



NTIA MINORITY BROADBAND INITIATIVE

Framework for Discussion

This report provides a framework for dialogue, policy recommendations and strategic goals for implementing the NTIA Minority Broadband Initiative

Executive Summary

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), located within the Department of Commerce, is the Executive Branch agency responsible for advising the President on telecommunications and information policy issues. Consistent with recent Executive Orders and commitments the Department has made under the American Broadband Initiative (ABI) to close the digital divide, NTIA is increasing minority stakeholder engagement around solving broadband access challenges in vulnerable communities. To that end, NTIA has launched the Minority Broadband Initiative (MBI), working with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to ensure all Americans can participate in the digital economy.

The initiative is consistent with the Administration's commitment to expanding broadband Internet availability and adoption in rural America. In launching the initiative, NTIA will build upon its relationships with HBCUs, as community anchor institutions, to leverage minority stakeholder engagement in finding new opportunities for broadband deployment. HBCUs offer specific programmatic advantages, including supporting economic growth and competitiveness in anchor communities through high capacity broadband networks and connectivity. The MBI seeks to partner with federal agencies, local government and the private sector to explore opportunities for broadband expansion across HBCU campuses and surrounding communities.

NTIA's work on this initiative complements the [White House Initiative on HBCUs](#), which is dedicated to helping HBCUs successfully compete for top opportunities in national and global markets, while providing education and economic experiences that can improve the standards of living for the students and communities HBCUs primarily serve.¹ NTIA seeks to increase HBCU leadership participation in relevant broadband organizations and federal agency committees, enhance outreach to improve HBCU participation in federal agency broadband programs, and ensure their inclusion in the broadband stakeholder ecosystems and grant opportunities.

NTIA's MBI aims to achieve the following broad strategic policy objectives:

- (1) Convening a forum where stakeholders can explore options for leveraging HBCU broadband infrastructure to connect neighboring communities of vulnerable populations; and
- (2) Using broadband infrastructure investment as a catalyst for adoption that will result in job growth and economic development and deployment of advanced mobile technologies primarily in the economically distressed communities of the rural South.

¹ White House Initiative to Promote Excellence and Innovation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Exec. Order No. 13779, 82 Fed. Reg. 41 (Mar. 3, 2019), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2017-03-03/pdf/2017-04357.pdf>.

Background

The Department of Commerce promotes job creation, economic growth, and improved standards of living for all Americans by working in partnership with businesses, universities, communities and our nation's workers. The Department has a wide range of responsibilities that include economic development, technology, encouraging entrepreneurship, and business development.

NTIA's programs and policymaking focus on issues that include expanding broadband Internet deployment and connectivity in America, spectrum management and availability, and ensuring that the Internet remains an engine for continued innovation and economic growth. Since 1994, NTIA has been conducting in-depth research on patterns of Internet usage throughout the United States. Our data consistently show that Americans living in rural and distressed urban communities are less likely to use the Internet than their urban or economically advantaged peers.

Just 59 percent of households with incomes under \$25,000 reported using Internet at home in the 2017 NTIA Internet Use Survey. African Americans and rural dwellers have also consistently been less likely to go online than their non-Hispanic White and urban peers. Seventy percent of African American households reported home Internet use in 2017, compared with 80 percent of their White counterparts.² Similarly, 71 percent of rural households were connected, compared with 79 percent of urban households.³

A 2019 report by the Federal Communications Commission found that of the 19% of Americans living in rural areas,⁴ nearly 17 million (26%) live in areas lacking sufficient broadband availability. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the United States had 102 counties where at least half the population identified as Black or African American over the 2013-2017 period; nearly all of these counties were located across the Coastal and Lowland South in a loose arc related to traditional areas of plantation agriculture, including the Mississippi Delta.⁵

² Nat'l Telecomm. and Info. Admin, Digital Nation Data Explorer: Home Internet Use by Anyone in Household – Race or Ethnicity (Jan. 6, 2018), <https://www.ntia.gov/data/digital-nation-data-explorer#sel=internetAtHome&demo=race&pc=prop&disp=chart>.

