



The Development of an **ACTION AGENDA**

ADDRESSING THE TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL DIVIDE PLAGUING MILLIONS, ESPECIALLY CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME HOMES AND STUDENTS OF COLOR

COVID-19, which has shuttered schools, after-school programs and other learning environments, has further isolated millions of students, elderly and low-income Americans who lack computers and broadband access.

The STEM Learning Ecosystems Community of Practice is collecting ideas and strategies that ecosystems and the overall initiative can deploy to make a difference for students on the local, state and national levels.

The resources below will continue to grow and expand into a full action plan and agenda and we invite you to submit additional ideas [**here**](#). We will then take those ideas and add them to this growing guide for advocacy for the unconnected.

While this full advocacy plan is being developed, we urge you to read through ideas submitted by leaders from the STEM Learning Ecosystems Community of Practice and others and consider borrowing some.

Here is a helpful list of links and resources regarding free and reduced cost Wi-Fi and free devices for students who need to access the internet. **Comcast** is also offering unlimited free data.

Please add any additional resources to improve connectivity and/or access to devices [**here**](#).



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Index to Resources

LOCAL LEVEL

Tips and Ideas from Ecosystem Leaders

- Ensuring that your districts and other organizations are taking full advantage of e-rate options and have solid information about federal and state resources that may be available
 - Asking local businesses for computers and hot spots
 - Asking the community to donate to purchase hot spots, computers, Chrome Books or other devices
 - Share your WIFI campaigns and initiatives
 - Share information about low-cost WIFI options
 - Share information about educational programs being offered by PBS stations
- **An ecosystem example**

STATE LEVEL

Advocacy Resources and Research

- The PEW Charitable Trusts - Research and Tips

FEDERAL LEVEL

Resources

- **Connecting to and learning from national organizations working on broadband issues**
 - School Broadband coalition letter to the FEC
 - Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition letter to the FEC
 - Accurate broadband mapping
- **Long-term Advocacy**
- The BroadbandCoalition's 2020 Roadmap
 - Broadband 101 for policymakers
 - Broadband planning and implementation funding





Tips and Ideas from Ecosystem Leaders and Others

ENSURING THAT YOUR DISTRICTS ARE TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE OF E-RATE OPTIONS AND HAVE SOLID INFORMATION ABOUT FEDERAL RESOURCES THAT ARE AVAILABLE

While many school districts have strong pipelines and ways of ensuring that they are aware of changing federal laws that could provide them with funding, others may need some support during a time when they have such a heavy lift.

As of March 24, 2020, Congress was working on changes to various programs, including E-Rate that would enable schools and other organizations to provide internet-connected

devices and mobile broadband internet access to students.

Schools and other organizations may need support from community leaders for taking full advantage of state and federal resources and keeping close watch on developments that could impact districts' and organizations' abilities to provide access and resources to their students as they unfold.

ASKING LOCAL BUSINESSES FOR COMPUTERS AND HOT SPOTS

Numerous ecosystem leaders report that they have had good luck getting companies, including Verizon, Sprint, Spectrum and AT&T to donate hotspots and Google, BestBuy

and other retailers to donate computers or Chromebooks. **(The FCC has lifted the gift restrictions for school districts in light of the pandemic.)**



Some strategies for making this ask:



Understand the exact need by talking to school district leaders. Bolster their summary with national data and analysis of the impact for a student living in a home without technology or Internet. Check out some of the research [here](#).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN YOUR RESEARCH:

- How many students live in homes with no or severely limited Internet connectivity or inadequate devices for accessing the internet?
- Where are the students?

Secure informal agreements with school districts, ideally looking for multiple districts in a region to work together. Ask district leaders if a donation can be made to the school, so that the business can receive a tax benefit for such a donation. Ensure that you obtain the school district's tax-exempt information to share with the business.

DEVELOP A DISTRIBUTION PLAN FOR THE HOT SPOTS OR OTHER PIECES OF TECHNOLOGY ONCE THEY ARE SECURED. SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Who will deliver them?
- When will they be delivered?
- How will they be delivered?

