

**2021 ConnectHomeUSA Virtual Summit**  
**Innovative Approaches to Digital Inclusion**  
**Wednesday, October 6, 2021**

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thank you so much, and thanks so much, everyone, for joining us for an action-packed day three of the 2021 ConnectHomeUSA Summit. We're really glad to have you back with us today, and we're looking forward to this presentation in particular because it's about innovation in what we believe is already an innovative program with ConnectHome.

So, we'll be talking about some interesting models that acknowledge the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to connectivity and looking at ways of leveraging different new technologies to connect communities.

So, we have with us today the Volunteers of America and U.S. Ignite, two great speakers who I think you're going to find extremely engaging. And so, as they're talking, I want to encourage everybody, if you're coming up with thoughts, ideas, reflections, questions, to please submit them into the Q&A.

We're going to reserve at least half of today's session for Q&A and discussion, and because there will not be a facilitated idea exchange this afternoon, we're going to use the second half of this session to have a dialog. So, we would encourage you also at that time to certainly raise your hand, ask questions verbally or via the Q&A.

So, to get started, Ryan Elza, comes to us. He's actually the innovation officer, so to speak, for Volunteers of America, vice president for innovation, and has been working with us over the past few months on some thinking around new approaches for ConnectHome and is here to share some of that with us here today. So, we'll start it off with Ryan.

Ryan Elza: Thanks, Jason. Really excited to be here and have the opportunity. Next slide.

So, as Jason mentioned, I'm the vice president of innovation and technology for Volunteers of America National Services. After today, if you want to connect, I would welcome the opportunity to have conversations and really exchange ideas about how we can continue to further the fields of digital inclusion and digital equity. Next slide.

So, Volunteers of America is a large national nonprofit that serves about 1.5 million people every year across hundreds of health and human services programs, and we operate over 400 communities in 46 states, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. And so, our programs run the gamut from children and youth all the way to senior services and senior living. Next slide.

So, I sit within Volunteers of America National Services. So, we're a wholly owned subsidiary of Volunteers of America, the parent organization, and we operate 240 of those affordable housing properties and also operate 46 senior health care programs, including skilled nursing facilities, assisted living, home health care, adult day, and three pay sites serving 2400 to 2500 people every day. Next slide, please.

And so, when we think about digital inclusion and digital equity at Volunteers of America National Services, we really see it as an important component of the social determinants of

health and an enabling power for us to help our residents age in place in the aging community and thrive in a setting of their choice.

And so, as we look to really make sure that we have digital access and training and technology and the appropriate applications across our portfolio, we're doing this under the mandate to really figure out how that technology can better improve the lives of our residents.

And so, today, I'm just going to walk through a couple of case studies of how we approached digital inclusion in different settings, but really, it's -- we follow a framework of going through assessment and awareness, first, trying to understand from a person-centered perspective what are the needs of our residents and the people that were serving? What are the barriers that are impacting their ability to age in place, access technology, be at home safely, and then really raise awareness around the importance for the opportunities related to digital inclusion and connectivity?

And so, some of the things that we'll talk about today related to connecting to broadband and technology are connecting to low-cost internet and technology access programs, leveraging reserve funds to complete infrastructure upgrades within properties, hot spots and LTE enabled devices, enrolling in Emergency Broadband Benefit program, implementing hoteling style managed Wi-Fi systems, and then partnerships with community-based organizations such as the local area agencies on aging, state AT programs, and health care partners.

And then when you're thinking about training, programing, and education, there's a lot of really great resources that have come online, pun intended, that you can have access to from synchronous to asynchronous classes. There are train the trainer models. You can adapt your current program models to virtual engagements, and we'll talk a little bit about how we're doing that. And then there's online opportunities for connection and continued learning through local organizations such as senior centers, libraries, and museums. Next slide.

So, what we have done internally and some of our peers have also done in building that roadmap to digital inclusion is really to first organize a cross-organizational task force. So, there's no one single silver bullet to digital inclusion and digital equity. It really does take a multi-pronged approach in order to achieve digital equity across diverse communities.

So, as you're thinking and planning for your community, really make sure that you are working across your organization and leveraging interdisciplinary teams to build that roadmap for your organization and how you can achieve realistic and attainable smart goals related to digital inclusion. Next slide.

So, here's just a quick example of a strategic plan and goals that you can set in order to go down the pathway towards digital inclusion. So, you can inform residents as outlined before on low-cost programs, offer free Wi-Fi in community spaces and in your lobbies, and provide free Wi-Fi to residents in your property.

So, as you're thinking through each of these tactics, you can set specific goals related to those and think about, after segmenting across broadband service devices and training, who are the

folks that are responsible across your team? How can you set those goals to achieve them? And that can really help make a plan more actionable and achieve greater progress as you're going down this pathway. Next slide.

So, the first example I'm going to talk about is a program that we've developed called Aging with Options. So, we were an original pilot participant in the HUD IWISH Demonstration Project in which a wellness nurse and resident wellness director was embedded within affordable housing in order to help residents age in place.

