



BRIDGING DIGITAL AND
ECONOMIC DIVIDES

UNIVERSAL BROADBAND ACCESS

OPPORTUNITY:

Accelerate deployment of affordable, high-quality digital infrastructure across underserved and unserved areas in Alabama. The following recommendations align with portions of the recommendations provided in the Hoover Institution Report under “Tax Policy, Subsidies and Innovative Business Investment in Alabama: Past and Prospect” on pages 2 and 13-14, as well the “Alabama Broadband for Education” section of the report.

1. CLOSING THE RURAL VS. URBAN DIVIDE – STRATEGY

RECOMMENDATION:

The Alabama Innovation Corporation should support the state, ADECA and ADEA in their goal of expanding high-speed broadband access across the state. This could be done by providing additional matching funds or by forming a partnership to support “last mile” infrastructure, which connects the local network to end users, or “middle mile” infrastructure, which connects “last mile” networks to telecommunications carriers and the broader internet.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE:

The proliferation of the internet across every industry and nearly all facets of life has made broadband truly essential infrastructure. While this was becoming increasingly clear through the first two decades of the 21st century, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the expansion of remote work and learning highlight both the indispensability of high-speed internet access and existing inequities in its distribution.

In Alabama and throughout the nation, many companies are still struggling with COVID-related repercussions and having difficulty sustaining and scaling operations. Meanwhile, a lack of access to broadband limits the ability of many in the state to launch a business or access customers, service providers, training, networks and other resources. For governments, a “business friendly environment” does not exclusively refer to regulations or tax incidence. Instead, support for infrastructure (especially broadband), talent development or tactics aimed at addressing gaps in the innovation ecosystem offers different approaches to encouraging economic growth that benefits businesses. While some disparity is to be expected given the returns of scale in the knowledge economy, if the benefits to innovation are too concentrated, it will depress the positive impacts for citizens and communities. This extends to physical investments, including broadband, necessary to spur growth in the modern economy.

Alabama has a choice between having communities and regions across the state continue to fall behind, or incentivizing and funding investments in digital infrastructure and digital transformation (i.e., driving the productive use of online practices). Given the importance to this strategic plan of spreading innovation-based industries throughout Alabama, digital infrastructure is especially important to ensuring that opportunities for rural innovation are realistic.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS: Support efforts by ADEA to build awareness and capacity among communities to identify and pursue innovative and emerging strategies for funding broadband.

MILESTONES

2021-22

Partner with the ADEA board to identify strengths and weaknesses for the corporation to address in its branding and outreach campaign.

Discuss partnership to support “last mile” and “middle mile” infrastructure.

LEGISLATION REQUIRED:

ADDITIONAL FUNDS REQUIRED:

NO (*creation of ADEA*).

YES

GOVERNMENT TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSPARENCY

OPPORTUNITY:

Promote data sharing to ensure that state government data is more accessible, transparent and open to innovative uses that may help transform and improve citizens’ lives. The following recommendations align with portions of the recommendations provided in the Hoover Institution Report under “Tax Policy, Subsidies and Innovative Business Investment in Alabama: Past and Prospect” on pages 83-84 and “Establishing the Foundation for Economic Growth” on pages 105-107.

2. STATEWIDE DATA SHARING PLAN

RECOMMENDATION:

The state should work with its partners to create an Open Data Council (ODC) that brings together a team of public and private citizens focused specifically on making more data available to state agencies and the public. The ODC would be tasked with promoting open data, establishing a statewide data strategy and recommending data standards for publicly available data.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE:

Data is a strategic asset, yet one of the most underutilized resources in the public sector. State governments collect and maintain vast amounts of data, which should be treated as a public asset that can be used to explore and discover patterns, correlations and insights to improve efficiency and solve problems.

Differences in data collection and data sharing procedures across state agencies can affect the ability of policymakers to use data to enhance the effect of linking these cross-agency efforts in a meaningful way. Currently, Alabama’s state agencies largely operate with a high degree of autonomy in Alabama, which creates a responsive environment to benefit the state’s residents. However, each agency has developed, often independently, its own performance standards as well as methods for maintaining and disclosing information to the general public. By coalescing data to inform policymakers and improve public understanding of opportunities, Alabama can efficiently and effectively develop innovative strategies and improve economic mobility for its residents.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Clarify current legal parameters that govern data sharing by state agencies with the general public.

Start small – bring together data from a few state agencies in order to demonstrate the value of data sharing.

Expand data sharing with the creation of a formal state data plan, including establishing a program to collect, analyze and exchange government information from agencies, and making government information available to agencies, political subdivisions, educational institutions, researchers and the general public.

Create a website dedicated to hosting open data from state, regional and local public entities and public institutions of higher education and providing links to additional open data websites in Alabama.

MILESTONES

2021-22

Meet with Gov. Ivey’s team members to discuss the need for public data access.

Facilitate discussions with the Office of Information Technology and other relevant partners in state government to develop a roadmap for public data access.

Partner with the identified agencies to create a “best practices” guide for public data sharing that can be universally applied across all state agencies.

2022-23

Enact pilot program with select state agencies to allow public access to anonymized data..

LEGISLATION REQUIRED:
ADDITIONAL FUNDS REQUIRED:

PROBABLY NOT *(likely can be accomplished by executive order).*
YES