DEVELOP A TRAINING PLAN FOR INSTRUCTING THE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES FOR SETTING UP THE HOTSPOTS, CHROMEBOOKS, COMPUTERS OR OTHER DEVICES. SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Ideally, you will want a printed instruction. Work with local community based organizations to make printed materials available for families.
- You may want to plan a group call where people could dial in and receive instructions.
- You may also want to set up a hotline and have various volunteers agree to staff it different days and times.

Develop an understanding with the donor for how long they agree to keep the hot spot live. Clearly communicate this timeline with your families.

Develop an understanding with the donors for how their names are to be promoted as part of the donation.

Write an initial press release about the fact that you are seeking companies to donate the hotspots, computers or other devices. Be sure to include statistics about how many students and families are without broadband or adequate technology for accessing the internet in the home and why it is critical for them to be connected.

Write a follow-up press release reporting about how many hot spots, computers or other devices were provided, who was involved and how many students will now be connected. Be sure to include additional needs and how people can help. (Coordinate with the donors, before the information is released to ensure that you have them appropriately represented in this press release.)

ASKING THE COMMUNITY TO DONATE TO PURCHASE HOTSPOTS, COMPUTERS, CHROMEBOOKS OR OTHER DEVICES

Some ecosystem leaders are now developing plans to ask members of their community to donate to technology and internet funds for those families most in need in their region. Many of the strategies involved in this type

of request mirror those outlined in the sector offering guidance on business donations (see above). The biggest difference is the need for a parent organization to collect the donations and acknowledge receipt.

SOME STRATEGIES FOR SEEKING DONATIONS:

Understand the exact need by talking to school district leaders and out-of-school time leaders. Connecting with school district leaders and out-of-school time leaders will be crucial but you can bolster their summary with national data and analysis of the impact for a student living in a home without technology or Internet. Check out some of the research [here](#).

- How many students live in homes with no or severely limited Internet connectivity or no or inadequate devices for accessing the internet?
- Where are the students?



- Secure informal agreements with the school district or districts to be working together on this initiative. Ask the district leader if the donation can be made to the school, so that the business can receive a tax benefit for such a donation. Ensure that you obtain the school district's tax-exempt information to share with donors. Or, seek another fiduciary agent that has a non-profit (501 C-3 status) so that donations are tax deductible.
- Develop a distribution plan for the hot spots, computers or devices once they are secured.
 - Who will deliver them?
 - When will they be delivered?
 - How will they be delivered?
- Develop a training plan for instructing the students and families for setting up the hotspots, the computers or devices.
- Ideally, you will want a printed instruction.
- You may want to plan a group call where people could dial in and receive instructions.
- You may also want to set up a hotline and have various volunteers agree to staff it different days and times.
- Develop an understanding with the donors for how their names should be promoted or acknowledged as part of the donation.
- Write an initial press release about the fact that you are seeking donations for the hotspots, computers or other devices. Be sure to include statistics about how many students and families are without broadband or adequate technology to access the internet in their homes and why it is critical for them to be connected.
- Write a follow-up press release reporting about how many hot spots and how many computers or other devices were provided, who was involved and how many students will now be connected. Be sure to include additional needs and how people can help. (Coordinate with the donors to ensure that you have them appropriately represented in this press release.)

Additional Strategies:



SHARE YOUR WIFI CAMPAIGNS AND INITIATIVES

Some ecosystems have worked with their school districts to park busses - now idled - in neighborhoods with low rates of connectivity. Others are talking about launching region-wide "Share the Internet" campaigns to increase local awareness of the issue.

One idea, suggested by Common Sense Media, is to encourage neighbors to share their WI-FI with each other. This could be suggested in fliers distributed at Pharmacies, neighborhood grocery stores and restaurants that deliver food.

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/5-ways-to-get-the-internet-when-you-cant-afford-it>

SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT LOW-COST WIFI OPTIONS

Many states have some type of arrangement for reduced cost internet service for low-income families. Below is a list of those we have compiled. You can try to strike deals with the providers directly to purchase for families. Try to share this information as widely as you can with your communities.

