



April 8, 2009

Ms. Bernadette McGuire-Rivera
Associate Administrator
Office of Telecommunications
and Information
National Telecommunications
and Information Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Mr. David P. Grahm
Associate General Counsel
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Applications Rural Development
Room 2017
Mail Stop 1423
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Ms. McGuire-Rivera and Mr. Grahm:

As members of the higher education community with over 20 years of extensive experience in research and data collection of national and local Information & Communication Technology (ICT), we would like to offer comment on the establishment of criteria on data collection and dissemination that could support both NTIA and local communities that are working to implement long-term, sustainable ICT efforts.

Our recommendations for criteria include the short-term goals of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and the long-term goals of building an economically viable cyber-infrastructure that meets the needs of all Americans, particularly disadvantaged and under-served communities.

We believe NTIA might establish, with support from the higher education community, key priorities for consideration that support the goals of the ARRA.

Large Scale National Data Collection

At Illinois, we have significant experience with a variety of research methods that enable local non-profits, municipalities and community based organizations to collect, analyze and disseminate learnings in the implementation of successful research efforts. We suggest that a mechanism for national data collection should be identified, consistent with the kind of expertise that a rigorous

Research-1 public institution can provide. This includes rigorous data collection and analysis of public computing, training, job creation and other accountability measures related to previous BTOP projects.

We believe that aggregating and disseminating research to the public would be valuable to other researchers and could be used to answer inquiries to the NTIA and the public who are looking at evaluating broadband efforts.

Free and Publicly Available Information vs. Privatized Data Collection

We strongly encourage NTIA to consider a public research component be established at a public rather than private organization. Data collected through public funding of broadband and wireless initiatives should be made available to the public, and not collected and housed by a for-profit or private entity. The ARRA is designed to encourage economic stimulation and our hope is that non-profit, local and community owned and operated broadband deployment will serve to enhance learning from projects across the country.

Currently, mapping of fiber across states is difficult to access from telecommunications incumbents who own private networks. As new fiber is deployed, careful tracking and measurement based on a common set of criteria is essential to our national analysis of impact. The opportunity before us is to use public money to foster communication and information sharing of both successful projects and those that falter, such that we strengthen the long-term viability of telecommunications projects, including first- and middle-mile projects that are both broadband and wireless implementations. We believe there is significant resource in public educational institutions to collect incredibly large data sets that support a national analysis of economic recovery and local, regional and national impact of the ARRA.

Fostering Greater Success in Information Communication & Technology and Broadband Deployment Efforts

Current economic crisis and lack of faith and trust in powerful public institutions signal a new demand for relevant scientific, technological, and other academic innovations and accountabilities, which research can support and foster.

We recommend that NTIA work with public research institutions, to establish and recognize coherent national collection and dissemination of data points. We believe this will significantly contribute to the building of a viable national cyberinfrastructure. It also ensures that the efforts of the Obama administration under the ARRA will reach people in marginalized communities across the U.S., which the administration has identified as a key solution to the most serious crises threatening society as a whole: poverty, health, violence, food security, etc.

In part, we advise that data collection criteria to ensure public accountability should include:

- identification of the range of activities provided by broadband efforts, particularly as they relate to national priorities of the current administration, including: education, employment, health, energy and the environment, civil rights and homeland security, among others
- tracking the direct impact of broadband efforts in support of public institutions (e.g., public libraries schools, municipalities, universities, non-profits and faith based organizations, etc.) that strengthen the public good
- categorization of the types and qualities of connections between and among communities through broadband and wireless initiatives

The outcome of successful data collection includes:

- research and knowledge sharing
- identification of best practices
- supporting standardized data collection methods
- repurposing data across Federal programs and agencies
- encouraging contributions of data by other researchers into a single collection with common criteria
- supporting access to this data as the basis for ongoing analyses of the success of the ARRA broadband effort
- enabling policy research
- provision of national trend data
- enabling broad geographic, demographic, and longitudinal comparisons and documentation
- usability by any project, individually or collectively, e.g., recipients of stimulus funds for broadband access

We believe that the identification of the crucial criteria that support the technology agenda of President Obama's administration should be developed by NTIA and that public institutions with strengths in community-based computing can be of service. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has a long history of science, technology and research innovation in creating and assessing community-based technology across a wide spectrum of organizations and we offer our assistance in supporting the committee to define requisite criteria that could add to the national collective intelligence and accountability for success in broadband deployment under the ARRA.

Respectfully submitted,

Abdul Alkalimat, Co-Director
Community Informatics Laboratory
Graduate School of Library & Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
mcworter@uiuc.edu

Ann Bishop, Co-Director
Community Informatics Initiative
Graduate School of Library & Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
abishop@illinois.edu

Kate Williams, Co-Director
Community Informatics Laboratory
Graduate School of Library & Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
katewill@illinois.edu