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**Fifth Panel: Broadband Opportunity Council**  
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AIMEE MEACHAM: Thank you, Karen So my name is Aimee Meacham, and I am from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. And I am lucky to be joined today by two of my esteemed federal colleagues.

First is Keith Adams, who is, of course -- I just lost my screen -- but he is an administrator at the Rural Utilities Service and he has a longstanding history of government service. He has worked basically everywhere, starting with the Foreign Agricultural Service, moving on to the U.S. Development Agency, USAID, the Postal Service, and now at the Rural Utilities Service. He's responsible for a billion dollar grant portfolio -- annual grant portfolio -- and a \$4 billion loan portfolio which includes the Broadband Initiative Program which was part of the Recovery Act. So Keith has done a lot for rural telecom, and we're excited to have him here. Thank you, Keith.

Then I have my colleague, Karen Hanson, who is a longstanding expert in digital inclusion and access issues, and she has experience from all over the place. She has nonprofit experience, foundation experience, private sector experience, and we have been lucky to have her at the government for the last few years. And she's been doing some amazing work. She had about a \$70 billion -- or \$70 million -- portfolio in the BTA Program and now she really manages our efforts with the Broadband Opportunity Council. And, as you guys have heard throughout the day, both the Rural Utilities Service and NTIA serve as the delegated co-chairs for Commerce in USDA for the Broadband Opportunity Council, and that's our panel today.

So I'm going to actually like turn it over to the panelists to talk to you a little bit more and tell you a little bit of background about the Opportunity Council. And one of the things -- before we get to some of the results of the actual Council report, we really found that the process was interesting, and these guys undertook a really kind of cool process to come up with the

results of the Council. And so I'm going to turn it over to Karen to talk a little bit about what the Council did to come up with the report.

And let me take a step back and say the President issued a Memorandum in March that asked for a report that was due in August, so, in five months' time these guys had to go through a huge amount of work to get the report to the President. And they got it to the President on time and then the President issued it out to the public in September. So, Karen?

KAREN HANSON: Thank you. Is this on? Okay, great. Thank you, Aimee, and it's great to be here and good to see so many familiar faces out there, and thank you for sticking with us until the bitter end. So I guess just to tag along with what Aimee said, just to give a little bit of the history before even the Broadband Opportunity Council Presidential Memorandum was signed, NTIA has been working for a long time in this space and working with our federal partners to make sure that all of the various agencies that have important missions that serve communities would weave funding for broadband into their programs. And we looked at the funding environment in Congress and realized that there probably wasn't going to be another \$4 billion or \$7 billion Recovery Act effort, so we knew that the best strategy to support broadband funding at the state and local level was going to be to have it woven into existing federal funding streams that did have longevity and would be reauthorized and appropriated year after year.

So that really was the impetus for the Broadband Opportunity Council, and the President signed this Memorandum in March and told 25 different federal agencies that they had to do that. They had to look within their own programs, within their own existing statutory authorities to make every effort possible to make more funding available for broadband. So the steps that we went through -- and I kind of joke that I really thought it was an exciting process, which doesn't

always; you don't usually hear those two words together -- but it was really exciting to see these colleagues from across the federal government really with a real focus. We were given the directive, of course, from our boss, but what the agencies did first of all was to take a really deep dive, a look into their own internal programs and look across their huge -- the gamut of funding that they provided to see what programs currently supported some form of broadband, whether it was deployment or adoption, and which programs could be modified in some fashion to make more funding available for broadband. So that, in and of itself, was a huge lift, but that was something that the agencies did.

A second thing that we did was do a public request for comment which garnered over, I think, almost 250 comments from the public, and all of those responses are on NTIA's website. You can find, if you look under NTIA and then Broadband Opportunity Council, you'll find all those comments. And so those, we asked the public to give us ideas and to tell us what they were seeing at the state and local level as the barriers that the federal government could possibly address. So that was hugely helpful to each of the federal agencies, who were then able to go look again deeply into their programs to see, "Okay, here's a barrier that the local communities are experiencing. Can we do something to fix it?"

