
Introduction to the Special Issue: Outreach to the Scholarly Community on the National
Broadband Research Agenda: Overview of the Workshop

Author(s): Krishna Jayakar

Source: *Journal of Information Policy*, Vol. 8 (2018), pp. 227-231

Published by: Penn State University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jinfopoli.8.2018.0227>

Accessed: 29-08-2018 15:36 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



Penn State University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Information Policy*

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Outreach to the Scholarly Community on the National Broadband Research Agenda

Overview of the Workshop

Krishna Jayakar

ABSTRACT

This essay is an introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Information Policy (JIP)* on the workshop titled “Broadband Research in a Changing World” that met at the American University Washington College of Law, on September 10, 2017. It provides an overview of the multistage process that resulted in the September 10 workshop, introduces the two articles included in the special issue, and summarizes the views and opinions of workshop participants on the means of further stimulating and carrying forward a national dialog on broadband research.

On September 10, 2017, a group of about 20 leading broadband researchers met at the American University Washington College of Law in Washington, DC, for a day of deliberations on broadband research. Organized by the Institute for Information Policy (IIP) at Penn State University, the by-invitation experts’ workshop titled “Broadband Research in a Changing World: New Technologies, Ideologies and Priorities,” was the latest step in the IIP’s efforts to coordinate a national dialog on addressing the persistent gaps in broadband access and usage. This special issue of the *JIP* provides representative samples of the papers presented at the September 10 workshop. This introduction to the special issue has three goals: (1) to provide an overview and background to the multistage process that resulted in the September 10 workshop; (2) to introduce articles presented at the workshop and specifically the two articles by James Alexander Greig and Fernando Beltran included in the special issue; and (3) to provide a summary of views and opinions expressed by the September 10 workshop participants on the means of further stimulating and carrying forward a national dialog on broadband research.



JOURNAL OF INFORMATION POLICY, Volume 8, 2018

This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution CC-BY-NC-ND

Background

Access to broadband Internet is now considered essential for participation in social and economic life and to avail of educational and cultural opportunities. Broadband access has generally improved over time; according to the latest Broadband Deployment Report of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), in 2016, 92.3 percent of Americans had fixed terrestrial broadband access at speeds of 25 Mbps/3 Mbps, up from 89.4 percent in 2014 and 81.2 percent in 2012¹. But that still leaves a substantial number of Americans (over 24 million) without high-speed broadband access; these citizens are mostly residing in rural areas and tribal lands. Lack of broadband access also has an impact on the ability of citizens in these areas to start up a business or avail of economic opportunities that their counterparts elsewhere take for granted.

It is to address gaps such as these that the Obama administration in March 2015 created a Broadband Opportunity Council (BOC), tasked with producing “specific recommendations to increase broadband deployment, competition and adoption within the scope of existing Agency programs, missions and budgets.” The BOC included representation from 26 executive agencies with some role in broadband deployment, promotion, and data collection or research. As members of the BOC, the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) undertook to “develop a national research agenda, prototype advanced applications and improve data collection, analysis and research on broadband.” In accordance with this goal, NSF tasked the IIP with organizing a national workshop bringing together leading academic scholars and other experts in a workshop to define a national agenda for broadband research. The workshop was held at NSF headquarters in Washington, DC, on June 16 and 17, 2016, with about 50 leading broadband researchers, consumer advocates, and government officials in attendance. Deliberations at the workshop were condensed into the *Broadband 2021* report.²

In the following months, the NSF/NTIA continued their consultation and outreach efforts to various constituencies including the academic community, the end product of which was the *National Broadband Research Agenda Report*, hereafter referred to as the NBRA Report.³ Among

1. Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

2. Jayakar et al.

3. National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).

its many recommendations, the NBRA Report highlighted the goal of “fostering collaboration across the research community”⁴. As an agenda item, the NBRA Report set before the research community the challenge of identifying the “strategies (that) can foster a national network community for broadband scholars”⁵. Following this challenge, the IIP with supplementary funding support from the NSF organized a follow-up workshop with two goals: to communicate back to the research community the findings-to-date of the NBRA process, and to solicit further comment from the research community on the best ways of creating a “national network community of broadband scholars.” The outcome of the IIP’s efforts was the “Broadband Research in a Changing World” workshop held at the American University in September 2017.