³ Nat'l Telecomm. and Info. Admin, Digital Nation Data Explorer: Home Internet Use by Anyone in Household – Population Density (Jan. 6, 2018), <https://www.ntia.gov/data/digital-nation-data-explorer#sel=internetAtHome&demo=metro&pc=prop&disp=chart>.

⁴ Michael Ratcliffe, et al., U.S. Census Bureau, Defining Rural at the U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey and Geography Brief (Dec. 2016), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/acs/acsgeo-1.pdf>.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP05, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=dp05&hidePreview=true&table=DP05&tid=ACSDP5Y2017.DP05&lastDisplayedRow=22&g=0100000US.050000>.

In the latest Business Case for Racial Equity report from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the authors state that “by 2050, our country stands to realize an \$8 trillion gain in GDP by closing the U.S. racial equity gap.”⁶

To address the broadband challenges for unserved or underserved Americans, especially those living in rural areas, NTIA has launched its Minority Broadband Initiative to build a broader working relationship with HBCUs. The contributions of HBCUs have been indispensable to the participation of African Americans in sustained U.S. competitiveness, job creation and shared prosperity.

HBCUs, which are located in rural as well as economically depressed urban areas, serve a unique role as anchor institutions in many American communities and have the potential to become “hubs” for broadband deployment, use and applications. Campus-wide broadband infrastructure helps HBCUs to fulfill their role as anchor institutions to better serve their host communities, and aid in America’s economic development, growth of social capital and increased productivity.

HBCUs have been in existence for over a century. For instance, 19 were established as Negro Land-Grant Institutions under the Second Morrill Act of 1890. The 101 HBCUs are almost evenly split between public and private nonprofit institutions; 64 are located in what is called the “Black Belt” of the United States. In total, HBCUs generate more than \$14.8 billion in economic impact annually; that’s equivalent to a ranking in the top 200 on the Fortune 500 list of America’s largest corporations.⁷

The presence of an HBCU means a boost to economic activity, on and off—and even well beyond—its campus. The workforce produced by HBCUs generates 134,090 jobs for their local and regional economies. Of this total, more than 57,500 are on-campus jobs, and more than 76,000 are off-campus jobs. For each job created on campus, another 1.3 public- and private-sector jobs are created off campus because of HBCU-related spending.⁸

HBCU anchor institutions are an integral component of the broadband ecosystem and potential force multipliers for economic prosperity. Because anchor institutions such as universities and hospitals are among the largest employers in communities, their demand for broadband services contributes to the formation of a critical mass of sustainable and predictable demand. This can be leveraged to build the economic case for service providers to extend broadband services to their surrounding community.

⁶ W.K. Kellogg Found., Business Case for Racial Equity (Jul. 24, 2018), <https://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2018/07/business-case-for-racial-equity>.

⁷ United Negro College Fund, HBCUs Make America Strong: The Positive Economic Impact of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, https://www.uncf.org/wp-content/uploads/HBCU_Consumer_Brochure_FINAL_APPROVED.pdf.

⁸ *Id.* at 5.

Minority Broadband Initiative

NTIA's initiative will work with connected HBCUs, or "Smart HBCUs," to ensure their inclusion and awareness of broadband deployment grant opportunities. The MBI also will seek to partner with federal agencies, local governments, and the private sector to lay the groundwork for potential expansion of broadband networks in communities surrounding HBCU campuses and throughout the rural South.

As a starting point, the initiative seeks to create a **Smart HBCU Task Force**, which will work to ensure that leadership at all levels of government understand that HBCUs and their communities must be front and center in conversations about broadband expansion for economic growth and sustainability of economically distressed neighborhoods and the rural areas. Federal, state and local governments should coordinate with HBCUs regarding policy around the development and expansion of smart cities and communities to the benefit of all Americans. The task force will raise awareness of advancements around next generation wireless services including 5G, and the role that HBCUs could play in their deployment.

