



## A Better Deal: Universal High-Speed Internet

*America needs a Roosevelt Plan to bring internet to every farm, school, and neighborhood.*

**Every American home, school and small business should be connected to high-speed internet.** Unfortunately, there are still too many communities in America that are simply being left behind. Over 34 million Americans, including 23 million rural Americans, do not have internet service available to them at an adequate speed and quality.<sup>1</sup> While the private sector has delivered high-speed internet to many, millions of Americans in less profitable rural and urban areas have been left out.

**In the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt understood that every American needed reliable and affordable electricity to succeed in the new economy.** But utilities had only delivered electricity to big cities, leaving millions of Americans behind. As a result of the 1936 Rural Electrification Act, FDR's New Deal brought jobs, productivity, opportunity, and growth to all corners of the Country.

The electricity of 2017 is high-speed internet. **Our pledge in A Better Deal is to connect every American to high-speed, reliable internet by providing direct federal investments to deliver the highest quality internet access at the lowest price.**

**A Better Deal will connect all of America to high-speed affordable internet.** The plan would invest at least \$40 billion in direct federal funding using the following principles:

1. **Provide Direct Federal Support for a Universal Internet Grant Program to Close the 'Last Mile' Gap.** These new funds would be used to bring high-speed internet infrastructure to areas most in need of quality, affordable service. Support would be distributed on a technology- and provider-neutral basis, and would be designed to secure high-speed internet at levels sufficient for the 21st Century in the most efficient and cost effective means possible. The program would also have broad eligibility so that partners like rural co-ops, local governments, or other alternative entities could compete on an equal playing field with private sector providers. In crafting the grant program we would prioritize the following principles:
  - a. **Focus on those areas that need adequate, affordable high-speed internet the most.** Applications will be accepted to fund buildout in any areas of the country that do not presently have, and are not expected to have in a reasonable amount of time, reliable, affordable, high-speed internet. Applications for funding will be

<sup>1</sup> 1 <https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/2016-broadband-progress-report>

weighted so that support is targeted to those areas that are most in need of assistance, and the program would account for the topographic, geographic, and economic challenges in providing high-speed internet throughout the country.

- b. Upgrade existing infrastructure where reasonable.** The program would support existing networks where it's reasonable and helpful in achieving highspeed affordable internet. Existing providers in unserved and underserved areas would be given the opportunity to use funds to upgrade their existing networks to provide high-speed internet at an affordable price for consumers and businesses. State and local officials could tap these funds to "dig once" and improve broadband access at the same time they're building and repairing roads, highways and transit systems.
  - c. Leverage competition to make sure federal resources are used most efficiently.** High-speed internet providers would compete against each other (in a reverse auction fashion) to win support to deploy service in unserved and underserved areas in the country. Bids would be rated by cost, service quality, and other factors to award the funds to the bidder who provides the most highspeed internet "value" to the American public with the available funds. In addition, bids from providers who have failed to make good on previous commitments would be given a higher level of scrutiny or flat out rejected.
  - d. Use Tax-Payer Resources Responsibly.** The program will link federal support with state high-speed internet initiatives in an effort to spur additional investment so that each federal dollar spent goes further and provides a greater level of service. In addition, the program would include extensive accountability measures for recipients of Federal funds, including regular accounting and field audits. If grantees are not meeting their promised targets, they would be at risk of having grant money rescinded and of being blocked from future grant opportunities. Finally, we create a new coordinator role for existing agency staff to coordinate the federal programs that deploy broadband and help people afford it.
  - e. Tackle the Tribal Broadband Gap.** Part of the Federal support would be set aside to tackle the extraordinary need for quality, affordable high-speed internet on tribal lands throughout the nation. The program also would take into account unique challenges in closing the digital divide in insular and truly remote areas, including U.S. territories.
- 2. Create Accurate Maps of Areas that Lack Adequate Internet Access.** To ensure success and that resources are well spent, we must have an accurate understanding of the high-speed internet gaps that currently exist in the country; we cannot merely rely on providers' representation of the service they deliver. Complete and reliable service maps that accurately represent the real-world consumer experience are a necessity to ensuring every American gets efficiently and effectively connected to adequate, affordable highspeed internet service.

- 3. Deliver Internet Speeds Needed to Compete in the 21st Century.** Americans should have access to high-speed internet regardless of where they live and those speeds must be sufficient for them to be competitive in a changing world. That means achieving universal high-speed internet coverage that provides speeds fast enough to surpass modern challenges like rebuilding main street, completing homework assignments, precision agriculture, access to health care, classrooms and other business applications. We won't pursue solutions that provide yesterday's internet service; rather we will deliver high-speed internet access that empowers communities both big and small to compete and prosper for years to come.
- 4. Upgrade the Nation's Critical Safety Infrastructure.** Grants would be made available to states and localities to upgrade critical public safety infrastructure – most importantly, the nation's aging 9-1-1 systems. Modernizing 9-1-1 is a public safety imperative. Next Generation 9-1-1 will ensure that text, data, video, and other essential digital information can flow seamlessly from citizens to first responders through an integrated, interoperable 9-1-1 system.

## **BACKGROUND**

**High-speed internet access is essential for hard working Americans and our communities to thrive in the modern economy.** High-speed internet is a critical link for small businesses and their customers, it helps foster innovation and growth, recruit and retain talent, and it provides an important tool that helps students learn and succeed. High-speed internet also is essential to connecting patients with doctors, supporting modern agriculture, enhancing fundamental services like the electric grid, expanding the educational opportunities available to students, and helping young people thrive and raise families in the communities where they were born.

In 1936, only 10 percent of Americans had access to reliable electricity. Solving the problem of rural electrification seemed daunting, but with a renewed federal commitment and American ingenuity by 1940 the number of homes in rural America with electricity climbed to 40 percent.

By 1950 well over 90 percent of America had been electrified. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in a report issued last year indicated that 34 million Americans have limited choice (if any) in their internet service provider, leading to higher cost for service.