So that effort, in addition to all the education that we did with our colleagues, we had weekly meetings with our working group members to help them understand a little bit more about the issues. All of that led to this report that we completed in August and the President released in September. So if you haven't read it yet, I encourage you to go look at it. It's a reasonable 40 pages, so it's not too crazy, and it outlines all of the steps that agencies have already committed to taking and the principles that they're operating under going forward to continue to identify more funds for broadband.

KEITH ADAMS: Yeah, and I would just add that I want to thank people in this room who helped out with this. We have several people who helped out with both the survey and the request for comments, and really we didn't know if we'd be able to get it done in time because we only had 120 days. And this was, as I told my administrator, Brandon McBride, this was in addition to closing out the Recovery Act programs in September. So we were trying to do this, we were trying to make sure that we were processing our loans at USDA, but making sure we were involved with the Broadband Opportunity Council from a co-chair level perspective.

AIMEE MEACHAM: Well, and I understand that USDA went through quite an intensive process itself, and so I think it might benefit folks here to talk about the things that you guys did, both before and after the Memorandum was issued to look into your own programs.

KEITH ADAMS: Yeah, Aimee, we got a call probably in January about this Presidential Memorandum, and we were told by, at that time, the Acting Undersecretary's Office to pull together all the Rural Development Offices who may have anything to do with broadband and come up with a list of all of our programs. So that's what we did. The Rural Development Program area has the Rural Housing Service, which provides community facilities, single/multifamily housing; and we have the Rural Business Cooperative Service that provides loans and grants to small businesses which qualify for rural assistance; and we have an Electric Program, a Water and Environmental Program, and a Telecommunications Program in the Rural Utilities Service. So we brought together some experts from all those areas and we brought together some of our Rural Development state directors, and we just listed every program that we thought could possibly fit into enhancing broadband.

And then we went through the process of ranking those programs and asking what barriers would be if they would need any legislation changes, and, at that time, we hadn't seen

the Presidential Memorandum so we were thinking that maybe there would be an opportunity to expand some of these programs with a tweak in a regulation or a tweak in legislation here or there. So we had a pretty good list by the time the Memorandum came out, and we also included partners, such as the Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management, other USDA offices or agencies, such as the Forest Service, and we listed the Federal Communications Commission and NTIA who were partners that we thought maybe we may have to work with along these lines. But we didn't have any idea that it would be 24 other agencies with 24 executive secretariat offices who have to clear this report.

AIMEE MEACHAM: That's excellent. And so how -- for folks out there who maybe didn't read the report -- how much additional funding from these processes did we make -- did you guys make -- available through existing programs that wasn't available before for broadband expenditure?

KAREN HANSON: So not all of this funding is available exclusively for broadband, but the total amount of new -- of programs -- for which broadband is now going to be listed as eligible expense is worth \$10 billion. So that's a pretty significant number, and it's only really the start I would say; that one of the benefits of this effort was the new and focused attention on broadband within all of these agencies. So I think as the agencies are looking into their FY16 and 17 budgets, there are still possibilities that they would find additional funding, but the new -- the \$10 billion -- is not a bad deal for five months of work.

AIMEE MEACHAM: Not at all. So, you know, and it -- Karen mentioned that process usually isn't the most exciting thing, but it seems like you guys developed a process that could be replicable at the state or local level. Is that -- and, you know, California is pretty advanced in the

things that it's doing, but I know that there are some localities here that might be interested in the type of work that you put together. Is that something that you guys could help them with?

KAREN HANSON: So I think so, and I think we'd certainly be happy to share the materials that we pulled together, the survey mechanisms that we had the agencies, and the public request for comment structure that had a lot of the open-ended questions that went through a bunch of different types of comments that were typical barriers. But I do think what we've heard throughout is that coordination at all levels is really where the solution is going to lie, and I think that's where we still have some work to do to make sure that the action items get - - that the information flows down through all of the various regional offices and local offices. So I think that's probably going to be the next step; but, for example, Keith's agency has local field representatives. I think for us one of the visions would be to make sure that the local HUD folks who are responsible for the Community Development Block Grant funding or who know how that gets implemented are in touch with the local Rural Utilities Service field representatives who can help those communities who are trying to piece together the funding, really figure out where those opportunities lie now that they've been made -- now that the federal government has made -- it explicitly clear that all of those programs can support broadband.

