



# OKLAHOMA BROADBAND EXPANSION COUNCIL

## SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In May 2020, with the passage of HB 4018 and SB 1002, the Oklahoma Legislature established the Rural Broadband Expansion Council to improve and expand high-speed internet connectivity in rural Oklahoma and to and to reduce its cost. The legislation took effect upon passage. In 2020, the Council's main accomplishments were organizational. By contrast, in 2021 the Council made substantive progress by passing legislation, mapping broadband service and assets, securing funding for the Council's work, establishing policies and principles to guide funding recommendations, and supporting the creation of a State Broadband Office.

Through the enactment of two major pieces of legislation – the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) – the U.S. Congress will provide “generational” funding opportunities for expanding broadband quality, accessibility, and affordability. But even before Congress acted, Oklahoma created the Oklahoma Rural Broadband Expansion Council (ORBEC) to provide balanced, considered guidance and vision on broadband matters. The Governor and Legislature look to the members of this Council as subject matter experts. The Council enhanced its reputation for fairness and practicality through its incredibly effective legislative work. It brought together direct competitors and others in the sector to write good legislation, fix or kill bad legislation, and push good legislation until it was passed. Council members supported passage of a \$42 million tax rebate for broadband expansion and assisted in updating every statute dealing with broadband, which had not been touched since 1996. Council members demonstrated to policymakers that, with careful planning, broadband can be a driving force for economic development, educational opportunities, and access to health services.

Federal funding presents tremendous opportunities to expand broadband in Oklahoma. As with most federal funding, it comes with rules, funding priorities, and limitations. Oklahoma has a \$167 million Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund, as well as the federal infrastructure bill with between \$100 million and \$1.2 billion for broadband expansion. The Council positioned the State of Oklahoma to be prepared for such funding and advocated for creating the administrative framework for selecting, funding, and providing oversight for eventual projects made possible through ARPA and BIL.

Leaders have recognized and appreciated the Council's work. Oklahoma's Joint Committee on Pandemic Relief approved, as one of its very first items, more than \$2,000,000 in funding to support the Council, especially in enhancing the Oklahoma Broadband Map developed for the Council by the staff of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce.

In May 2022, Governor Stitt signed HB 3363, changing the Council's name to the Oklahoma Broadband Expansion Council and making the council advisory to the newly created State Broadband Office. Both the Executive and Legislative branches will be involved and engaged. Both will expect the Council to work closely with the new office. The Council will monitor ongoing marketplace challenges and supply chain delays affecting broadband expansion in Oklahoma. To spend federal funds before they expire, the Council will need to act with urgency and help decisionmakers understand the reasons this process needs to speed up.