So, from the insights and learning that we gained from that program, we really wanted to enhance the capabilities of those services that were being delivered through the program through the power of technology. And so, we implemented a iteration of it in which we have embedded a wellness nurse and a community health worker along an existing service coordinator in a 100-unit 202 property in New Jersey and have installed devices within that property and a managed Wi-Fi system.

So, our community health worker, which is a traditional role to deliver health equity services in community through a culturally competent way, has become a hybrid role that is intersected with the digital navigator. So, we actually have the community health worker within this property who is working with residents to help set them up with a tablet and their smart speaker.

And alongside the wellness nurse, they are working with our residents in order to create wellness plans in which they are identifying goals that are helping them to stay independent longer within their community. And they're being provided education about how the technology that they have access to can help them achieve their goals.

So, if the resident is interested in being able to better manage their prescription adherence, the service coordinator and the community health worker or wellness nurse is actively working with the resident to set reminders within their smart speaker and also help them be able to access their medical -- electronic medical records through their tablets and is really trying to empower residents to have that ability to achieve better health outcomes and improve their social connection at that property.

And so, we were lucky enough to work with a funder to help shape and craft this program. But ultimately, we're looking towards building a sustainability roadmap and figuring out, is there a role to play within the health systems in the New Jersey area in order to find a sustainable reimbursement mechanism to continue the program and scale it to additional properties? Next slide.

Another example of deploying technology during the pandemic that we did was we were able to leverage our reserved funds in order to upgrade the infrastructure across 10 communities in Louisiana, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, North Carolina, and Oklahoma. And we put hoteling Wi-Fi systems within these communities by putting access points throughout the properties and creating that network that residents were able to access in their unit.

And from there, we worked with a technology company called Valera to deploy a Google Nest Hub Max to those residents. So, this is a managed solution, which created a plug-and-play solution that could be deployed to residents quickly without having to go through several setup steps with residents and creating Gmail accounts and then installing devices.

The vendor actually has the ability to set up the devices in advance, ship them to the property, and then once the property -- they have already been pre provisioned with the credentials for that Wi-Fi network and the contact list of the residents. So, when the resident received the device, they were able to plug it in in their apartment and it worked from day one.

And we worked to create virtual engagements between our staff and the residents so that they would have the ability to work with their property management and the service coordinator to interact and engage, to conduct normal business operations, and also allow them to have the ability to connect with their friends and family through the device. So, it definitely was a easier way to quickly deploy technology at scale across our communities. Next slide.

We were able to deploy 281 tablets by leveraging the Emergency Broadband Benefit program. So, the Emergency Broadband program is a individual benefit that residents can apply for, if they're eligible, to receive subsidized data plans and devices. So, we were able to work with T-Mobile to have a national contract with them in which all the billing was centralized, and we were able to have our social workers across our pay sites reach out to residents.

We provided, again, scripts to them to have outreach to them, walk residents through the process of what the Emergency Broadband Benefit was, and then help apply on their behalf through the portal on the FCC and and USAC websites. And then we would take that information and and confirm enrollment of individuals back to T-Mobile, and the devices would be activated.

And so, the devices were actually shipped to our pay sites, and we were able to then work with the state assistive technology programs to develop training materials on the devices and the accessibility features of the tablets, in this case, where Joy Tab 2. And so, the state AT programs trained our staff and also are working to have one-on-one interactions and engagements with our PACE participants to give them guided demonstrations and help personalize the device to their individual accessibility needs.

And the really nice thing about the way that we were able to work with T-Mobile in this instance is none of our participants have to worry about getting those bills from T-Mobile, even though they come out as \$0 invoices. It really limits some of the confusion that can tend to happen in these types of programs. So, it was very helpful.

And then we are leveraging the devices in order to deliver telehealth and engagement solutions to our PACE participants. So, as a part of that guided demonstration, we're really showing them how they can access their provider, which through PACE is us, through Zoom on the tablet and also giving our staff the ability in the field to do documentation on those devices, especially since our pay sites are in rural areas in Colorado, Michigan, and North Carolina. Next slide.

And then the last case study that I wanted to mention is Oak Village Square Apartments in Michigan, in which we worked with the local area agency on aging. So, the AAAs, as they're colloquially called, received a lot of funding from the CARES Act, and a specific portion of the funds could be used to address social isolation. And so, many of the AAAs across the country have been purchasing technology and devices and devices with data plans and donating them to community-based organization to reach individuals who may be socially isolated.

So, in Michigan, we worked with the AAA there in order to place donations of tablets in our communities and then to have virtual programing and training provided by the AAA and the delivery of evidence-based programs for chronic disease management, again, which used to be in person, now available through virtual engagements for those residents. Next Slide.

And so, as we think about deploying devices and technology and internet across our communities, we don't just think about it from the lens of the how the devices can help improve residents' lives and experiences, but also how they can improve our workflows and operations across our different communities and settings.

