and continuing to this day through the dedicated efforts of his daughter, Adrienne Benton Furniss, the Institute has helped strengthen communities by advancing communications policy in the public interest while providing day-to-day support and resources to the community of people who care about “broadband for all.”

Tens of billions of dollars in public subsidies have failed to close gaps in broadband access and adoption. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 offered great promise, launching a national broadband plan, the introduction of innovative state-led broadband mapping, and—over time—slow but steady growth in state broadband offices and state broadband grant programs.

For its part, the New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion is among the latest wave of state broadband offices to open doors in 2022. Recently-appointed [Director Kelly Schlegel](#) left a successful career in the private sector to lead the office, make best use of historic

state and federal funding for broadband deployment, and realize the full vision of the office as set forth in New Mexico's [Broadband Access and Expansion Act](#). The same holds true for the Connect New Mexico Council, established through the [Connect New Mexico Act](#) and guided by the leadership of interim chair Kimball Sekaquaptewa.

As a past Minnesota state legislator, Matt Schmit helped establish one of the country's first state offices of broadband—created in 2013 to better understand the state's digital divide—and a complementary state broadband grant program to do something about it! While successful, and at the time a model for the country, inconsistent state funding kept Minnesota from meeting its goals of universal broadband access.

That story of slow, and often unsteady, progress played out around the country. Even as states opened broadband offices and launched grant programs, the public investment needed to make a real difference was still a dream.

For a small handful of states—such as California, Illinois, and New York—a commitment to universal broadband access inspired significant public funding. For the rest of the country, the COVID-19 pandemic spurred federal funding that has been a true game changer. The CARES Act provided resources to support immediate fixes for targeted populations, such as families with school-aged children. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) introduced a forward-thinking approach to federal support for broadband solutions led by state and local governments and established the US Treasury's Capital Projects Fund. Finally – after decades of half measures, funding from the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act fuses federal support with more trusted state, tribal, and local leadership to ensure the promise of universal, affordable, open broadband.

This newsletter is devoted to New Mexico's unique story as it journeys toward its goals of universal broadband access and true digital equity. Future editions will provide timely updates on Office of Broadband Access & Expansion programs, raise the collective voice of the [Connect New Mexico Council](#), and call out successful or promising local initiatives. Importantly, the newsletter will help curate the collective advances of a state that has a lot more to gain from smart use of federal broadband funds than any other in the country.

We'll also bring you news of federal programs and funding opportunities relevant to all New Mexicans. Moving forward, you'll hear much less from us as we introduce you to others from around the state and the country who inspire us and who care about fast, fair, and open broadband for all.



Adrienne BFurniss

Adrienne Furniss
Executive Director

Benton Institute for Broadband & Society



Matt Schmit

Matt Schmit
Broadband Advisor
The Broadband Lab

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Building New Mexico's Broadband Capacity

Over the past year, the Connect New Mexico Council and New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE) have made significant progress toward establishing a collaborative relationship, building their respective capacities, and—together—leveraging the unique confluence of historic state and federal funding opportunities, cross-sector and public interest alignment, and vision for universal access to reliable, affordable, high-speed internet statewide.

In 2022, OBAE has hired staff, contracted with expert consultants, supported the Connect New Mexico Council, engaged a variety of stakeholders throughout the state, met critical deadlines to unlock historic federal funding, and launched the [Connect New Mexico Pilot Program](#)—a \$123 million matching grant program to make immediate progress toward universal broadband access throughout New Mexico that leverages a portion of the state's Capital Projects Fund dollars per the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

The Connect New Mexico Council convened in January 2022, established a monthly meeting cadence and six working groups, elected an interim chair and interim vice chair, and contributed considerable time and insight into creation of the Connect New Mexico Pilot Program. The council is currently collaborating with OBAE to establish the full Connect New Mexico Broadband Grant Program in administrative rule, per the [Connect New Mexico Act](#).

Recently, the Connect New Mexico Council and Office of Broadband Access and Expansion coordinated efforts toward the first in a series of annual updates intended to summarize, on a county-by-county basis, “access to and quality of service of broadband across the state.” The report builds on the 2020 broadband plan—the [State of New Mexico Broadband Strategic Plan and Rural Broadband Assessment](#)—and anticipates creation of a State Digital Equity Plan and Five-Year Action Plan as required to leverage the state’s full share of federal broadband and digital equity funding per the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Initial federal funding—along with the robust statewide engagement, data collection, and planning it will support—is expected to commence coordinated, year-long planning and engagement activity in October 2022.

Although the [State Digital Equity Plan](#) and [Five-Year Action Plan](#) will guide future investment of federal funds, these plans will be completed to align with state initiatives, priorities, and statutory requirements. Much of this work lies ahead, and we look forward to building our collaborative approach—and bringing it to communities, providers, and New Mexicans everywhere.

Kelly Schlegel
Director
Office of Broadband Access and Expansion

Kimball Sekaquaptewa
Interim Chair
Connect New Mexico Council

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News & Articles

Aug 10 | [Gov. Lujan Grisham launches statewide broadband grant pilot program](#)

Sept 26 | [A Proposal to Create the Foundation for Digital Equity](#) (Benton Institute)

Sept 24 | [Black Churches 4 Digital Equity Connects Communities to the Affordable Connectivity Program](#) (Benton Institute)

Sept 9 | [Capital Projects Fund Continues to Advance State Broadband Plans](#) (Benton Institute)

Resources

[New Mexico Office of Broadband Access & Expansion](#)
[Connect New Mexico Broadband Grant Program Map](#)
[Affordable Connectivity Program \(ACP\) Consumer FAQ](#)
[FCC Outreach Toolkit for ACP](#)

For questions, email nmbroadbandconnections@benton.org.

Looking for more broadband policy news? The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society offers a free, reliable, and non-partisan daily digest that curates and distributes news related to universal

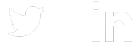
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