

# Improving Broadband Access to Bridge the Digital Divide

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly shifted more of American life, including learning, working, and health, to digital experiences. Access to high-speed internet is critical to participating in the economy and American society. Yet too many Americans – particularly rural communities, as well as people with lower incomes – lack access to this critical infrastructure.

That is why Business Roundtable supports legislation and policies to improve access to broadband and remote devices that would help underserved Americans engage in productive activities during the COVID-19 public health crisis and in the future. Bipartisan efforts in recent weeks to develop near term solutions to this issue and improve access to technology for schools, libraries and at home have been encouraging. But long-term solutions are essential to ensure those in need can stay connected. To this end, Business Roundtable supports the following principles:

- **Improve Coverage Mapping.** Business Roundtable supports efforts by the FCC and Congress to more accurately map broadband deployment nationwide. Enhanced data mapping will better enable the identification of current gaps in broadband coverage, ensuring accurate measurement of the availability of high-speed coverage.
- **Increase and Modernize Federal Investments.** A 2017 Federal Communications Commission (FCC) report estimates it would cost \$80 billion to bring high-speed internet to the remaining unserved parts of the United States.
  - Business Roundtable supports the use of incentive spectrum auctions to help fund the buildout of broadband infrastructure.<sup>1</sup>
  - Business Roundtable also supports the distribution of existing funding sources to build broadband infrastructure and the creation, through legislation, of significant, consistent, and reliable funding to help close the rural broadband gap.
  - Programs such as those established within the FCC's Universal Service Fund, including Lifeline and E-rate, should be modernized to ensure access for underserved households, schools, libraries, and health providers in urban and suburban areas.
- **Accelerate Deployment.** The federal government should work with its state and local counterparts to streamline permitting and reduce regulatory barriers for broadband deployment. For example, state and local governments should adopt uniform timeframes for reviewing broadband deployment applications and accelerate the distribution of FCC funding for shovel-ready high-speed internet projects.
- **Encourage Private Sector Investment.** Policies to expand access to broadband should encourage private sector investment and market competition. Allowing flexibility to providers will also help ensure networks are sustainable in the long-term and can continue to grow to meet evolving needs.

<sup>1</sup> Any spectrum auctions should ensure that users in areas such as weather, national defense, public safety, critical infrastructure and aerospace can continue to meet critical mission requirements.