So, when we are building out our plans, we're also thinking about the software solutions that we're using, both from that infrastructure perspective. So, for service coordination and case management, we use AASC Online, which I'm sure some folks here may be familiar with, and through AASC Online, we have the ability to have features such as Resident Connect, which is a national solution that is empowered by Zoom that we can push out meetings and events and virtual activities to our residents.

And so, as we're kind of deploying different types of devices, we're ensuring that we're leveraging the capabilities of our service coordination case management software as a part of that. And then we use Zoom for health services within our health care facility, so making sure that we are leveraging that to enable delivery of telehealth.

And then we're working across a number of different resident engagement solutions so that residents have access to curated content that supports their wellbeing and their ability to access health-related information, fitness activities, items that stimulate their minds, and tools that allow them to reach out to their loved ones and better manage their care. Next slide.

And with that, I want to pass it on to my colleague, Lee, to talk about what some of the amazing things that U.S. Ignite is doing.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thanks, Ryan. And just by way of introduction, I will say that Lee is one of our ConnectHome old-timers, as is U.S. Ignite. It was one of our original nonprofit stakeholders.

And I want to just remind folks, those four models that you presented, Ryan, a lot of great information there. We have some questions in the Q&A. So, please continue to ask questions also about Lee's presentation, and we'll get to those in the Q&A portion in just a minute. So, take it away, Lee.

Lee Davenport: Thank you. Super appreciate it. I'm going to do a quick overview of U.S. Ignite, just for those who are just kind of catching up with things. U.S. Ignite is an organization. It's a nonprofit that we've started outside of the White House in about 2012. Our mission is really to play the mediator and role between the stakeholders that are active in technology and the solutions that we all hope it can deliver.

Really, I think, if it's narrowly defined, we're here to accelerate the creation of innovative applications and services and projects, those specifically that leverage advanced networking and build the foundation for what many call smart and connected communities. They used to be formally called smart cities. People call a lot of different things.

Data informed decision making and driving outputs is really what we're interested most in. That tends to live somewhere between community services and jobs and startups and investment in innovation zones, opportunity zones, and promise zones.

I think the organization, we are, again, a nonprofit, and as we work between constituencies across communities nationwide, we are sustainably focused on commercialization and cross-community scale up. And so, we see each sector having a really valuable role in identifying its challenges or the challenge areas it wants to address. And the academic sector can apply research and make opportunities for its students and researchers to get out and build solutions that meet those needs.

Where the city comes in is because they often connect us with places, demonstration test beds, that we can go and work in those communities. And then the private sector is often very good at understanding how -- because nothing, at the end of the day, is actually free; right -- how it's going to get paid for, how they could potentially go somewhere and make money after the project is built and done.

And so, in the middle, we play a role of project management expertise. We deliver some technical expertise for communities and corporate and startup and federal and university experts. And we try to get and distribute funding and donations to support these efforts.

I think that broadly speaking, again, if you're not familiar with U.S. Ignite, we are an organization that has a network of around 40 cities that we work with to deploy these ideas. Beyond that, we operate for the National Science Foundation, a \$100 million platform for alternative wireless research program. We operate several 5G lower win [ph] and MIMO 6G test beds on smart bases.

We're building smart city data dashboards and economic recovery dashboards for several states and cities, and we offer prizes and challenges with grants from commerce through economic development agencies, private sector partners like Facebook and Amazon, federal partners like NIST, NSF, and local academic partners like the Commonwealth Cyber Initiative.

The project I'm here to talk about today is called Project Overcome. It's a project that we kind of created over the course of 2020, and it was in response to several complicated ideas. We all knew that the internet was seen as, as much as we argued, it was a right that people should have.

It was still largely regarded as a privilege by some in the sector, and because it was a privilege that meant that you had to have money to exchange for it -- to get it; right?

And so, I think now 2020 showed all of us, even those who could be skeptical, how much we really needed to treat it like something that was really a human right; right? We needed to be able to get this to engage, to live, to earn, to be healthy in an environment where we couldn't get as much as we needed engaging from each other, in between each other. We had to get it online sometimes.

And so, because of that, we developed a project called Project Overcome. It's supported by the National Science Foundation and Schmidt Futures, which is -- Schmidt Futures is part of an Eric Schmidt funded organization. Eric Schmidt was the CEO of Google for a while, and so he has money; right, which is great because without people without money, then we can't do what we collectively need to do.

And so, we built this idea that we could support proofs of concept. So, they had to prove their idea within -- and they did demonstrate their success within 12 months. Could they take a creative or risk-taking approach? These applicants, now grantees of ours, they are risk-taking in invention and choice and configuration on lots of ways, technical, social, and organizational, these variables that they're all messing with, so they could deliver what we considered outsized results, technical and social results.

Could they really make some interesting innovations happen? Could they apply interesting innovation, and could they get big social results when they connected unserved and underserved populations to the internet?

We are -- of those programs, I should say, there are two of which that have a public housing partner or housing partner, and I'm going to talk about those two today. But these sites, generally speaking, received around \$300,000 in federal funds and then project management support from us throughout the course of the year. They are rural. They are urban. They are housing.