AIMEE MEACHAM: That's great. So we haven't really talked yet about the results of the report since we talked about process. Maybe you each could go through -- there were some major themes that resulted from the report and then there were quite a few large outcomes -- if you guys want to talk a little bit about that. And I'll start with Karen and then go to Keith.

KAREN HANSON: Sure. So there were four basic themes that we landed on as far as an organizing principle for the report, but I think so the four are -- the first is modernizing federal

regulations to make more funding available for broadband. And you've heard us talk about that already, to the tune of, you know, \$10 billion.

The second was to make more federal assets -- oh, sorry; the second was to empower communities with tools and resources to help them drive their own community broadband efforts forward. And so some of the action items in that theme we've talked a little bit about today, but one is this notion of a Community Connect Initiative that NTIA is working with the White House on. And a little plug for the 4:00 p.m. slot on the agenda; we'd love to talk to folks about that further if you'd like to stick around. But that's intended to give cities and communities a set of indicators and a framework that they can use to understand where they sit on the, so to speak, spectrum of broadband connectivity and what they can do to become more connected and what tools and resources the government can provide, other partners can provide, to help them learn how to advance.

The third is to make more federal assets available for broadband deployment. So, for example, the Department of Interior has thousands of towers on their lands that have not yet been made available for wireless deployment, so they're going to conduct an inventory in partnership with private sector folks who can help them do this, and then make information available about those towers so that providers can use them and governments can use them.

And the fourth is to develop a National Broadband Research Agenda, which is also, I think, an important step to making sure that we know where the gaps remain in our knowledge of what the barriers are and where the opportunities are, and then drive towards a concerted, prioritized agenda to get those answers.

AIMEE MEACHAM: So I think, Keith, maybe you can talk about the RUS-specific actions?



KEITH ADAMS: Yes. USDA had four specific actions that were in the report and, just before I go into those four, the Council still meets -- the working group and the steering committee still meets -- and we are tracking all of the actions because each action, if you look in the report, has a milestone and dates and even specific actions about what should be taking place. So USDA, we have four.

One is our Community Facilities Program which is in the Rural Housing Service, but they have approximately \$2 billion a year to provide funding for broadband in the local municipalities. Over the years, they have not funded any broadband projects because there was a perception that they could not do that if our traditional Telecom Program was able to fund the same things. And we found that there are some differences -- that they can defer interest for a period of time; they can give a certain working capital request that we can't because our loans are construction only. So there are some distinguishing factors that would allow municipal governments to apply for a Community Facilities loan. So right now, they're in, I think, Quarter 3 is when they're supposed to be able to actually accept applications, but they're working with us right now, they're working with our Office of General Counsel, and then we're going to be talking to the Office of Management and Budget to make sure that there are no duplications.

Another issue that we're working with them is that they know how to build hospitals, they know how to build libraries, they know how to build community facilities, but they don't have necessarily broadband or telecommunications expertise. So they will be leaning heavily on our general field representatives. Rocky Chenelle is here for California; he also handles Nevada. But we have to work out how our general field representatives are going to support their needs.

We also have an action from the Rural Business Cooperative Service, who provides loans and grants to small rural telcos or small rural electric cooperatives for funding for grant proposals, for consulting services, things that we don't necessarily fund in our programs. But someone could use this for an engineering study or a feasibility study. All of that money is not going to go to rural telephone companies or rural cooperatives or rural broadband companies, but it is available.

The other -- the third one -- is with our electric program. We have -- the electric program within the Rural Utilities Service has a smart grid program, and the smart grid program is worth \$6 billion a year. Not all of that, as Karen said, could be funded, but it is possible to use some of that, and that will not take a project directly from a particular place to the home, but it will maybe go 75 percent of the way there. And we have a lot of electric subsidiaries or rural subsidiaries who are doing that now.

