

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Digital Equity: How Should the Government Help Bridge the Divide?

Some are raising concerns that digital equity programs established under the sweeping infrastructure law need to go beyond having providers offer low-cost broadband plans. There was a ton of fanfare earlier this month when the White House touted that 20 different ISPs, including **Comcast** and **Verizon**, have agreed to cut prices on their plans to make them essentially free to those receiving \$30/month government subsidies. But advocates say there's more work to be done.

"We don't really think about equity in terms of the types of diversity that states are deploying when it comes to who's building networks, what types of firms are supplying products and services, who's helping with some of the evaluation and training. I think we're going to find ourselves not... getting the full gamut of the type of outputs that want to see this type of legislation," **Brookings Institution** Senior Fellow *Nicol Turner-Lee* said during a **Benton Institute** panel discussion Monday. "The president has stressed that he wants 100% adoption, particularly among the underserved and unserved. We just don't want to make sure that they have the shiny object in their hand—we want to solve issues of poverty, social isolation, economic development. So, I think it's really important for us to really envision that equity is not just about a low-cost program, it's actually about building an ecosystem of participation."

New America's Open Technology Institute (OTI) and the **Philanthropic thru Privatization Project** (PtP) have

proposed that the federal government create a Digital Equity Foundation. In a [paper](#) released this month, they described how the foundation would invest a substantial portion of spectrum auction proceeds toward digital literacy and inclusion initiatives, including through grants to nonprofits.

While the government's \$42.5 billion BEAD broadband deployment program has the word equity in its name—BEAD stands for Broadband Equity Access and Deployment—it's worth noting the digital equity component is covered by the separate Digital Equity Act. The Act provides \$2.75 billion to establish three grant programs that promote digital equity and inclusion. The first of those programs—the \$1.44 billion State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program—is currently open. States, territories and tribal governments have until July 12 to file a letter of intent or planning application for the program, which funds an annual grant program for five years in support of digital equity projects.

"I have been actively saying that I think when states submit their plans, they need to be suggesting not just how they're going to get people served through low-cost programs or open WiFi architecture or partnerships with community organizations, but how they're going to bring in diverse suppliers to help build those networks. People who look like the community that they're serving as well," said Turner-Lee. She also called for info on public meetings and for states to be required to share how they solicited feedback on their equity plans.

NTIA is heading up the BEAD Program and Digital Equity Act, with *Evan Feinman* serving as the director of the program.



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Speaking at the Benton event, he pledged that this is “a sea change” in the way the federal government is approaching the concept of digital equity. “An amount of resources directed through carefully reviewed and analyzed state plans will flow to efforts designed to promote digital equity and inclusion that are multiple orders of magnitude more than the entire lifetime amount of resources that have ever gone into that [before],” he said. “I have high hopes. It’s early days yet. We need a bunch of people to put their shoulders to the wheel.”

Digital equity isn’t the only part of the plan raising questions. As is the case with almost any discussion on government broadband spending, there was also concern over underserved areas potentially getting funding ahead of unserved communities. “There’s no requirement that unserved gets taken care of first. They say as long as there’s a plan to serve the unserved then we can start serving underserved...” said Duke University Professor Michelle Connolly. “I don’t trust right now, the way this is set up, that we can guarantee what I think is the laudable goal of reaching and properly serving the unserved. Right now, I see a lot of money for overbuilding.”

All ye with worries, take heart. NTIA’s recently released Notice of Funding Opportunities is not the last word, Feinman said. “A ton of the program design, implementation of safeguards, budgetary caution... get pushed to the state plan development, so that each state with have the opportunity to develop a plan that works for it,” he said. That’s also why NTIA is placing a high-level senior staff member in each state and territory to assist in guiding those plans. “So much critical work will happen post-NOFO during the implementation within each state as a subgroup,” Feinman said.

ROGERS-SHAW DEAL PAUSED

Rogers and Shaw agreed to a preliminary injunction that prohibits them from closing their proposed \$16 billion merger until Canada’s Commissioner of Competition Bureau’s challenge is heard and decided by the Competition Tribunal. “Rogers and Shaw strongly believe the transaction is in the best interests of Canadian consumers, businesses and the Canadian economy, and that a settlement is the best path forward in ensuring that the benefits of the transaction are fully and expeditiously realized,” the companies said in a joint statement. “If a Tribunal hearing is ultimately required to address the Commissioner’s application to prevent the transaction, Rogers and Shaw intend to oppose it.” The two operators previously announced plans to fully divest Shaw’s wireless business as part of the proposed merger. On May 9, the Competition Bureau filed an application with the Tribunal seeking a court order to block Rogers’ proposed acquisition of Shaw. The Bureau must now prove its case before the Tribunal in order for the deal to be permanently stopped. The Bureau alleges that removing Shaw as a competitor threatens to undo the significant progress that it has made introducing more competition into an already concentrated wireless services market, where Rogers, Bell and Telus serve approximately 87% of Canadian subscribers.

CARRIAGE

MeTV was briefly removed from DISH’s lineup on May 23, but it’s back up—at least for now. “Fortunately, we were able to quickly reach an extension agreement and have MeTV programming restored to our lineup within about two hours. We continue to work with MeTV and hope to reach a long-term agreement soon,” a DISH spokesperson said. The Weigel Broadcasting station fea-

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tures classic TV from the 1930s through the 1990s. – **Comcast Technology Solutions** is adding **TVG-HD** and **TVG2-HD** to its Managed Terrestrial Distribution (“MTD”) platform. The channels provide programming related to horse racing, including live and delayed horse races, interviews, commentary and profiles. – **Cox** and **Jewish Life TV** (JLTV), an English-language, Jewish-themed network, entered an affiliation agreement to launch in several markets. Starting today, Cox customers in Arizona (Phoenix and Tucson), California (Orange County, Palos Verdes, Santa Barbara and San Diego), New England (Providence) and Washington, D.C. suburbs have access to the network. JLTV already has distribution deals with **Charter**, **Comcast**, **DirectTV**, **Hotwire** and others.