The variety of them across just a regular Wi-Fi mesh, the one that you might find in your local housing authority now. There are those that leverage Citizens Band Radio, which is a recently deregulated spectrum license that was held for docking naval ships. Guess what? There's not a lot of docking happening in Arizona or Missouri; right?

There's also Millimeter Wave Pilot, which means that they're using some fiber-like speeds, which is they're moving internet very fast and they move a lot of it. And so, we wanted to really explore that. Some are using a radio frequency over fiber, which means they're using existing infrastructure like power lines and moving internet over it to very rural places in just hours outside of big cities, places that have 140 residents in their entire town, and there's no internet at all; right?

And so, we wanted to be able to experiment with some of these solutions as they were created and designed in collaboration with these local -- every partnership had to have a university. It had to have a partner, a vendor. Had to have a community involved. It had to have a nonprofit

innovator. And so, the way we got to read these ideas was just really inspiring to see how many great ideas are out there. I'm going to talk to you today about two of them that are most focused on public housing.

All right. So, this first graphic, I admit I completely stole it from somebody. And if you are in Cleveland -- this is the part where it's engaging to see if your computer or keyboard works. If you are in Cleveland or have heard of a partnership in Cleveland called Digital C, just type in the chat window Q&A something about Cleveland. You can just say something about Cleveland, or you can say nothing about Cleveland, or you can just say, I've heard of it. That's fine, too. I'm curious, though, if anyone has heard me talk about this before or anyone talk about this.

This organizational idea, as you can see, is layered; right? And so, I'm going to do -- I picked this graphic because -- perfect. I picked this graphic because they have such a rich history of working to connect those populations who are not yet served by the internet in Cleveland. Cleveland is the -- technically; right, the largest, least connected city in the United States; right? That's saying a lot; right, because we have a lot of places that need the internet and a lot of places that have it, and this is the largest?

The project is, as it started with Cleveland Housing Authority, you can see the municipal -- so, we're going to read this chart left to right. It's a complex diagram that I'm going to try to explain really simply. And so, the idea is that in a big building downtown -- if you've been there, think of the Key Bank building. Think like that -- big building downtown. They can get pretty fast internet to that building; right? But it's probably fiber; right?

Many of you have fiber in your buildings now, and so what they're doing is some really innovative work from Siklu. Siklu sells a particular product that's good for point to point, which means that I can get from my house to the fire station directly by pointing two radios exactly point to point. This is like -- think of like a satellite or dish; right? You need to point exactly to something to the exact place it is. It's not multi-point like Wi-Fi. It's directly point to point.

So, they can point to point it directly to a hub home or an anchor institution, a library, a nonprofit. And then what they do is they use that particular hub to redistribute technology and connectivity across trees. They can get around things. It's called shadowing. They can get around buildings. They can get around other spots. And what they can do is millimeter wave allows you to move information really fast and a lot of it low latency. So, really fast and high quantities of it quickly.

And so, what they're doing is they can say, let's move this point to point around pretty quickly. And then once we get local, we'll make a little hotspot locally. So, they're providing access in Cleveland in this way. This is something that they have been talking about doing for years; right? So, this is not a new idea, but what they had never done before is done it in this particular way, which I'm going to talk about for about another two minutes. So, next slide.

Here, the idea is not only is it innovative in the way they've delivered it with partners, what we talk about here, they've deployed this technology that's really, really fast that no one's really getting access to in a sustainable way. And so, we were able to pay for it to be used in this

particular way because, certainly, your big clients, your big customers, your big partners, campuses, big hospitals, arenas, attractions, baseball stadiums, football stadiums, they're doing all kinds of things because they have money; right?

So, how can we use the best of technology applications to empower communities to do great things? And so, what we did is we said, we'll pay for this. And then the best thing about Cleveland's model is, to be completely honest, it touches on some of the things that Ryan was talking about. It's free, paid for by the first year where we experiment with. People, sometimes the internet's up. Sometimes it's down.

We're going to have some connectivity issues because this test is a environment. But we're also going to make sure that what you hear about it is by a neighbor knocking on your door as opposed to a guy that looks like me from Washington, D.C. walking up and down the street. So, there's a local person telling you about the internet. If you have questions about the internet or a device, there's somebody there to help you with it who's born and raised there.

There is somebody who's going to help you understand how to fix your applications or your services or to make sure you feel empowered to use the internet, and you get a free device. There are refurbishes out there like PCs for People and other partners that are great in the space, well known, and they're refurbishing great computers. And when we run out of those, then the city is going to step in and kick in some devices too; right?

And so -- and then at the end of the day, it's also sustainable. So, again, not everything is free. Or if it is, it can't be free forever; right? And so, it's a sustainable model. If -- there is some stuff that's free, but if you want a better internet, you want an -- what we call unthrottled internet, you're going to watch Netflix all day or game all day long, that's your business, too. There may be a small fee to pay for that. And so, but you get this in a sustainable way.