The last recommendation is rewriting our Telecommunications Regulation. The regulation is long overdue for rewrite and what we want to do is give the administrator flexibility as we have done with our Farm Bill Broadband Program so that we can define what is an adequate speed a leave it open, because adequate speeds are going to vary and we want to make sure that it's higher than what it is now, and a lot of the Regulation still talks about telephone. We don't talk about broadband. So we're going to make sure that we look at that. That's going to be a longer process because we have to make sure that we get feedback from our state directors, make sure we get feedback from the major associations that we work with, and then we have to get it in the queue to go through the process of changing a regulation within a department.

AIMEE MEACHAM: Thank you. So I'm going to -- Karen put her own shout-out for a session that we're having afterwards to discuss the Community Connect Initiative. I also want to mention one of the other outcomes for empowering communities is really providing best practices and technical assistance, so there's also a Technical Assistance group that will be providing some help from 4:00 to 5:00, and Keith will be participating with that, along with Dana Shaffer from the FCC and Sandeep Taxali from NTIA. So I just want to put a shout-out for, you know, if you need help from either group -- we would appreciate your input definitely on the Community Connect Initiative, but we want to make sure that you know that resources are available to you as well.

So, along those lines, some of the -- let me just change gears a little bit and go back to the comments. So 250 some-odd comments from the public, which I think is a fantastic really statement that says, "This is important and we care about broadband as an issue." And they came in what? Can you tell us a little bit about some of the themes that came out of those comments and some of the actions maybe that Commerce has taken as a result? Just we -- I think this, what USDA has done, is a massive undertaking and they're really making an amazing amount of funding available to people that wasn't available before.

KAREN HANSON: Uh-huh.

AIMEE MEACHAM: But Commerce has a couple of actions that it's taking as well.

KAREN HANSON: Sure. So, yeah, as Aimee said, we received comments from local governments, counties, tribal entities, lots and lots of providers as well. I think some of the comments that we heard consistently from the public, as well as through our Broadband USA work, is that it's sometimes difficult to know where to turn for information about funding for

broadband. And where are all the policies that different agencies have and where can you find someone's permitting policies and another's funding policies?

So one of the things that we're going to be doing at Broadband USA is creating a portal -- essentially, a one-stop shop -- for information about all these various programs and policies and the various action items that the Council members are working on. So we're going to basically make it easier for communities to find this information in the first place. So that's a pretty basic first step, but surprisingly difficult as well.

I think some of the other actions that we heard a lot about had to do with policies around permitting and Dig Once issues. And DOT -- I know you said just what Commerce is doing, but I'll share also that DOT is doing a lot to communicate their support for broadband deployments, and they'll be issuing guidance to the state DOTs, making sure that it's clear that the federal role and the federal perspective is to support these deployments at the same time that local governments may be, you know, digging a highway. And, at the same time, I would say we didn't just think that Dig Once was relevant to the transportation space, because EPA funds water and sewer projects that are also opportunities for communities to leverage those infrastructure builds to lay down conduit.

So we've been working across the Council agencies to make sure that every agency that has a role to play in infrastructure makes those kinds of policies their policies. So HUD with the Community Development Block Grant and with the other infrastructure funding that they provide to communities. EPA, as I said. Department of Interior. Department of Transportation. I think one of the real powers behind the Council is the fact that all the agencies are on board and doing whatever they possibly can, so that's one of the things that we heard consistently and how we're going to be addressing it.

KEITH ADAMS: Right. And if I may add this, the comments were very interesting because you had well-crafted 2- or 3-page comments from some of the associations who we deal with regularly, and then you individuals who said, you know, echo much of what's been said to day that, "I can't get broadband where I live. And why does the government programs, why don't you talk to each other?" And it was very interesting to see those comments come through and see how the different agencies and the different working group members integrated that into the final recommendations.

AIMEE MEACHAM: Thank you. So something that may be a little bit different about this report or maybe you can tell us what's a little bit different. As you know, there's some -- there's definitely some -- metrics and some milestones in the report for each of the agencies, but how can we be sure and what's going on now with the Council to make sure that the work is actually being done and that this report's not just going to gather dust and will be another, you know, notch on someone's -- yeah, you know, in the President's shelf that says, "Hey, I put out -- we have this great report"? But what's next, Keith? Can you tell us a little bit about --

