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Why NTUA should oversee broadband funding

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in broadband prior to the delivery of broadband services through NTUA-Wireless in 2014. However, since then the story has changed and improved.

NTUA and NTU-AW (which is majority owned by the Navajo people through NTUA) have expanded communication services in ways that no other companies have been able or willing to do on the Navajo Nation.

NTUA originally started with only 32 towers and within the past 13 years through self-funding, NTUA has been able to grow that number to over 100.

NTUA has gained experience in broadband which, in turn, makes it an experienced candidate to determine which projects are viable for the Navajo Nation and should be funded by NNFRF.

A proven track record

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to expand broadband services on the Navajo Nation.

The pandemic showed that broadband internet is required for our children to attend class from home, for parents to work from home, and for health care providers to offer telemedicine. This service allows people to safely isolate from others and quarantine at home if necessary.

Last year, under a resolution (CJY-67-20), the Navajo Nation allocated \$147.1 million in CARES Act funds to NTUA for broadband infrastructure projects, among many other things.

NTUA had the task to complete as

many projects as possible before the deadline of Dec. 30, 2020. NTUA began working on the projects prior to receiving funding to ensure the projects were done by the end of the year and the Navajo people got the most from its federal allocation.

NTUA received its first cash disbursement on Oct. 5, 2020. Within the short amount of time, NTUA was able to complete 143 broadband projects.

NTUAW was also able to complete 81 broadcast station uplifts allowing increased internet speeds which benefitted students attending online school, people working from home, and patients and doctors engaging in telehealth.

NTUA also completed four new tower builds which included NTU-AW broadcast stations that delivered services to Navajo communities for the first time.

In addition, NTUA and NTUAW were the first to create Wi-Fi hotspots throughout the Navajo Nation. Today there are 41 locations with the goal that no one would have more than a 45-minute drive to access the internet. In some locations, teachers used the Wi-Fi to teach from their vehicles.

NTUAW was also able to complete more than 3,000 residential broadband connections in 2021, of which more than 1,000 customers signed up for the Student/Teacher Discount Plan. This plan provided customers with free equipment, free internet service for the first four months, and a 50% reduction of the standard plan price thereafter.

Additionally, through the federal Emergency Broadband program, more than 2,000 qualifying households have taken advantage of this "broadband lifeline" program. This program will turn permanent in 2022 with federal funding provided through the Affordable Connectivity Program.

NTUA was also able to construct and

put into service four new strategically placed towers, which provided broadband services. To accommodate the additional broadband traffic, NTUA upgraded the fiber optic backbone from 10 Gbps to 100 Gbps.

Teamwork with additional organizations

NTUA has demonstrated its willingness to work with other broadband service providers and electric service companies.

Recently, NTUA worked with several broadband service providers including Cellular One, Frontier, AT&T, Navajo Technical University, Sacred Wind, and NTUA Choice Wireless in submitting a grant application on behalf of the Navajo Nation to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

NTUA met and coordinated with the other broadband service providers to request \$52 million in federal grants for broadband infrastructure.

NTUA was asked by the Navajo Nation to coordinate the effort and was able to meet the submission deadline.

The results are yet to be seen but the effort highlights NTUA's willingness and ability to work with other broadband providers and engage in meaningful discussions on the expansion of broadband on the Navajo Nation.

NTUA has also worked with other electric utility companies that provide electrical services on the Navajo Nation including Continental Divide Electric Cooperative, Arizona Public Service, Jemez Mountains Electric and Socorro Electric Cooperative.

Under the CARES Act, NTUA created partnerships with the neighboring electric utilities that serve homes on the Navajo Nation to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

NTUA reached out to neighboring electric utility providers to develop a

meaningful solution for families living beyond the reach of NTUA's electric distribution system but are near a powerline of another electric utility provider. These companies identified homes they were able to connect.

NTUA shared its CARES Act funding with these companies so the identified families could be connected to the grid. It was the first time NTUA established this type of partnership with these neighboring electric utilities. With these partnerships, 54 home connections were completed under the CARES Act.

These relationships continue and to this date, more Navajo family homes are being connected to the electric grid even though it might not be NTUA's electric grid.

Transparency and accountability

During CARES Act and now with American Rescue Plan Act, NTUA has been transparent and has provided periodic updates to Navajo leadership. The published updates were also placed on NTUA's website for the Navajo people and the general public.

NTUA is willing and able to demonstrate transparency and accountability again utilizing funds from the NNFRF.

NTUA is also ready and able to be the custodian of the proposed \$45 million and the decision maker for determining which projects should move forward.

With its proven track record, NTUA has demonstrated its dedication to the Navajo people, its expertise in broadband, its teamwork approach, and its ability to accomplish big projects using federal funds for its intended purpose.

Thank you.

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