And so, we're really excited about this partnership because what they have now done in Cleveland one time with this partnership, they were at the same time getting vetted by a local set of partners. And they've just received -- I think in the next slide did I cover this? They've just received a large grant of \$20 million to replicate this across housing authority buildings across their footprint. So, they're going to do the same thing for -- I think their goal is to have -- oh, God. You probably -- I should know this number -- 50,000 people connected to it within three or four years.

And so, again, they have a great model, very sustainable, and I encourage you to, next time you see anything from Empower Cle or Digital C, if you get a chance to hear them directly talk about their model, I really encourage it. Really innovative technologies used in new ways to get people sustainably connected to the internet. So, that's model one.

I'm sure if you guys had questions, you would chat them in. Crickets. Okay. Next.

The next example I'm going to use is from Yonkers. Ta-da. All right. So, here it is. Supported by the Westchester County Association, Yonkers is the second largest city in New York.

If you knew that, if you're from Yonkers, going to chat in a little something about Yonkers. I don't know anything about Yonkers. To be completely honest, I don't know the name of their newspaper. I don't know the name of your favorite state bird. I actually knew that one, but I don't know the Yonkers city bird. If you have something special about Yonkers, you want to chat in the box, just do that right now. So, perfect. Very good. Thank you.

So, this one is neat because it's in partnership with WestHab, which is the -- we offered this opportunity to come get \$300,000 in a really cool new way. And at the same time, the city kicked in \$300,000 of devices and connectivity. So, they said, you can use the top of our big buildings. You can beam this -- it's the model I showed you earlier. You can beam your connections from the top of every municipal building is going to have free hotspot connection points.

We already had that, but now, they're going to connect into what they're calling a digital opportunity zone just alongside this big buildings. And so, the city said we'll give -- we'll kick in devices and modems. We'll pay for the modems, and then WestHab, which is a houser there, they kicked in \$300,000 in a block grant; right? So, now, you can go to two buildings or three buildings; right?

So, what we find is that when we use what we refer to as a challenge environment, can you challenge it? We're challenged to think of a new big idea; right? So, how do we use a traditional grant mechanism and really double down on people and get more buy in, more partners?

And so, Fordham is doing all the pre and post survey. Every project has a pre and post. So, we're looking at ways in which we can understand the meaningful network usage. How did people use the internet to do things better; right? And what were they doing on them? So, we're pre posting. People have before and after, and they're going to tell us, to what extent they tell us the truth. Who knows; right? But -- I'm kidding -- what -- they're going to tell us about what they did. Did they learn? Did they live? Did they better -- do something better? And what was it? So, then we can report to the government that these things are important, and they should be supportive.

We do think that there is an urban model here to be replicated. It's very cost effective. They're using -- unlike the millimeter wave and LTE, they're using a CBRS that's better, honestly, for scoping out need than it is delivering high needs. And so, if you're talking to any vendors or partners about CBRS, then my little tip for you is it is brand new. Its use in our field, I would really encourage you to use it for exploratory internet services.

I would not expect people to get long-term high bandwidth needs. You're not going to have 20 people watching Netflix at a time or 10 people playing very intense games at the same time. It just won't -- it's not built for that, but it is built to deliver lower need services across -- unlike millimeter wave, which is point to point, this is a wide area coverage and it will go a mile. It's a pretty big area.

So, cities have been using this to connect street -- smart street lights or environmental sensors for air quality, and they're just saying, oh, let's open it up in service populations that may not be

getting the internet. So, you have a project in Las Vegas that's connecting 800 or 1,000 homeless persons in something they're calling the Corridor of Hope. So, you can send internet a long way.

You can connect people who are getting in transition, people who are experiencing homelessness. They can go into a place, get some social services, get the internet, get a few of the things they might need, and then move on; right? And so, it's -- again, it's perfect for providing pop-up style connectivity.

All right. So, I think I have -- do I have another slide? Oh, I do. Look at this.

So, these principles of the Yonkers team, I'm not going to read this to you. I feel like you're all pretty good at reading at this point. I would just say it's meaningful. It's valuable. They do want to replicate their project, and one -- the last little piece I'll throw in about Yonkers is, when we went to our partners at Schmidt Futures, they were so excited about this model that they kicked in money too. And so, we're able to buy more services.

So, you'd be surprised, when you put your hand up and saying you're doing great work, how people might join you in your efforts. And so, I just want to encourage you to be optimistic about the -- I know we throw our head against the wall all day sometimes and it's brick and it hurts. But if and when you get a chance to talk with new partners or you talk with an old partner about a new way, you may be surprised that folks may want to give you some more money to do great things.

They may not want to give it to you, but they will give it to people who you work with; right, devices, support, connectivity. It might be another month, maybe another year of connectivity. And so, again, I encourage you to have win projects that are meaningful and have big long-term objectives like the ones -- the core principles that Yonkers did. Then it empowers cities to work with the local organizations, with economic partners to really deliver some really valuable decisions.

