**Meeting Minutes**
**OKANOGAN COUNTY & CCT**
**BROADBAND ACTION TEAM MEETING**
**January 25, 2024**
**2-3 pm**

**Meeting started: 2:01 PM**

**Introductions: Attendees by Zoom/call in:**

Roni Holder-Diefenbach (Economic Alliance), Kayla Wells-Yoakum (WSU Ok Co Ext.), Kellie Conn (WSU Ok Co Ext.), Kendal Ingraham (PUD), Carlos Antuna (MVH), Hanna Kliegman (North Okanogan Community Member), Nick Pappin (WSU), Brenda Jones (ESD), Duke Mason (Economic Alliance), Ernie Rasmussen (CCT Bigfoot Communications), Jeff Rasmussen (WSBO), Steve Quick (OKSD), Michael Porter (Super Omak School District), Brandi Schwerdtfeger (ACRS), Gerardo Perez -Guerrero (Community Health Plan of WA), Joanna Bastian (Methownet), Kalvin Johanson (Okanogan Community Services Office), Cory Johnson (Petrichor, Port of Whitman), Rachel McClure (North District Representative for Congressman Dan Newhouse), Mike Maltais (Quad City Herald), Scott Graham (CEO, Three Rivers Hospital), Monica Garza (Worksource).

October 2023 meeting minutes approved.

**Presentation: WSU BAT Tools-** Nick Pappin (Digital Equity and Broadband Assistant Director, WSU) showed us how to effectively use the WSU Broadband Website tools which show analysis and data.  Nick is adding overlays of target service areas to mapping which will assist in our grant applications. Nick mentioned that he is willing to help those who need assistance through the challenge license process.  Once the licenses are granted, he will also help with GIS mapping. https://broadband.wsu.edu/bat-tools/  For questions nick.pappin@wsu.edu

**Funding Updates-**

**Jeff Rasmussen (WSBO)** Kicking off the new year with BEAD and Digital Equity planning, anticipating approval from NTIA for draft volume one which should be any day.  Next would be approval for volume two.  Preparing for challenge process for volume one which will open April 8th and run through May 7th which is a 30-day window to complete. Asking communities to take a good look at who could spearhead the challenge process, such as local governments, cities, counties, PUD's, ISP's, and non-profits. The final determination will be in late July with the application process to follow.  WSBO hired a contractor to support through the challenge process and hired a new interim director Erica Henry who is excited to connect with communities, she welcomes questions and conversations.

https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/internet-for-all-wa/bead/

**Ernie Rasmussen (CCT Big Foot Communications)** Met with WSBO to discuss the short-window challenge process and learned that the Tribe needs a license to participate; they are working with Costquest to get that done. Preparing for Broadband Connectivity Round 2, CCT does not expect to be funded because of the amount of the award received in Round 1.

**Joanna Bastian (Methownet)** Attended the Internet for All meeting by WSBO and NTIA; learned that congress needs to pass their budget. Agencies are working with congress to ensure we receive the $22 M that many have applied for. WA State legislatures are writing letters of support to the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). To support ACP visit this link.
www.digitalinclusion.org/acp-advocay/
Also working on the challenges for the Public Works Board funding, applied for $5 M to build a contiguous area off of the fiber project that was funded by the WSBO grant. OCEC announced plans to acquire Methow Net which will happen in July 2024. Adam Glenn was hired by OCEC last November, he is the new Broadband Okanogan County Connect manager.
aglenn@ocec.coop

**Kalvin Johanson (Port of Whitman)** Learned that there will be an enrollment freeze for Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) on February 8th. If a member of the community is not enrolled with an internet provider by this date, they will not be able to join ACP. WSBO expects funding to run out by April. One can join the Lifeline program where the stipend is $10 rather than the $30 through ACP.

**Kendal Ingraham (PUD)-** PUD submitted a pre-application to the Public Works Board. This is a grant/loan combination, which would fund a $3.8M project. The build out is 22 miles, from Okanogan to Conconully with 100% fiber to the home build out in the town of Conconully. The USDA contacted all applicants for the Community Connect program with new revisions and requirements from the original intent of 10 x 1. The Carlton area is considered served so the PUD will not be continuing with this opportunity. (Joanna mentioned that when the application was originally submitted the guidelines was if 25MB was not available then that would be considered underserved. The issuing agency changed the requitements and lowered that to 10MB which Carlton already has).
https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bcff051f692f4b3eadaca9305c267cf7

**Roni Holder-Diefenbach (Ok Co Economic Alliance)-** The next big funding opportunity is BEAD, as Nick mentioned our BAT are working to identifying these locations. Kalvin with Petrichor who have been doing broadband funding work in some Eastern Washington communities offered to assist Okanogan County with our application, making it a more streamlined process. Next Monday, Ron Gadeberg with the PUD and Roni will meet with the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) to speak about the ARPA funds the county has set aside for broadband. $500,00 went to OCEC and the other $500,000 was set aside for the PUD, Roni hopes to get this clarified. Roni will bring a MOU agreement from Petrichor which the BOCC will need to sign so we can move forward with our relationship to prepare for BEAD. Ziply Fiber will be having a ground breaking ceremony in Tonasket on February 13th.

**Gerardo Perez -Guerrero (Community Health Plan of WA)-** Continuing to address the digital equity challenges of 'Link to Care' hotline where they have trained operators a phone call away: https://linktocarewa.org/  The operators assist in teaching the community how to use their smart devices, offering bilingual English and Spanish operators.

**Steve Quick (Okanogan School District)-** Connectivity for families is our main challenge.  The kids have laptops, but if they are unable to connect when at home, learning becomes more difficult.

**Scott Graham (CEO, Three Rivers Hospital)-** Would like a strong internet infrastructure connection in our community to allow for telehealth and outreach. Patients' information is stored in the cloud, when the internet goes down, hospitals need to use the old system of paper documentation, that may not get passed along.  From a patient perspective there are many that do not have internet and are unable to use telemedicine.  Three Rivers Hospital have created internet hubs in the Methow, but it would be best if patients could have a strong internet connection from home.  Hospitals need to have failover systems in case of a disaster and with a weak internet, it is quite concerning.

**Michael Porter (Omak School District)-** Agrees with Steve that connectivity is a large issue for families.  Schools use Chromebooks or laptops which make it difficult for those without internet service at home.  Students get sent home with paper packets and in some cases, need to stay after school to finish their lessons.  Michael appreciates the work our BAT is doing.

Meeting ended at 2:54pm.  Next meeting is February 22nd at 2:00pm.

Respectfully submitted by Kellie Conn, WSU Ok Co Ext.