The task force, led by NTIA, will include HBCU Presidents and Chief Information Officers, representatives from the National Association for Equal Opportunity, the United Negro College Fund, and the Thurgood Marshall College Fund; leaders in a range of businesses and industry, including companies and representatives from the wireline and wireless trade associations; members from academia, nonprofits, institutes, the Bi-Partisan HBCU Caucus, and the White House Initiative on HBCU Interagency Working Group. Such a crosscutting body will provide objective and comprehensive policy insight and expertise to drive its efforts. In addition, the Working Group will coordinate and collaborate with the President's Board of Advisors on HBCUs, the Joint NTIA/USDA Broadband Council, and the Networking and Information Technology Research and Development (NITRD) National Coordination Office.

Some potential areas of discussion to encourage smart infrastructure investment include:

- Implementing policies that encourage and foster innovation, interoperability, industry-led standards development and best practices, transparency, inclusion, privacy and security;
- Producing and distributing information and policy briefs regarding the benefits of investing in HBCUs and their host communities – from creation of better-paying, in-demand jobs to invigorating America's competitive advantage on the global stage;
- Holding collaborative public-private partnership summits;
- Conducting workshops to educate policymakers at local, state and federal levels on the role of smart technology in a 21st century economy for inclusive competitiveness that leads to increased productivity;

- Supporting efforts to unlock barriers to HBCU smart infrastructure investment by updating strategic plans and organizational structures to meet the technology and connectivity needs of the future;
- Ensuring state-by-state HBCU connectivity to existing and planned regional and state broadband networks; and
- Advocating for leveraging broadband assets on military complexes and federal installations to be shared with their surrounding communities.

NTIA, in partnership with HBCUs, will conduct **State-Wide Broadband Summits** for the purpose of establishing a network of Smart HBCU campuses. The summits facilitate planning and developing frameworks for collaborative Smart HBCU campuses. State-wide summits should include HBCU leadership and academic officers; state, local and regional government officials; principals from state broadband networks, K-20 educators, workforce and industry representatives, policy experts, and non-government organization executives for statewide economic inclusiveness and competitiveness interests. The expected outcomes of these meetings include:

- Creating HBCU strategic plans to improve the competitive position of each HBCU through broadband deployment and applications;
- Developing a strategy to strengthen the economic competitiveness of each HBCU by identifying potential partnerships with businesses and industries;
- Facilitating ongoing outreach to keep key administrators up-to-date and increase their knowledge of technology and its relevance to capacity building of HBCUs;
- Including HBCU representatives in local, state and regional broadband planning.

Investing in a partnership with the HBCUs could provide the needed multiplier effect for deploying broadband infrastructure. There are 76 HBCUs across 11 states in the rural South, with the others in distressed urban neighborhoods. These institutions are in states and neighborhoods with persistent poverty, low education levels, high number of veterans, distressed communities, and those who are yet to be connected to the Internet.

NTIA's Minority Broadband Initiative would work with HBCUs toward the goal of extending broadband to underserved and unserved communities. To prepare for the future, land-rich rural HBCUs should be included in plans currently being made to deploy the mix of towers, small cells and fiber facilities that are essential for new wireless networks.

Conclusion

This report is intended to be a catalyst for strategic planning and policymaking for broadband infrastructure deployment opportunities to ensure that rural Americans and distressed urban communities, through our Nation's HBCUs, have an active, integral role in advanced communications technologies. Following the debut of this initiative at the November 15, 2019, *Carolinas Alliance for Success in Education Summit* in Charlotte, N.C., at Johnson C. Smith University, NTIA will work to develop statewide Smart HBCU planning teams, starting first with HBCUs, state broadband leaders, telecom industry officials, philanthropic entities and policy experts in North and South Carolina.

Through these meetings, NTIA hopes to develop a set of policy recommendations to support Smart HBCU efforts to expand broadband in the rural South. This collaboration affirms the Department of Commerce's commitment, through NTIA, to ensure that all Americans benefit from broadband and other telecommunications technologies.

NTIA would like to thank the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities for its leadership in creating greater awareness of broadband challenges in minority communities through its support of the MBI. We look forward to continued engagement with the White House, federal partners and the HBCU community in building the MBI program.