I think I was -- really, this is a really an honest question. I don't know if I have another slide. Good. That's me.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thank you so much. We have a lot of great information, and glad to see a few folks familiar with Cleveland and Yonkers, although I am surprised no one took the freebie. But our secretary is from the Cleveland area, Secretary Fudge. So, for next time.

We did have a couple questions in through the chat. So, I want to start off with those, and then we may go back to some of the slides, if it helps to reference. But we have a question from Rudy Hernandez. She said -- and actually, we also had this from another anonymous attendee -- "Is U.S. Ignite looking to expand this model to southern and western states?"

Lee Davenport: We did not place regional parameters around our search process. We did receive applications from, I can't say, every state, but many, many states, and those western and southern states were not excluded for any reason or another. We just picked the widest variety of density, geographic location, technology type, serviceable area. We did not discriminate based on that.

And so, if given the opportunity, this project is a one-time. We're looking for additional funding to go around a second time. Would be fantastic. And so, in that way, the westernmost population, honestly, was an interesting story, too. I'll just throw it in real quickly to say there was a large wildfire in Oregon -- Eugene, Oregon, about two years ago, and basically their whole town of McKenzie, Oregon, Blue River, Oregon burned down, and some engineers built a temporary emergency network to use microwave backhaul to get first responders signal into and over mountain and into a valley; right?

So, we had this temporary and emergency network. It was already there. It was paid for. Tower companies were giving free access. Tower companies were going to provide that the school district was going to buy internet ready devices. All this -- all the -- all they needed was to be able to turn that signal back into -- so, they bought a tower and they -- their plan was to turn that signal back into usable spectrum for 95 households.

Those education hotspots are out, is sliced into what we call it, which just means that it's only for education content, only for those kids. And so, you can't get other things. And schools are very popular. They do this all the time; right?

So, we're able to support a Western -- that's our westernmost city. We did have some very competitive applications from the South. I will say that what you all probably have in common is you have resources and thoughts and capacity to think about some of these things. You are already in a better place than some of your cohort that doesn't have the infrastructure that you already have.

And so, think about that is to say, I say that not in a bad way at all. But some of these cities are very well resourced because to be -- to have a research institution and to have a city that can kick in some devices, you already have to have a smaller list of some than others. And so, because you're all here, that means you probably already are working in a system that does have some resources. So, think of it that way is that there are opportunities that way to be creative.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thanks, Lee. And let me ask you one more specific follow-up question and then a few for Ryan. So, could you describe sort of -- I guess these are a lot of technological solutions people may not be familiar with. If I could just go back a few slides, actually, you presented some different models for connectivity, citizen band, millimeter wave and I think it radio frequency over fiber, you mentioned.

So, if folks aren't familiar with these different solutions, do they need to be to kind of pursue this kind of work? How would you recommend that they could connect with sort of subject matter experts or technical assistance to find the right solution for them, given their topography, geography, other funding constraints?

Lee Davenport: I have a great answer. I have a great answer for you. The best answer I can give you is three words Stay in your lane; right? Is that four words? Stay in your lane is what I tell cities all the time.

It is not your job to understand technology. It is your job to really understand what the need is. And so, if you have a population that is largely senior and you want to use -- you want to provide social connectivity to prevent social isolation -- this is a softball to Ryan -- if you wanted to do that, you would be very easy to understand why you need it, what you need, what kind of devices you would need, what kind of connectivity you would need, that it wouldn't need to go too late at night. So, gaming is not a big deal unless their grandkids are visiting; right? All these generalizations I'm making just totally off ad hoc, basically.

But in the same way, if you knew that you had a homeless population that you wanted to serve in a particular way, if you could define what the industry calls requirements, you need what kind of -- what's the population you want to serve, and what is the need that you think that they need to have serviced?

Let people come to you with, oh, you need a wired solution. That MDU building in that first diagram is not a wireless solution; right? It's one big tower on top. It's using fiber throughout the building and then repeaters on the floors; right? Meraki routers or something that was created ten years ago to get one internet signal spread across a floor.

All you have to do is say, hey, we have 150 families who need the internet; right? And is that compelling? Well, probably not; right? What do they need it for? Well, then you would tell them what you need it for. What's the kind of -- what's the -- what's an interesting thing about that particular place that makes it interesting? Well, it's the largest X population of the state, city, county. It's the most disconnected family that we have. Here's a story of Janet. This is her story.

So, again, not your bag to understand what technology is, although you should explore it if you want. When they say we're going to offer you this, you should know, oh, we're -- you're going to test some technology on us? What does that really mean? I'd say 100 percent, though, if you say you want to connect students or kids or potholes or emergency responsive street lights, it is only for you to define exactly what you want so that people can come to you with solutions, because if they know you're serious about it, they can get really serious.

Maybe that's a good question to go back to Ryan, though, because you've done this a lot too. Do you think that communities need to understand technology and how?

