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Appendix B: Summaries of Participant Interviews

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“Alice” | Interview 1

Alice was the team leader for a rural county in Washington State. Before starting the BCAT, she was already a part of a broadband action team formed in the late 1990s that was active and regularly held meetings. Her team was successful in completing the entire assessment, and she had nearly everyone do all 12 modules, although it took a bit of nagging on her part. One goal her team had was to document where they were starting from, as a sort of benchmark they could use for future work. They also wanted the assessment to provide information they needed to be prepared to take action, such as applying for funding. Due to their previous engagement within the community, the broadband action team already had a good idea of existing issues in the county.

Alice’s Key Insights:

- The tool helped understand and confirm the current status of broadband and how it was working in the community. It provided documentation that could then be used for advocacy.
- Some team members had difficulty accessing the online tool in areas with poor or no broadband access. Team members printed out sections and filled them out on paper.
- Although the team size was limited, they printed out different modules and distributed them to certain stakeholders in the community, like teachers (working independently of the BCAT tool). Alice hoped for a better way to provide additional 3rd-party input.
- For larger, more diverse counties, answers would be less representative if there were a limited number of responses. It was challenging to get good representation.

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- The scale questions hid distributions within the data and could be misleading or difficult to interpret, especially when compiled as a part of a team response.
 - Alice said that written team responses work well for including a narrative of who said what and highlight the diversity of answers.
 - Privacy was a concern for participants in this team, who wanted to know where the data would be going, who was using it, and whether it would be published.
 - Their group found the FCC data to be incorrect, so they hope to take steps to remedy this. The BCAT report provides evidence that the federal data is incorrect, which is information that would be critical documentation when applying for grants or funding.
 - Having a way to correct the FCC data was an interest of some team members.

“Beth” | Interview 2

Beth was also a team leader for a rural county in Washington State. She approaches broadband access issues from the perspective of economic development, which is her background. The county she is a part of completed a broadband plan in 2013/2014 as part of a grant from the Washington State Broadband Office and hoped that the BCAT and Community Connectivity Assessment would allow them to reflect on how things had progressed and assess what still needed to be changed. Another major goal was to create a report that could be used to provide information when applying for funding.

Key Insights:

- The final report was so large that it was difficult and slow to download and open.
- The report was not something that could easily be referenced by policymakers. It needed to be far more concise to be readable and usable. (Beth took this long form report and edited it down herself, making it into a rich, succinct source of information).
- Many participants had trouble finding the time to work on the assessment. Beth chose to not require all participants to complete the entire assessment but instead had them all do the community module and then any other sections they found interesting or relevant based on each person's role.
- Similar to Alice, Beth liked that using the written team response allowed her (acting as team leader) to attribute different responses to the different team members. This was useful for highlighting extremes and the differences in expertise.

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- Beth's team also found inaccuracies in the FCC data. She was able to identify inaccuracies in the FCC data, but this time the data showed fewer providers than actually were present in the county (the opposite of what Alice's team saw).
 - Another important finding was that while they had made strides in obtaining access, their community needed to do more in terms of broadband outreach and education.
 - Unlike Alice's group, Beth felt her team needed to go through the process of completing the assessment in order to recognize what the main issues in the community were. They were slightly surprised at how much of a problem adoption was.
 - Beth did not like how the questions were displayed and felt that the order of the scale/scope questions should be reversed.
 - The community has been able to advocate for funding with their report.

“Christopher” | Interview 3

Our third participant, Christopher, works in the area of digital equity and inclusion in a large midwest city. The city had been selected to receive Google Fiber, and as a result had a pretty good understanding of the issues surrounding internet access facing their community. While he valued community input and including different points of view in the assessment, Christopher completed the entire assessment by himself. This was a result of the combination of their city already being active in the broadband space, (having done similar work for their application for Google Fiber), and a limitation of resources that would have meant work would have to be stopped on other projects in order to pull more people into the assessment. Christopher felt as though he had sufficient knowledge to adequately answer the questions himself but was highly deferential to the needs of the community and was quick to take responsibility for his own biases.

Key Insights:

- Cities have different needs than rural communities. For example, Christopher's community had a good idea of what infrastructure (like mobile availability) is available, but would want to focus more on inclusion and affordability of service.
- It is important to make the assessment accessible so that people just getting started in broadband planning aren't scared away or intimidated, and easy enough so that they don't have to have a lot of extra resources to complete.
- He felt the tool should focus on providing actionable results.