FCC ADDS BROADBAND DATA ASSISTANCE

The **FCC** launched an online help center and other new resources to assist ISPs and other filers of broadband availability data when filing for the Broadband Data Collection. Tutorials and other tools can be found at www.fcc.gov/BroadbandData ahead of the first filing window, which opens June 30. The help center also has technical information on how to prepare availability and subscription data, with an option for requesting additional support.

JOURNY INTRODUCES NEW FAST CHANNEL

Ovation TV's travel entertainment channel **Journey** is bringing **Journey Presents: America the Beautiful**, a FAST channel with content highlighting national parks, monuments and forests. The channel will launch Wednesday and be available on **Plex**, **DistroTV** and **FreebieTV**. Content includes “Rock the Park,” a 52-episode series advocating viewers to visit National Parks, “Great Wide Open” which spotlights park adventurers and “Travels with Darley,” a program shot in 4K where host *Darley Newman* travels with locals in various locations.

TENNIS CHANNEL, BLOOMBERG TV PLAY DOUBLES

Bloomberg Television and **Tennis Channel** agreed to put each network in front of the other's audience during the 2022 French Open through Sunday. During the week, Bloomberg TV and Radio will present audiences with a one-minute, Tennis Channel-produced update from the French Open. Tennis Channel viewers will get a similar-length daily market recap produced by Bloomberg on these days. This is the second year the two have partnered, first teaming up in August 2021.

T-MOBILE HOME INTERNET DEAL

T-Mobile began a new promotion for its 5G home internet. Customers can switch for \$30/month with AutoPay with two or more lines on 5G smartphone plan Magenta MAX. It's free to switch and comes with a 15-day trial period. Additionally, new Magenta MAX customers can also receive 50% off YouTube TV when signing up for T-Mobile Home Internet as well as \$50 off any streaming device.

RATINGS

The second round of the 2022 Stanley Cup Playoffs on **ESPN** and **ESPN2** averaged 1.33 million viewers, up 27% from last year. Game 5 of the Rangers and Hurricanes garnered 1.8 million average viewers Thursday and peaked at 2.3 million, while Game 5 in the Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Flames' series reeled in an average of 1.2 million viewers that night. Across

both networks, the Playoffs currently average 894,000 viewers, up 12% from 2021. – The first half of the final season of “Better Call Saul” delivered over 2.2 million viewers in live+3 ratings on **AMC**, according to **Nielsen**. For linear, episodes averaged 2.2 million viewers per episode in L+3 ratings, with the most recent episode growing 87% over three days. It's been the top performing show on **AMC+** in both viewership and acquisition and has generated more than 17 million engagements across social media platforms. The second half begins July 11 on AMC and AMC+, with the series finishing on August 15.

WAR IN UKRAINE

Newsmax CEO *Christopher Ruddy* met with Ukrainian President *Volodymyr Zelenskyy* in Kyiv on Tuesday. President Zelenskyy then sat down with primetime host *Rob Schmitt* for a discussion about Ukraine's and Europe's security. Schmitt's interview will air Tuesday on **Newsmax TV** at 8pm. – French journalist *Frédéric Leclerc-Imhoff* was killed Monday while covering the war in Ukraine. He was on assignment for **BFMTV**, a sister news network of **Altice USA's News 12**.

PROGRAMMING

Beginning Wednesday, **Fox News** will cover *Queen Elizabeth II's* Platinum Jubilee, recognizing her 70 years of service to the U.K. “The Story” anchor *Martha MacCallum* will lead coverage from London and host her afternoon news program there from Wednesday to Friday. Highlights include a broadcast of the Trooping the Colour Parade on Thursday and the service of Thanksgiving on Friday. – “The Spectrum Virtually Funny Comedy Show” with *Kevin Fredericks* and *Tony Baker* will premiere Friday at 8pm on Frederick's **YouTube** channel and **Facebook** page, simulcasting on **Spectrum's** YouTube channel. It is part of Spectrum's partnership with the comedy duo and will be available on Spectrum Originals On Demand on Tuesday.

SAD REMINDER

As Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month draws to a close today, we received an unwelcome reminder of why it's important to celebrate this community. **ChimeTV** CEO *Faith Bautista* shared that on Sunday she was doing some stretching exercises outside a Marina del Rey bagel shop while waiting for her husband. “A man shouted at me, telling me to stop. ‘What's wrong with what I'm doing?’ I replied. Right then, he told me something that has no place in this great country of ours: ‘You Asians....You should go back to China!’” Bautista, who is Filipino, said the experience strengthened her mission to get ChimeTV fully distributed. **Charter** has already said it will carry the Asian-American and woman-owned channel across its 41-state footprint when it launches later this year. ChimeTV is devoted to serving multigenerational Asian-American and Pacific Islander audiences in English. “Yes, I am angry and sad at what happened to me, and even more indignant that minorities like me go through this kind of injustice, perhaps on a daily basis. But instead of being victimized by it, I choose to create something more empowering and inspiring,” said Bautista, who currently hosts “Owning a Piece of America” on Charter's Spectrum News 1.