Ryan Elza: No. I mean, I agree with Lee. Stay in your lane; right? You can kind of -- if you can figure out what the requirements are enough to put it out for a request for proposal, you can have vendors or technology folks who can answer your RFP and give you the solution.

So, in our communities, I mean, we have -- it's a little bit more focused in that you have different types of buildings; right? You have the bricks and fixed mortar in which you can have really big, tall high rises that are cement buildings. And so, the type of solution that may work within those types of properties is going to be different than something in a garden style building.

So, I think if you can just kind of understand what the requirements are, you can work with folks externally that can help you guide and shape the selection of the appropriate broadband solution.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Thank you both for that. Ryan, let me ask you, it seems like we have another question in from the chat. This is also from Ruby in L.A., who's actually a community health workers. So, you mentioned your community health worker approach, and I know she focuses on the social determinants of health. So, this is right up your alley.

So, from where they are in South Los Angeles, they're full of resources, especially now with the pandemic. "From a CHW perspective, residents don't have the most up-to-date resources and aren't sure where to look. Internet technology is still a struggle. Projects like these are interesting. How can somebody who's in that role just trying to sort of help people get connected during the pandemic, have basic needs met, start to think bigger picture like some of the projects that you mentioned and maybe be an ambassador or a navigator for some of the solutions that you mentioned to help bring sort of a more robust set of resources to the community?"

Ryan Elza: Yeah. Absolutely. So, for L.A. specifically, I would actually look to the city. Out of the Chief Information Officers Office, there is a dedicated website related to digital inclusion in which they collaborated with everyone on to create a portal of digital inclusion resources for L.A. specifically. And there are a number of programs that they are running in order to make technology more accessible to folks and affordable.

So, I would kind of point you there. Kind of more broadly, I would check out everyoneon.org and their website, and then also related for older adults, AARP.org and Older Adult Technology Services, OATS, which is an affiliated organization of AARP, has a website called ConnectedAging.org in which you can search for the low-cost programs, offers, opportunities, technology, device providers in your area by zip code.

But really, starting with the local community-based resources, I think, is always the best place to start because those are folks you can reach out to in your own backyard. Your local libraries often have resources related to this as well.

Jason Amirhadji: Great, Ryan. And a follow up for you, because I know, actually, everyone on has been a great partner as part of that program. So, I think, for folks who haven't engaged with them, that's a great place to go. And of course, they've been one of our key ConnectHome stakeholders. So, I think they'd appreciate that plug.

So, let's say you're in a community and you sort of have a local network. You have a group together, and you're starting to think big; right? So, you're thinking maybe something along the lines of a project at a place-based site or maybe something around enhancing the rollout and adoption of the Emergency Broadband Benefit, like you mentioned, or really just providing greater services to seniors.

What would you say is the next step; right? From that idea, you mentioned a few things here about how to plan and set goals. But I think there's kind of a key step that people often struggle with, which is how do we get from here to then identifying the funding, especially, and the partners and the subject matter experts who will help you get from here to here?

Ryan Elza: Yeah. So, I would -- the first place I'd started is that community needs assessment. So, if you can actually identify what the needs are within the community, that can oftentimes lead you to the appropriate partners.

So, the softball that Lee kind of pitched to me in terms of social isolation related to older adults, if that is something that you're struggling with in your community, finding the appropriate partners where they have shared outcomes and goals related to that objective of getting that population connected is how I would really start to think about creating that coalition of folks to address those issues.

So, from there, you can think about, if you're already working on addressing older adult needs, who are the the partners that you traditionally work with? So, your AAAs, health systems who are focused on aging, and then kind of reaching out to them with the need that you're trying to meet and how you're trying to achieve those goals and figuring out what kind of resources they could contribute to help and create your plan more fulsomely and in detail.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. So, I heard a few key things there about sort of leveraging anchor institutions, leveraging the needs assessment process, not just to create the needs assessment but as a way of gathering partners and [inaudible] an environmental scan of the partners in the community. And of course, just to reiterate again, you mentioned that the ConnectHome network can be a great place to look both through everyone on and also through HUD and our connection to other federal resources.

There was a question which we addressed yesterday but I think it's worth bringing up again, which was actually about the Emergency Broadband Benefit. Of course, it's been out for a few months now, but not everyone is familiar with it. It was one of the key federal programs that we presented yesterday, but there was a question around, is it ongoing? Is it still available? Is it available nationwide?

And the great news is yes and yes. It's available, and it's nationwide. But can you talk a little bit, Ryan, about how you all thought and sort of envisaged leveraging that program, which is relatively new; right? It came out in May -- and then building on top of it because that program goes directly through the ISPs. And so, it looks like you've done some innovative work here to kind of layer on top of that program some very local or statewide efforts.

Ryan Elza: Yeah. Happy to talk about how we went through this journey. So, one of the -- we were very excited at the first announcement of the Emergency Broadband Benefit program, about the opportunity to see how we could leverage that in order to achieve one of our strategic goals in terms of providing internet access and technology to all the people we serve across our portfolio. And thought that it can be a really great solution to address some of the cost concerns and affordability related to technology in our communities.