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- Christopher was slightly disappointed to learn that the tool would not provide automated reports to automatically reconcile participant responses or provide suggested resources.
 - He was also somewhat hesitant about the size/scope of the BCAT project and felt that it required more resources than many communities might realistically have. He noted that simply assembling the initial team requires a committed leader with strong project management skills.
 - Christopher noted that providing one catch-all tool might not satisfy the needs of all participants.

“Denise” | Interview 4

Denise is a broadband expert in charge of digital initiatives at a major land-grant university, working through the university’s extension services. Her involvement with the BCAT project was as a guide and advocate of local groups, particularly the groups led by Alice and Beth. As such, she didn’t have experience directly using the tool, but oversaw the process from team formation to the final presentation of results.

Key Insights:

- People struggled with internet requirements for using the tool. It needs to be available in a format that takes less bandwidth to complete.
- The BCAT is not a tool you can put up and expect everyone to use; teams may need additional support to be successful, including possibly dedicated staff.
- Denise saw the role of a champion/lead or dedicated staff as the most important factor for if a team would be successful.
- The process of team formation and gaining expertise in the broadband policy area is as important as the information gathered from the tool itself, and this step should be supported with resources.
- Teams need additional technical assistance to be successful.
- It's good that the tool was comprehensive, but need to eliminate repetitiveness.
- In-person meetings are important. They create a sense of being in it together. Empathizing and sharing challenges helped teams feel supported.
- She appreciated some of the phrasing of the questions, especially the ones that helped the team focus on the future. She saw the assessment as providing direction for future work and not as a hard and fast requirement for what the teams could do.
- She emphasized the importance of process and team formation.

“Edward” & “Frank” | Interview 5

Edward and Frank worked together on the BCAT project for their small island community. The remote island sits off the coast of Maine and has a population of 1,200 to 1,300 residents year round, which more than triples during the summer with the arrival of seasonal residents. Edward is the town manager, living in the community year round, whereas Frank lives there part-time. A funded study was completed in the past looking at gaps and broadband service across islands in mid-coast Maine and so they hoped to compare these results with those of the BCAT to see how much progress has been made in their community.

Key Insights:

- Being such a small community (one census tract), there wasn't a lot of community data available. The available data was inaccurate.
- Some participants created their own survey, including a speed test, to gather data for themselves. This is especially important for small communities where federal data isn't granular enough to accurately tell their stories.
- They appreciated that the tool was a chance to combine all their work together in one place.
- There needs to be an executive summary to hand off to policy makers and voters.
- They thought it would be useful to be able to compare notes with peers, compare and contrast with similar communities, and see case studies of successful communities.
- They had great local support but found it difficult to reach out to all parts of the community. They were open to brainstorming more ideas to address this problem but at the same time regretted that they hadn't been able to address this recognized gap at an earlier stage of the process.
- They wanted to highlight the economic importance of broadband for the community.
- They expressed a need to be able to upload documents into the assessment, especially when they've surveyed and gathered data and want to share that data with the team.
- Figuring out how tool worked and was formatted was challenging.
- Calls with peer groups were great. Those should continue. Talking to people who do similar work was one of their favorite parts of the project.
- The group initially met weekly and had workshops but eventually lost steam.

“Grace” | Interview 6

Grace worked as a participant on the assessment with Alice on her county's BCAT assessment. She is program director of a major state university's extension services for the county.

Key Insights:

- The team wanted to look more holistically at broadband, going beyond just infrastructure.
- She echoed the sentiment that the assessment itself was long and duplicative.
- Her team pulled out parts of the assessment and shared these specific sections with other people, hoping to get a broader range of opinions.
- People tended to get bogged down with completing their work. It was mentally challenging because they felt like they had too much to do.
- If people didn't have the answers, they were able to give information to the leader on who to contact. They designated the leader as the external contact point, which worked well.
- She thought that it would help prioritization to have a short, crucial section and then a longer version that is more complete.
- Her team wanted a way to update report over time as things change.
- She felt that data in the final report might be skewed if too few people answer certain questions.
- Some of the language was too difficult to easily be understood. The questions were too academic without enough community-focused language.
- Above all, Grace emphasized how important the team aspect was, including elements such as working together, being representative of the community, and supporting each other in their work. She felt that having a good team that worked well together was the most important factor for success.

