

## **RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE**

Friday, May 3, 2019 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 CDT

Varner Hall, Lower Level, Board Room

3835 Holdrege Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

Video Locations:

University of Nebraska at Omaha, Eppley Administration Building

Room 110A, 6001 Dodge Street, Omaha, NE 68182

Homestead Bank, 619 Grand Street, St. Paul, NE 68873

1005 Woodcrest, Norfolk, NE 68701

## **MINUTES**

### **MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Ed Toner, Chair, Nebraska Information Technology Commission

Mary Ridder, Chair, Nebraska Public Service Commission

Senator Bruce Bostelman, District 23, Nebraska Legislature

Ben Kuspa for Dave Rippe, Nebraska Department of Economic Development

Zachary Hunnicutt, Farmer, Hunnicutt Farms (Participation only, not able to vote)

Steve Wellman, Director, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Isaiah Graham, Vice-President, Homestead Bank

Daniel Spray, Owner, Precision Technology

Timothy Lindahl, CEO/General Manager, Wheat Belt Public Power District

Andrew Buker, Executive Director of Infrastructure Services, University of Nebraska

Ron Cone, Director of Network Information Services, ESU 10

Anna Turman, CEO, Chadron Community Hospital & Health Services

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Senator Curt Friesen and Tom Shoemaker

### **OPENING BUSINESS, ROLL CALL NOTICE OF POSTING OF AGENDA NOTICE OF NEBRASKA OPEN MEETINGS ACT POSTING**

*Ed Toner, Office of the Chief Information Officer*

Mr. Toner called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Roll call was taken. There were seven voting members and one ex officio non-voting member present. A quorum existed to conduct official business. The meeting announcement was posted on the Nebraska Public Meeting and Rural Broadband Task Force websites on Dec. 3, 2018. The agenda was posted on the Rural Broadband Task Force website on April 25, 2019. The Nebraska Open Meetings Act was posted on the south wall.

### **APPROVAL OF THE MARCH 29, 2019 MINUTES\***

**Senator Bostelman moved to approve the March 29, 2019 meeting minutes as present. Ms. Ridder seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Ridder-Yes, Kuspa-Yes, Graham-Yes, Spray-Yes, Lindahl-Yes, and Cone-Yes. Results: Yes-7, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.**

### **UTILIZING THE NUSF TO LEVERAGE FEDERAL UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND SUPPORT PANELISTS:**

Cullen Robbins, Nebraska Public Service Commission, provided information about the state and federal universal service fund programs which are available to provide support for services for customers in high cost areas, low income residents, K-12 education, libraries, and health care providers. The Nebraska Universal Service Support provides support for broadband in high cost areas, telehealth and low-income consumers.

SuAnn Witt, Nebraska Department of Education, provided information on the E-rate program. The Schools and Libraries (E-rate) Program provides discounts to assist eligible schools and libraries to obtain affordable internet access and telecommunications services. Funded services include:

- *Category 1:* Data Transmission Services and/or Internet Access
- *Category 2:* Internal Connections, Managed Internal Broadband Services, and Basic Maintenance of Internal Connections.

Discounts range from 20-90 percent depending on the level of poverty and the urban/rural status at the school district level. The average statewide discount is 68%. Educational entities in Nebraska have a high rate of e-Rate participation with 301 school districts, 86 private schools and ESUs, and 40 consortiums applying.

Additionally if a state provides eligible schools and libraries with funding for special construction charges for high-speed broadband that meets the FCC's long-term connectivity targets, the E-rate program will increase an applicant's discount rate for these charges up to an additional ten percent to match the state funding on a one-to-one dollar basis. Twenty-five states have qualified for this program since 2016.

Christa Porter, Nebraska Library Commission, shared information on library participation in the E-rate program. Sixty out of 272 Nebraska libraries received a total of \$199,950 in E-rate funding in 2018-2019. She shared a variety of factors which may contribute to the low rate of participation.

Panelists entertained questions from task force members.

### **ADDRESSING THE HOMEWORK GAP PANELISTS**

Burke Brown, District OR-1 Palmyra/Bennett Public Schools, read testimonies from educators, students and parents regarding their experiences with connectivity and home internet availability.

Tom Rolfes, Nebraska Information Technology Commission, provided information on Network Nebraska, a statewide consortium of 292 education entities working together to improve their telecommunications, share services and lower costs. Network Nebraska is managed by the State of Nebraska Office of the CIO, in partnership with the University of Nebraska, with guidance from the Network Nebraska Advisory Group, Collaborative Aggregation Partnership, and the NITC.