KEITH ADAMS: Well, in my opinion, I think that this report won't sit on the shelf because the person who signed the report and issued the report is very interested and committed to broadband access, adoption, and to making sure that everyone has access to affordable and quality broadband. So, as you heard from David Edelman today, we work with some people from the National Economics Council. We meet twice -- well, we were meeting weekly; now we're meeting once every two weeks to make sure that we are looking at the timelines and that we can even move some recommendations up. At USDA, we've already moved up our smart grid electric recommendations from Quarter 1 -- excuse me, Quarter 2 to Quarter 1 -- and we're looking at moving our Rural Business Cooperative Service recommendations up. So I think the

attention that the President has given to this and that all the cabinet level secretaries have by signing onto it is something that will prevent this from just being a report that nobody will pay attention to. And if you really add to the fact that, you know, everybody -- I mean, this conference is affirmation that everybody knows that access to enhanced broadband services is going to drive the economy for years to come.

AIMEE MEACHAM: Karen?

KAREN HANSON: I would share just a little anecdote. As Keith said, getting 25 agencies to each clear this report was no small feat, and my boss -- and Aimee's boss and Doug's boss -- is Assistant Secretary Larry Strickling, and when we got the news that our secretary had approved the report, he sent a few of us a note saying, "Congratulations, team. Now we have to execute." So I think it's very clear to all of us that the report is only the first step, and the real change is going to have to happen as each action item gets completed and as the information gets out to the public and as, you know, we hear back from stakeholders that, you know, "Gosh. Wow. A barrier that we used to have is no longer there." Or on the flip side, if you tell us, you know, "Even though you've made this change happen, we're still running into problems, you know. Can you help us?" I think that's a really important message to send out as well, that we don't think the work is done and we are certainly still eager to hear from folks at the local and state level that there are still problems that need to be solved.

AIMEE MEACHAM: So if someone comes across those barriers, Keith, for example, can you tell us, you know, how the public can get in touch with you and make sure that they -- you know, that you guys -- understand what the barriers are so that you guys can go to work to try to solve them?

KEITH ADAMS: Well, I think in the case of NTIA and the Rural Utilities Service, you know, our contacts are, you know, public knowledge. We're still trying to work out how we can make all of the Broadband Opportunity Council representatives of the working group accessible to everybody. So I think we're going to be working on that so that there's going to be a portal of some type. I know that that's one of the actions that NTIA is working on and is developing a resource portal.

KAREN HANSON: Uh-huh. A resource, yeah. And I think as we're working through our stakeholder networks, I see some faces here in the crowd who have been working with our State Broadband Initiative, and there's still a State Broadband Leaders Network that NTIA is continuing to facilitate and will continue to facilitate. We will definitely be encouraging those state broadband leaders to keep us informed. We're working with our partners at the associations, as Keith mentioned -- the National League of Cities, U.S. Conference of Mayors, National Association of Counties -- so I think we're relying on our stakeholders to keep us informed and to keep us honest. And we certainly are -- we have -- NTIA has the Broadband USA Initiative. We have a public email address that we are happy to share. But I think either way, we expect that we'll continue to be hearing from folks and we'll be escalating issues as they come to our attention through the Council. So we have our colleagues that we know how to reach them.

KEITH ADAMS: And I would add that, for USDA, we have our Rural Development Offices that are located in 48 states, and we're leveraging the U.S. Small Business Administration Small Business Development Centers so that they will have the information so that, when people come in and they ask about broadband opportunities and the Broadband Opportunity Council, they will be directed to the proper place.

AIMEE MEACHAM: So that's great. Well, I know it's been a long day for everyone and so I'd like to move into some audience questions and see what kind of questions we have from you all. And I know Karen and Keith are more than happy to answer those.

KAREN HANSON: Is it Kelly?

KELLY COLE: Hi, yeah. So I'm Kelly Cole and I'm the State Broadband Representative for Utah. It's sort of a suggestion, I guess. I think you guys have done a great job in kind of making some of the funding information more accessible, but one of the things that I think would be a really cool addition to that is to have some sort of online portal where you can put in, "I'm a broadband provider," "I'm a community," and go through sort of a decision tree to, in the end, spit out which programs you would qualify for in different situations. And then the other thing that that would do is that might also allow you to see where the holes are. You can maybe have at the end of that a component where they say, you know, where you kind of have information about who they are or why they're not being served to collect that data on where the holes are. And I think having that kind of tool sort of like -- I think there's like an Immigration tool that you can go through and say, "This is my circumstance," and then it spits out which visa you'd be qualified for. So that's just a suggestion; it may be like the next step of making information accessible.