“Helen” | Interview 7

Helen was a team leader who works as the Chief Equity Officer for the Department of Information Technology of a large, metropolitan county. The community she worked with is a census-designated area located within this county. Her team had not previously worked together, was new to broadband issues (though not inclusion/equity efforts) and completed the BCAT in hopes that it could be something they could use moving forward to help engage communities in their county.

Key Insights:

- Helen felt that some of the questions were grouped incorrectly, particularly device ownership being part of adoption rather than access.
- The report was great once they had support pulling out the key insights.
- It is important to have recommendations focus on what to do with the information.
- She felt the BCAT could function as an engagement tool to help gain community context.
- The interface was not useable, they ended up filling it out in Microsoft Word and copying and pasting in. The navigation through the assessment was unintuitive and confusing.
- Their community started off with an in-person meeting. Helen felt this worked well to get buy-in and create a personal connection that helps hold people accountable.
- She wanted more analytics to see which questions weren't answered. What perspectives was her team missing?
- Sharing outside of core team was important, sending out targeted questions or sections to community, families, and organizations to share with members.
- No one on Helen's team had much background in broadband so she felt that the tool needed to be educational in nature.
- In writing final team responses, showing team leaders the data would help in summarizing answers.

“Ike” | Interview 8

Ike works as the assistant city manager for small business and entrepreneurship for a large city in the midwest. Their community had a good understanding of their broadband situation as they had applied and been selected as a Google Fiber city. He was a participant rather than a team leader.

Key Insights:

- He is well-versed in this field but still felt confused by some of the questions. He should feel like an expert at this stuff, but the questions sometimes left him doubting his own knowledge.
- Ike felt that the questions required too much research, even for things he knew about. Specifically, he said that this might be a problem for bigger cities. Some questions in the assessment might be too broad for people who have very specific jobs or job knowledge within city government, whereas smaller communities might have an

easier time getting a pulse on how their community functioned and would be able to connect with the right stakeholders more easily.

- Would like more administrative tools to help break the assessment into parts - assignments, reminders, etc.
- Tool was too long. He felt the work was important but too time-intensive by a substantial margin.
- Needs of cities are different from needs of rural communities; his goal is digital inclusion.
- Ike suggested making a super short version of the assessment (~25 scale questions) to help communities prioritize the areas of greatest need. He felt that the assessment revealed what his community needed to focus on, and this was one of his favorite aspects of the work. One question he asked was if it would be possible to do this faster.
- Conference calls with other teams were great.

“Jennifer” | Interview 9

Jennifer worked as the team leader for a community in Maine. She was involved in group formation, but relocated to another state before the assessment was completed. That said, she acted as a big-picture thinker and did a great job starting the conversation in her community in Maine. Although she didn’t get to work much on the assessment itself, she had a lot of thoughts to share regarding how to structure and frame the context for the work.

Key Insights:

- Communities should be able to walk themselves through the assessment; it’s important to be as self-sustaining as possible and to keep up momentum
- Need suggestions for recognizing but not fueling the fire of “Negative Nancys” who want to complain about pet projects and personal issues. More ways to redirect the conversation to a community focus would have been helpful. (She feels skilled at this type of facilitation, but fears that others might not be comfortable with it).
- The role of the champion is critical & one of the most important contributors to team success.
- The tool should provide a way to give more attention to anchor institutions.
- Just the fact that the federal government was involved was important; she appreciated help from NTIA but recognizes it is likely not sustainable on a large scale.

“Kirk” | Interview 10

Kirk works in a rural county in eastern Washington as the leader of a small, local ISP. He has extensive knowledge of both the customers and the broadband infrastructure in his community. Kirk worked with Beth as a participant on the BCAT team Beth led. Because of his work leading a small ISP, Kirk has a unique perspective. He was the only provider we interviewed.

Key insights:

- Via his work as a provider, he feels as though he often has more accurate data and insights about service, speeds provided, competitors, and customer needs than the FCC dataset.,
 - He felt that more people needed to take a “boots on the ground” approach to see what was working in each community. He was a proponent of having communities develop and collect their own data, primarily by talking to broadband customers.
 - Kirk also mentioned the fact that everyone likes broadband access and the idea of having better broadband. To him, it’s the payment piece of the equation that’s the sticking point.
 - Kirk also spoke about the importance of the team leader and about conducting outreach and other research for the project. He was not opposed to the length of the survey and liked its comprehensiveness, but wanted to be clear that the leadership and people involved were more important than the survey design or specifics of the questions asked.
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