Addendum: Broadband Development Task Forces

Executive Summary

Broadband task forces are composed of stakeholders from inside and outside government who can provide a broad range of perspectives and resources to tackle problems associated with broadband deployment. These task forces evaluate and advise the broadband deployment efforts of states and provide policy recommendations on how to best expand broadband access. Missouri HB 2052, filed in the 2022 legislative session, would establish a broadband deployment task force in order to evaluate the status of broadband deployment in the state, and make recommendations about how best to increase broadband deployment to certain residents.

Highlights

- Thirty-five states have some form of broadband task force or office established via statute.

- Interviews by the Pew Charitable Trust of broadband stakeholders across several states found that the lack of a mandate or funding to encourage collaboration between stakeholders can present a challenge to meaningful coordination.

- One scientific study found that the presence of a state-level broadband task force or office with full-time employment was associated with a higher percentage of residents with two or more broadband providers and a higher percentage of rural broadband availability.

Limitations

- Overall, there are not many scientific research studies on the effects of broadband development task forces on broadband deployment.

Research Background

Broadband Deployment Task Forces

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), currently at least 35 states have a statute that establishes an active broadband task force, council, commission, office, etc.[1] (Figure 1). The terms broadband task force, council, and commission are often used to describe groups that act similarly across states to guide broadband deployment strategy. From here on out, this Science Note will refer to these as "Broadband Task Forces". These task forces advise and evaluate broadband deployment efforts and can also provide policy recommendations.[2] As a means of increasing stakeholder outreach and engagement, state officials work with a broad range of entities, collaborate with state-level partners, and engage with local stakeholders
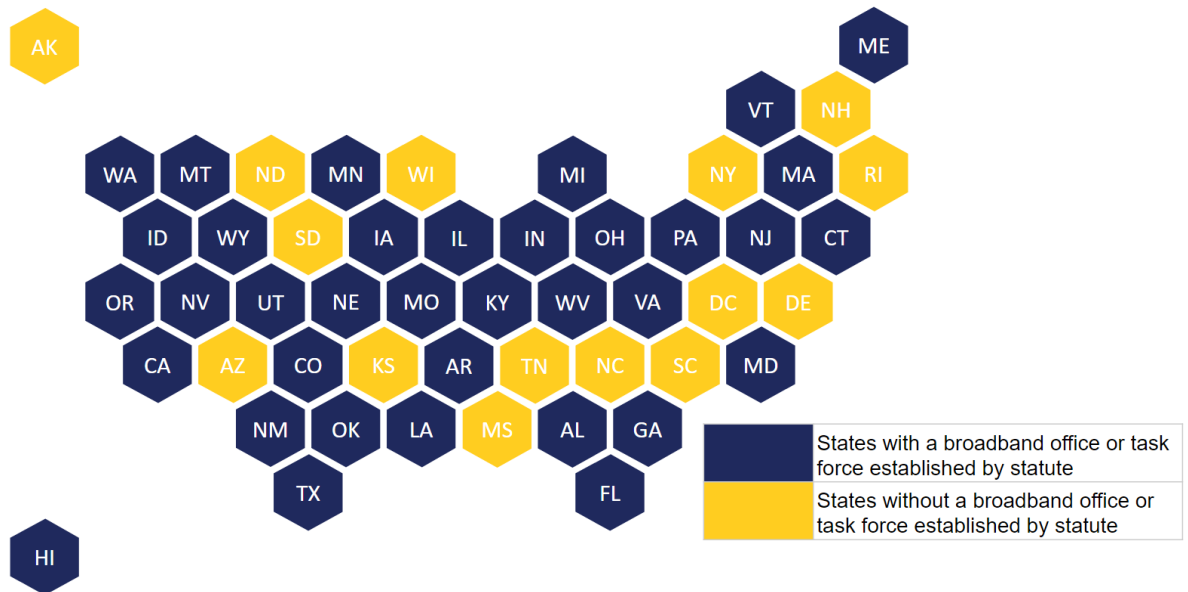
Figure 1. A map of states with a broadband office or task force established by statute. Other states may still have an office or task force without the statute requirement. This figure is made with data compiled by NCSL.

including local elected officials. There are also other forms of more informal engagement that states can take to interact with stakeholders, including when other agencies refer constituents to the state broadband program, or when the program collaborates with other organizations that have similar goals.[2] For a broader discussion of state-level broadband policies, see our previously published Science Note.

State broadband task forces are composed of individuals from inside and outside government and help to ensure that information and perspectives are collected from stakeholders who are affected by (or are themselves) broadband providers.[3] These task forces may contain representatives from a wide range of different sectors including the state's broadband agency, public utilities commission, consumers council, state office of the chief information officer, economic development, emergency services, K-12 education, higher education, healthcare, and internet service providers (ISPs).

Missouri HB 2052, filed in the 2022 legislative session, would establish a Missouri broadband deployment task force consisting of members from the House of Representatives, the Senate, and other stakeholders not explicitly defined in the bill. This task force would submit reports in 2023 and 2025 evaluating the status of broadband deployment in the state, and make recommendations about how best to increase broadband deployment to unserved and underserved residents.

Impacts of Broadband Task Forces

NCSL states several advantages of state broadband task forces including: 1) the ability to provide input towards a state broadband plan; 2) promoting public-private sector participation; 3) supporting broadband deployment map development; 4) providing aid for funding programs; and 5) aiding with broadband adoption and digital literacy.[1] Pew Charitable Trusts conducted interviews with broadband stakeholders including state broadband programs, other state agencies, ISPs, and local and regional organizations across several states.[2] They published a report based on these conversations and identified "promising practices" that states are taking towards expanding broadband access. Stakeholder engagement, which includes broadband task forces, was listed as one of the five practices with promise for expanding services. They cite that stakeholder engagement brings different perspectives and resources to broadband problems and solutions.

One research study investigated the effects of broadband offices and task forces on broadband availability.[4] They found that broadband offices and task forces may be instrumental in obtaining federal broadband funding from the Federal Communications Commission and the United States Department of Agriculture. They may also work with private providers in the state to assess demand and help make a business case for investment in broadband. The same study also found that state broadband offices and task forces with full time employees are associated with a higher percentage of residents with two or more broadband providers and a higher percentage of rural broadband availability which may lead to competition and affect prices.[4,5]

The Pell Center provides a list of suggested steps that states can take to improve broadband deployment.[3] Among the list is a suggestion to identify broadband experts in the state and establish a means of convening them so they can share their knowledge and perspectives, much like what could be accomplished by a state broadband task force. Interviewees of the Pew Charitable Trust broadband access report stated that the lack of a mandate or funding to encourage collaboration between stakeholders can present a challenge to meaningful coordination.[2]

References

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