KAREN HANSON: That's great and, actually, that is a concept that we're looking to see if we can add that kind of functionality into the portal, but it would be like a wizard, right --

KELLY COLE: Uh-huh.

KAREN HANSON: -- where you'd have the different, exactly what you're talking about. So, yeah, that's a really, really good point and good to hear that it would be valued.

AIMEE MEACHAM: Do we have any other? Oh, I see a question up front.



KAREN HANSON: Right behind you.

SPEAKER: [Indiscernible].

KEITH ADAMS: Oh, thank you.

AIMEE MEACHAM: Speak up.

JORY WOLF: Hi. Jory Wolf, City of Santa Monica. I think this portal idea is wonderful and bravo for having put that together. I think something that's really important at the federal level is to help inform the -- well, everyone for that matter -- about what's happening in the transportation space, especially funding for Dig Once. We have been -- unfortunately, we have not been -- the recipients of some public funds for Dig Once in our regional communities, and we aren't really aware of those things as they're getting funded and as those projects are being let. And if we are, then we'll have some say about how those who are receiving the funds might be able to distribute them for the betterment of more communities.

KAREN HANSON: So you're talking essentially about more of a notification system when projects are funded. So you may actually be interested to -- oh, I can send you a link, but OMB is working on a Permitting Dashboard Initiative where, I believe the challenge is that the threshold is, I think, a \$200 million project.

JORY WOLF: Uh-huh.

KAREN HANSON: So we might need to talk to them about that. But it's a dashboard where you could essentially see the projects that have been funded in your region to then be able to link up with them. But your point is absolutely --

JORY WOLF: That --

KAREN HANSON: -- well, yeah?

JORY WOLF: That would be really helpful. Just for an example, L.A. is just starting to wake up to mass transit, and there's a lot of transportation funds being let in the area and, unfortunately, all of the communities aren't really aware of that and they're being -- the funds are being -- hoarded by the transportation agencies that are receiving them, and the fiber optics that are being laid and the easements which are being created aren't being shared. And it would significantly benefit connecting the last mile in those communities.

KAREN HANSON: So, yes, exactly. So, to that point, DOT's Guidance to state DOTs is not just going to be about Dig Once policies, but it's also going to be about permitting or granting flexibility in use of other programs, such as Intelligent Transit Systems. If there's excess fiber that was installed that a community isn't using that it could be used for non-transportation purposes, but the trick is in our federated system the state DOT has a lot of say in how the funds get allocated, so what the federal government can do is issue strong guidance; but, ultimately, it's -- I think a lot of the state action is where it's going to be for communities. So working with your state advocates to make sure that the state DOT is on board is going to be very important.

JORY WOLF: Well, I think even if there was some sort of a policy recommendation as when states apply for the funds to look at regional efforts or statewide efforts to see how many more communities could benefit with the Dig Once policies.

KAREN HANSON: I'll look into -- I think that's coming, but I'll look into it. But I appreciate that and we'll definitely make sure that everyone knows what happens with that.

JORY WOLF: Thank you.

AIMEE MEACHAM: Do we have additional questions? Come on, it's a small group. Feel free to raise your hand, stand up. Looks like right here.

DIANA: Diana. So I've been following along with the Broadband Opportunity Council and a few of the groups that I'm involved with, like the National Digital Inclusion Alliance who've been providing some input. But I just wanted to both offer any sort of support that Youth Policy Institute or any of the consortia groups can provide, but also ask if there are any ways in which -- specific ways in which -- you feel that nonprofit organizations or any coalitions can help out.