So, the unfortunate thing is, since we are a multifamily provider, we don't -- there is no shared -- data sharing agreement between HUD multifamily and USAC, which in public housing, there is that data sharing. So, there's blanket eligibility across those communities.

So, that meant for us, if we wanted to pursue that pathway for our residents and people that we serve, we had to go through individual enrollment for all of the people within our properties or in community, depending on the setting that we were targeting.

And so, within our affordable housing, 70 percent of our properties have service coordinators. So, if we wanted to pursue the Emergency Broadband Benefit, we would have to have the service coordinators work individually with residents to enroll -- help enroll them in the program.

And given the number of steps that it takes to actually enroll and the outreach to reach the residents, we didn't feel like we had the best opportunity to leverage that program in affordable housing. We still promoted it widely across our properties, but we identified our PACE participants, which is -- for those of you who aren't familiar, PACE is Program All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly. And so, within that, they're dual eligible individuals who are both Medicare and Medicaid. And so, we have in record the Medicaid letters, which is one of the eligibility documents that you can provide in order to enroll someone in EBB.

So, since we knew that we have this entire population of people that were eligible, we already have all the information needed in order to help them apply through the EBB application through USAC, that we could have our social workers work to get consent from folks who wanted to participate to enroll in that process very quickly and streamlined.

And so, with that kind of formulation of, hey, there's a pathway to attack this program at scale, we then reached out to T-Mobile, who we had worked with previously on their government discounted pricing that they do for low-income communities. We had worked with them in the past and approached them with the idea of doing a bulk arrangement and worked with them to figure out what would the process need to look like in order to centralize all the billing and do a data link between submitting people individually through USAC and then that information being sent over to T-Mobile and kind of confirming those details so we didn't end up accidentally getting billed.

So, that's kind of how we went through the process of saying, oh, here's a really great opportunity that maybe we can leverage, to figuring out where was the best place to actually try to use it.

Jason Amirhadji: That's great. I mean, it feels like you just described a very human-centered design approach, and I wish you had another hour to get into that and to -- just some of the engagement strategies that you all used. But I know we're actually almost at time here. There's so much wonderful information you presented.

So, I want to give you each just 30 seconds to share sort of your key takeaway. If you were advising and brought on as a special adviser to any of the folks -- and we have a couple hundred folks joining us today -- and they want to know how can they take an innovative approach to connectivity challenges, maybe overcome a hurdle that has just been hard to do over the past few years, what would you recommend just in terms of a way of thinking or an approach or first

step? What do you want people to walk away from today, really keeping in mind, besides your email addresses and contact information to follow up with you?

And please jump in first, whoever wants to go.

Ryan Elza: I'll go first. So, I'll just say that, as Jason just kind of articulated, taking that person-centered approach and really understanding community needs and building that coalition around interdisciplinary teams cross-sector that can be a part of your journey, that can help push you to think in new and novel ways that you may not have thought of in how you can tackle the issue, and what resources those folks have to bring to bear to help you kind of achieve those goals. So, just all hands on deck.

Jason Amirhadji: Okay. Thanks, Ryan. Lee?

Lee Davenport: I thought I was going to be smart and be like, oh, I'll think of a better idea once Ryan finishes. The problem is that Ryan said all the good ideas, and I don't mean that like a half joke way. I'm even going to say them again; right? Collaboration, openness to new ideas, innovation.

If the -- I'll just say this. If the current ideas worked, we wouldn't be having this conversation; right? And so, if subsidies were the solution, we'll be fine; right? If the carriers were going to do it all by themselves, we wouldn't be sitting here; right? So, to be creative, you must also understand what the value proposition is for them; right? So, clearly you get the value proposition of housing a family because they need a house; right? They need a place that's stable, that's consistent for them.

And so, what's the proposition that you may make for a partner will -- learn about them. As much as you can about your families and what they need and why they might need it, learn as much as you can about your partners. What is -- what motivates them to talk to you? They wouldn't be talking to you if they didn't have a reason to. And if maybe they aren't talking to you, then find out the thing that clearly motivates them to do good in their community and connect these programs, these programs or some other program in the future, connect them to their bottom line so that they understand how they can make a really positive impact where many families call home. All right. So, that would be my understanding is just to really understand who you're working with.

Jason Amirhadji: Great. Well, thank you so much to you both. We're just about at time, but I want to thank both of you for sharing your expertise and some just really great innovative approaches that I hope has inspired all of our participants today to join our next session in 30 minutes on action planning and to take some of these ideas and think about how to put it into an action plan.

And then we're going to roll straight from there into our celebration and send off for the ConnectHomeUSA community. So, we want to thank all of you for sticking with us into day three of this action-packed summit, and I hope you join us for the last and final session today in just 30 minutes. So, take a little break and we'll see you shortly.

And thanks, again, for joining us and for all the great work that you're doing in your communities to help bridge the digital divide.

(END)