

Policymakers Should Ensure Universal Deployment of Identical-Quality Broadband

An estimated [42 million](#) Americans don't have the ability to access wired broadband because it isn't available in their area. When this happens, it's usually because offering broadband in this specific location isn't profitable enough for providers to satisfy shareholders. For example, to serve rural and Tribal customers, providers would have to build out over long distances just to serve a few customers. In urban areas, providers sometimes fail to build out or upgrade networks not because of distance and terrain, but because they don't believe that they can make enough profit by serving low-income consumers. This practice is called "[digital redlining](#)" and most frequently impacts communities of color and low-income communities. To make broadband available for everyone, Congress and the administration must ensure that deployment is profitable enough, and/or promote the ability of entities not motivated by profit to offer broadband. Below are the policies that policymakers can enact to ensure *everyone* has access to high-quality broadband.

- **Subsidize Deployment Based on Accurate Data:** The easiest way to incentivize deployment is to make it cheaper for companies to deploy (and hence, more profitable). The government can do this by increasing funding for the deployment of future-proof broadband networks, and base funding on accurate data about availability.
- **Promote "Open Access" Infrastructure:** Deployment funding should prioritize funding for "open access" infrastructure -- infrastructure that is built and owned by local governments, but leased by service providers. Promoting open access infrastructure is particularly beneficial for areas in which providers are still reluctant to offer service even with the aid of existing government deployment subsidies because it reduces the cost of offering service. It also helps consumers by increasing broadband competition in an area (and hence, reducing prices).
- **Require Universal Buildout:** Deployment funding alone will not ensure that those in low-income communities are profitable customers. To ensure that everyone is served, the government should, at a minimum, tie a requirement that a provider give equal service to *all* areas within its geographic footprint to the receipt of deployment funding. Ideally, however, the government would simply require providers to give equal service to all areas within their geographic footprint. This will prevent providers from only building service in the most profitable areas.
- **Prioritize Funding for Municipal Broadband and Other Alternative Providers:** Municipalities, less motivated by profit than companies, want to serve their communities by providing broadband. Congress should both overturn state laws that block or inhibit municipalities from offering their own broadband networks, and make municipalities and other alternative providers eligible for federal deployment funding.
- **Make More Licensed and Unlicensed Spectrum Available:** Unlicensed spectrum powers consumer Wi-Fi and supports innovation. The FCC and Congress should promote the availability and use of unlicensed spectrum by repacking spectrum where possible and making more spectrum available on a licensed basis through spectrum auctions to spur innovation.