Some strategies for how to do this:

- Create fliers that can be distributed at grocery stores, pharmacies and restaurants that are still delivering.
- The fliers should simplify the information and - if possible - please set up a hotline that you staff for people to call to understand how to access the resource.
- Try to set up a hotline that you staff for families to call if they are in need of broadband. You can collect their information and then try to connect them to resources.

See resources from companies and the federal government for low-cost internet options here:

- This offers an overview of some of the government resources and other programs for free and low cost internet service:

<https://www.highspeedinternet.com/resources/are-there-government-programs-to-help-me-get-internet-service>

- Comcast is offering unlimited free data:

<https://corporate.comcast.com/covid-19>

SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS BEING OFFERED BY PBS STATIONS

Many local PBS affiliates can share information that you can distribute to your communities - through fliers at grocery stores, pharmacies and restaurants that are still delivering food - about televised educational programs.

An Ecosystem Example

The METRO-WEST STEM Ecosystem in Massachusetts shared that WGBH in Boston and WGBY/New England Public Media in Springfield are partnering with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to provide distance learning opportunities on broadcast television, ensuring students continue to have access to educational programs regardless of their access to broadband internet. Programs are offered on the WORLD Channel weekdays from noon to 5 pm starting Monday, March 23. See schedule at <https://www.wgbh.org/distance-resource-center/broadcast>



Advocacy Resources

MANY ORGANIZATIONS HAVE BEEN STUDYING THE ISSUE OF CONNECTIVITY

Numerous states have developed bold action plans for improving broadband access. Several organizations are leading the research in this area and sharing resources that are useful for understanding the issues and forming action plans.

The Pew Charitable Trusts examined state broadband programs nationwide and compiled a comprehensive report that explores the political environment, the state's resource levels, the geography of the areas that remain unserved by broadband, and the entities that provide service.

Also in the report are many valuable promising practices about what states are doing and what you can do to help propel this work, including defining a clear policy direction, addressing identified policy barriers and connecting broadband to other policy priorities.

The Pew examination of individual **states** offers concrete strategies and ideas to implement.





Advocacy Resources

CONNECTING TO AND LEARNING FROM NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON BROADBAND ISSUES

School Broadband Coalition Letter to FEC

The School Broadband Coalition sent this **letter** to the FEC outlining regulatory recommendations in response to COVID. The arguments contained in this letter outline several possible federal changes that could increase the likelihood of districts and other organizations being able to support students who are lacking broadband or devices to access the Internet.

Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition 1

The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition is trying to convince the FCC to implement a series of steps that will enable districts and other organizations to access funding and programs that will enable them to provide technology and broadband resources to students who are in need. A recent **letter** that this organization sent to the FCC outlines some of the possibilities.



Additional Federal Resources:

ACCURATE BROADBAND MAPPING

Accurate broadband mapping is an issue because it determines how federal officials will direct funding to the communities that need it. S. 1822 **Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability Act** was signed into law March 23, 2020. This will help improve the data the federal government will have to ensure it is supporting broadband development in communities that need it most.

The other advocacy issue will be the homework gap:

- “Other lawmakers, like Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) have introduced measures specifically focused on closing the homework gap. His **Homework Gap Trust Fund Act** would establish a \$2.4 billion trust fund that would be funded through the revenues received by the FCC’s upcoming C-band mid band spectrum auction later this year that would go toward solving the problem.”

LONG-TERM ADVOCACY

The Broadband Coalition’s 2020 roadmap

Here is the school broadband coalition’s 2020 roadmap, outlining the advocacy campaign for community partners related to broadband: **2020 Policy Roadmap**

Broadband 101 for policymakers

This is a guide to the basics of broadband terminology and technology for policymakers and concerned citizens: **Broadband101 v8**

Broadband Planning and Implementation Funding

This is a comprehensive list of all the potential funding for broadband planning and implementation:

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/broadbandcatalysts.com/Funding-For-Broadband-Planning-And-Implementation.pdf>