Workshop Papers and the *JIP* Special Issue

A Call for Proposals (CFP) for the workshop clarified its basic goal, “to further key objectives of the NBRA Report, namely to encourage policy and program impact evaluations and to foster increased collaboration throughout the research community.” A large number of submissions were received, from which eight articles were competitively selected, spanning the three broad areas of broadband research identified in the *Broadband 2021* report: technologies of access, user behaviors, and impact studies. The presented articles addressed zero rating plans (Rob Frieden, Penn State), small and medium business demand for Internet access (Paul Rappoport, Temple, and Rich Mixsell, ShareTracker), and the complementarity and substitutability of satellite and wireless broadband services in rural America (Peter Stenberg, US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service). Two articles presented international perspectives: on mobile and wired broadband access in India (Prabir Neogi, Carleton) and a comparative analysis of broadband policy in China and the United States (Huiping Zhang, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China and his team). Another article addressed decentralizing Internet access oversight from national to local level governments (Michel Merseraux, Toronto). The last two articles, James Alexander Greig and Fernando Beltran, are discussed in more detail in the upcoming paragraphs.

4. Ibid., 38.

5. Ibid., 39.

Following the usual practice in IIP workshops, all articles presented received extensive feedback from a designated subject expert reviewer, as well as from the assembled scholars in open discussion. All authors were invited to submit their articles to the *JIP*, and those that chose to submit were subject to double-blind peer review. The articles included in this special issue, by Greig and Beltran, are those that successfully completed this multistage selection process.

Jamie Alexander Greig inquires how broadband networks might enhance or hinder marginalized or underserved population groups' effective use and access to information resources, and how local digital self-determination might be preserved as communities deploy broadband networks utilizing new technologies. Using in-depth interviews and analysis of documentary records at the Detroit Community Technology Project (DCTP), Greig finds that program design can significantly enhance community empowerment through training community members to be "digital stewards" in charge of education, and by partnering with local institutions. Fernando Beltran presents a comparative analysis of selected national and regional investment initiatives that seek to achieve broadband expansion by deploying NGA networks. He analyzes a number of initiatives including national networks in Australia and New Zealand, and regional networks in Stockholm, Sweden, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, Catalonia, Spain and Portugal. He investigates which specific combinations of policy, market structures, and technology contributed to the success (or failure) of these initiatives.

The Way Forward

Since the BOC/NBRA process was initiated by the Obama administration, there was a reasonable consensus at the September 10 Workshop that it will not be taken forward in its present format by the current administration; indeed, developments in the past year have confirmed this impression. However, concern about lack of broadband access cuts across political affiliation; President Trump too has on multiple occasions spoken about the importance of infrastructure investments in the renewal of America.⁶ Recent executive orders have prioritized rural broadband and mobile access.⁷

6. Jayakar.

7. White House.

Following the directives of the NBRA Report, workshop participants were queried in a plenary session what the academic community could initiate on its own, while awaiting developments in federal budgets, research funding, and policy. Participants provided several responses, that are reproduced here as a means of reporting back to the academic community. Recommendations included adding a “policy forum” to the *JIP*, catalyzing new collaborations between the research community and trade bodies and philanthropies, advocating for more positions such as Chief Technologist and Chief Economist at the FCC through which academics can engage with topical research areas; and broadband newsletters summarizing key developments periodically. Participants also recommended greater input from international researchers, since many jurisdictions are now confronting similar problems in broadband access and usage and may evolve novel solutions. More joint workshops with industry and trade bodies was also recommended, as a means for academic scholars to gain multiple perspectives as well as to keep up to date with emerging policy areas. Along similar lines, participants suggested that leading academic conferences should regularly include panels of diverse stakeholders, such as consumers, government officials, and business leaders. Collaborations between research centers and institutes were also mentioned as possibilities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Federal Communications Commission (FCC). “Broadband Deployment Report,” 2018. Accessed July 18, 2018. <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-releases-2018-broadband-deployment-report>.
- Jayakar, Krishna. “Is there Room for Broadband in the Trump Infrastructure Agenda?” *The Conversation*, April 12, 2017. Accessed July 18, 2018. <https://theconversation.com/is-there-room-for-broadband-in-the-trump-infrastructure-agenda-74881>.
- Jayakar, Krishna, Carleen Maitland, Jon Peha, Sharon Strover, and Johannes Bauer. *Broadband 2021: Report of the Interdisciplinary Workshop on the Development of a National Broadband Research Agenda*. University Park: Institute for Information Policy, 2017. Accessed July 18, 2018. http://comm.psu.edu/assets/uploads/Broadband_2021.pdf.
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration [NTIA]. *National Broadband Research Agenda Report*. Washington: NTIA, 2017.
- White House. “Presidential Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior,” January 8, 2018. Accessed July 18, 2018. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-memorandum-secretary-interior/>.