

## **A Call to Action for a National Broadband Strategy**

The undersigned, representing a diverse array of America's communications providers, high technology companies, manufacturers, consumers, labor unions, public interest groups, educators, state and local governments, utilities, content creators, foundations, and many other stakeholders in America's broadband future, call on President-elect Barack Obama and the next Congress to make the development and initial implementation of a comprehensive National Broadband Strategy a high national priority in 2009.

### **Advanced Communications Capabilities are Essential for the 21st Century**

The broadband-enabled Internet is rapidly changing the world. It has become a catalyst for innovation, economic growth, job creation, educational opportunity and global competitiveness. It enhances public safety, homeland security, health care, energy efficiency, environmental sustainability and the worldwide distribution of millions of products, processes and services. It aids in revitalizing depressed urban and rural economies and addressing the special needs of senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, and young people. It creates a vehicle for enhancing the level of civic participation and discourse so important to a functioning democracy. Yet broadband as an enabling technology is still growing out of its infancy. It has unlimited potential that remains to be fully realized.

### **The United States Urgently Needs a Comprehensive National Broadband Strategy**

The United States is at a critical juncture. Too many Americans still do not have access to affordable broadband or lack the equipment or knowledge to use it effectively. If the United States is to remain a leader in the global economy, our broadband networks must also be robust enough to enable our people, businesses, and public and private institutions to take full advantage of emerging and future bandwidth-intensive and quality-sensitive applications.

The United States vies in an increasingly competitive global marketplace with Asian, European, and other nations that have recognized the transformative significance and competitive advantages of broadband. Many nations have implemented national strategies that treat advanced communications networks as strategic infrastructure, and they are using a variety of policies and practices to promote broadband deployment and adoption. These include tax incentives, low-interest loans, subsidies, public-private partnerships, competition policy, and many other forms of direct and indirect support by all levels of government. Such measures have led to increased broadband availability, faster speeds, lower prices, and high adoption rates. The United States should not ignore successful policies and practices from other countries, as it pursues a National Broadband Strategy that is aligned with our own unique history, culture, geography, and economy.

### **The Framework for a Comprehensive National Broadband Strategy**

Throughout our history, the United States has adopted policies to maximize the benefits of major technological advances. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we promoted the development of canals, railroads, and electric power. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we instituted policies to expand electric power and national telephone and highway systems, and we transported people to the moon and back. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is time to adopt a National Broadband Strategy that builds on this tradition

and that is worthy of our great nation. The framework for our National Broadband Strategy should include the following:

- **Goals.** The National Broadband Strategy should set out several clear, forward-looking, and attainable goals that take into account the ability of broadband to generate huge benefits in education, environmental protection, scientific research, medicine, health care, energy efficiency, transportation, and overall economic vitality. These goals should include the following:
  - a. Every American home, business, and public and private institution should have access to affordable high-speed broadband connections to the Internet.
  - b. Access to the Internet should, to the maximum feasible extent, be open to all users, service providers, content providers, and application providers.
  - c. Network operators must have the right to manage their networks responsibly, pursuant to clear and workable guidelines and standards.
  - d. The Internet and broadband marketplace should be as competitive as reasonably possible.
  - e. U.S. broadband networks should provide Americans with the network performance, capacity, and connections they need to compete successfully in the global marketplace.
- **Policies to Stimulate High-Speed Broadband Investment.** The federal government, in collaboration with state and local governments and the private sector, should play an active role in stimulating broadband deployment, particularly in unserved areas. Such support might include tax incentives, grants, low cost loans, loan guarantees, universal service subsidies, efficient use of spectrum, and other approaches.
- **Policies to Stimulate High-Speed Broadband Adoption and Use.** The federal government, in collaboration with state and local governments and the private sector, must play an active role in stimulating adoption and use of advanced broadband connections. All Americans must have access to computers and the knowledge to use broadband technology effectively. Federal support might include programs, grants, subsidies, and other measures that foster broadband connectivity, computer access, education, and training.
- **Assessment and Accountability.** Specific timetables and benchmarks should be established to help encourage successful implementation and advancement of national broadband policies, incentives or programs. A system for regular and timely collection and publication of data concerning the deployment, adoption, and use of high-speed broadband should also be instituted to ensure that our national goals and timetables are being met.

## **Our Next Steps**

While we urge policy makers and other citizens to adopt the framework presented above, it is only a first step in the process of developing a National Broadband Strategy. Representatives of the undersigned entities will continue to work together to address key issues and policy priorities. In the Spring of 2009, we will hold an event to present more specific policy recommendations to President Obama, Congress, and the American people.