KAREN HANSON: That's a great question. So I think as the tools that get developed are refined and ready to go, I think absolutely it would be very helpful to help us get the word out. So, for example, some of the work that is going to be done is at GSA ; the General Services Administration, is going to be looking into the computers for a learning program to see how it can be modernized. I expect that that will lead to some good things -- that's what we're hoping - - that would make more devices available for more communities. Once that happens, we will definitely need help to get the word out. So I think becoming -- letting us know that you're willing to be a partner is fantastic, and then we can then keep you informed and have you be our conduit to the local communities. And I think, to my earlier point, hearing that there are still barriers and hearing where they are is really important as well, and if you have ideas about or if you hear that certain programs are not allowing funding for broadband in a way that you think they could or should, let us know because then we can elevate that to our colleagues.

KEITH ADAMS: And I think, if I can add, that it was mentioned in a panel earlier that the most effective execution is going to be at the grassroots at the local level. So what the report does is tell you who has funds, what the objectives of the funds are, and how much is available. Then, I think, coordination with the local level is going to be key, so if there are nonprofits, who can assist? They can only make the project that much more likely to be successful.

KAREN HANSON: Actually, if I could add on another thought? So HUD, for example, is one of the agencies that's doing a lot, as many of you know with Connect Home and Secretary Castro is very supportive of broadband. So one of the things they're doing is the Community Development Block Grant Program, which is often -- it's very competitive, I know, so it's not the end all and be all. But HUD is going to make guidance explicit that broadband is an eligible expense, so as you're working with your communities, that's something to keep in mind so that, you know, that's just at least in the minds of the community planners. The Economic Development Administration, which is part of the Department of Commerce, they have already issued the new guidance for the Community Economic Development Strategies, which is essentially the regional planning tool that they put out. Broadband is now explicitly mentioned as an important part of that strategic planning process. So being aware of the new opportunities that exist and being there for your communities and helping them understand where the opportunities are I think is going to be a very important role for organizations like yours and others to play.

DIANA: And I'm just going to throw something else out there, too. So SBA, for example, is working on some training materials, and I think input from the nonprofit that is already doing this work would be vital to what they're doing. Department of Labor is doing something similar. So you being involved in those discussions I think will be very important. I mean, Youth Policy Institute, for example, has a huge amount of experience that the government could benefit from and share those lessons with, you know, with those agencies. So I think that would be extremely helpful.

AIMEE MEACHAM: Thanks, Diana. I think I saw another question in the back?

KAREN HANSON: Or in the middle?

AIMEE MEACHAM: In the middle? You, right? [Chuckling]

KAREN HANSON: No more questions?

AIMEE MEACHAM: No? Okay, well, it's a quiet group. I know it's getting late and we want to move on to Technical Assistance and the Community Connect Initiative discussion. So I'm just going to ask for your sort of final thoughts on next steps and the Broadband Opportunity Council.

KAREN HANSON: So my final thought is that this is just the beginning and there's a lot of work that we can all -- that we're all going to be doing, and that we're hoping to have partners at the state and local level who are also going down this path with us and breaking down barriers at all levels because I think that will be really important for the ultimate goal that we all share.

KEITH ADAMS: Yeah. And I would just say thank you to anyone and everyone who is raising the flag and lifting your voice on behalf of those who are connected. Sometimes it's difficult for us in the Rural Utilities Service to think about anything other than rural America, but that's what we do every day. And if you look at access issues specifically, it's going to be in unserved and underserved communities and most of the time it's going to be in rural America. So we just thank anyone and everyone who is lifting your voice to echo what the President has said, what the Secretary of Agriculture has said, what the Undersecretary of Agriculture for Rural Development has said, is that access to enhanced broadband is a necessity. It's not just good enough for rural America. So I don't want to make this into a rural America issue, but I just thank anybody who is advocating on behalf of rural America because we need all the help and money that we can get.

AIMEE MEACHAM: That's great. And I'm going to add my final thought to that, which is, you know, Karen said this is just the beginning, but I also want to put a touch on that

says, you know, if someone asks me what NTIA is going to do once we have basically everyone online and everyone has access to high-speed Internet. And I, you know, I think the philosophy is, maybe we work ourselves out of a job because we've reached the goal that we, you know, that we want to see for all Americans. So we're hoping that we get there. We know there's a long road ahead, but we look forward to the day when that happens.

And I really want to thank Keith and Karen, and the information that you provided was great, so let's give them a hand.

[END OF RECORDING]