He shared the following challenges:

- 15-17% of students leave campus with insufficient internet at home.
- 90,000 students ride 7,500 buses daily with no WiFi.
- Monthly costs for 100Mbps Ethernet service range all the way from Holdrege Public Schools with \$400 (\$120/month after 70% E-rate) to Boyd County Public Schools at \$4,396 (\$879/month after 80% E-rate).

Holly Woldt, Nebraska Library Commission, reported that 74% of Nebraska public libraries have internet speeds lower than 25 Mbps, and 58% are at or lower than 12 Mbps, which makes the parking lot Wi-Fi experience less than desirable. Within 2 miles of almost every rural public library sits a school building that is connected by fiber to Network Nebraska and capable of Internet speeds from several hundred Mbps to over 1,000 Mbps. Through a \$25,000 grant from the Institute of Museums and Library Services, libraries in five communities (Bancroft, Genoa, Imperial, Verdigre and Wymore) plus one community (Bayard) funded by the Nebraska Library Commission improved their internet access for student homework use via a wireless connection to a local school district building connected to Network Nebraska.

Jessica Chamberlain, Norfolk Public Library, said 93% of students in Norfolk have internet at home, leaving an estimated 550 students with no internet. The Norfolk Public Library has a 1,000 Mbps connection and averages 287 WiFi connections a day. Norfolk Public Library started a hot spot lending program in 2016 and now has 10 hot spots available for a three-week checkout with a wait list of approximately 30 people.

Panelists entertained questions from task force members.

## **\*FORMATION OF A SUBCOMMITTEE TO DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING THE HOMEWORK GAP AND LEVERAGING FEDERAL UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUNDS**

Task force members discussed forming a subcommittee to address the homework gap and leverage universal service funding. Mr. Toner suggested that the subcommittee also look at other sources of funding in addition to universal service funding.

**Mr. Cone moved to organize a subcommittee to study universal service funding and make recommendations on how to best leverage additional funding as well as to study and make recommendations to address the homework gap. Mr. Lindahl seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Ridder-Yes, Kuspa-Yes, Wellman-Yes, Graham-Yes, Spray-Yes, Lindahl-Yes, Buker-Yes, Cone-Yes, and Turman-Yes. Results: Yes-10, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.**

Ron Cone, Dan Spray and Andrew Buker volunteered to serve on the subcommittee.

## **SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS**

***Broadband Technologies Subcommittee Report\****. Mr. Cone reported that the subcommittee has developed one-page descriptions of broadband technologies which will hopefully be helpful to task force members and policy makers engaging in discussions about broadband. He thanked the other subcommittee members, Zachary Hunnicutt and Dan Spray, and staff who helped with the report. Questions from task force members were entertained.

**Mr. Lindahl moved to approve the initial findings of the Broadband Data Subcommittee for preliminary inclusion in the task force's final report. Mr. Spray seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Ridder-Yes, Kuspa-Yes, Wellman-Yes, Graham-Yes, Spray-Yes, Lindahl-Yes, Buker-Yes, Cone-Yes, and Turman-Yes. Results: Yes-10, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.**

**NUSF Subcommittee Report.** Ms. Ridder reported that many issues being studied by the NUSF Subcommittee are inter-related with work being done by others, including the Public-Private Partnership Subcommittee and the Nebraska Public Service Commission. The Nebraska Public Service Commission will have a hearing next week on rules for establishing a reverse auction. The NUSF Subcommittee will be following the hearing and reading written comments as part of their information gathering. Next steps include going over the findings and developing final recommendations.

## **DEVELOPING RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE REPORT**

***Approval of Draft Report Outline and Formation of a Subcommittee to Review the Draft Report\****. Task force members discussed the process to complete the final report and a proposed outline for the report. Mr. Toner reminded members that the outline is a living document and would like members to provide feedback. The report will be submitted bi-annually. It was determined to have Ms. Byers write the draft report. The draft will be shared with task force members electronically to provide input, rather than forming a subcommittee to review the report. Recommendations will be discussed at future meetings.

**Mr. Wellman moved to approve the draft report outline. Mr. Lindahl seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Ridder-Yes, Kuspa-Yes, Wellman-Yes, Graham-Yes, Spray-Yes, Lindahl-Yes, Buker-Yes, Cone-Yes, and Turman-Yes. Results: Yes-10, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.**

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Ms. Turman moved to adjourn. Mr. Wellman seconded. All were in favor. Motion carried.**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:56 p.m.

Meeting minutes were taken by Lori Lopez Urdiales and reviewed by Anne Byers, Office of the CIO/NITC.