

States Use 5G to Drive Improved Citizen Services

Local governments are investing in innovative 5G programs to better serve their communities

Digital citizen services are more popular than ever. Where state and local governments once used digital services as a way to enhance or improve face-to-face interactions, they have now evolved to the point where these services have all but replaced in-person interactions. This trend has accelerated rapidly due to the COVID-19 pandemic forcing most interactions to move online. Even some services in which online components were never considered before, like elementary school education, had to suddenly embrace a fully-online model.

The rapid shift to online interactions for citizen services has left many broadband networks straining. Most existing 4G networks don't have the capacity, reliability or speed to support all of the new interactions. And there are also communities which always have been underserved when it comes to broadband, and they are falling even farther behind the so-called digital divide.

The answer to many of these challenges is 5G, or fifth generation, wireless technology. It has the power to support modern citizen services and bridge the gap into the digital divide. Many state and local governments are investing in 5G and are even running pilot programs to see how it can benefit their communities. Three broadband and 5G experts [talked with FedInsider](#) during a recent webinar about how those efforts were performing.

The following are some of the most important aspects of those efforts.

Newly Formed Nationwide Broadband Task Force Will Help Organize 5G Deployments

Good planning is critical when deciding how to best deploy 5G. With limited resources available for infrastructure investment, it falls to state and local governments to ensure that their operations are as efficient as possible. This has led to the creation of a nationwide broadband task force to help governments efficiently direct their resources where they can best support their communities.

"The members of the broadband commission are a growing coalition of about 50 local officials coming from all corners of the country. They are from counties of all sizes, from those with over a million in population to ones as small as a couple of thousand residents and everywhere in between," said Arthur Scott, Legislative Director, Agriculture & Rural Affairs and Telecommunications & Technology with the National Association of Counties.

The broadband taskforce looks at ways that state and local governments can partner with industry and technology firms to bring affordable broadband and 5G to communities nationwide. In addition to the 50 representatives from county governments, the taskforce also includes an advisory council of stakeholder

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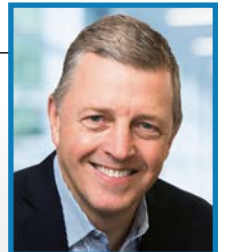
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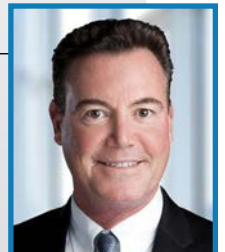
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members from industry, technology firms and broadband service providers. They meet regularly to work out both the technical and economic problems associated with large 5G deployments.

5G Can Help to Close the Digital Divide for Rural Communities

It is well known that there is an extensive digital divide in this country, and nowhere is that more evident than when looking at broadband options between residents of cities compared with those living in more rural areas. The lack of good broadband options, especially in more rural areas, leaves large numbers of residents locked out of things like online job opportunities. It also makes it difficult for communities on the wrong side of the digital divide to support efforts like online schooling.

"I think the most important challenge that we're seeing nationally right now is addressing the digital divide and the underserved and disconnected communities. As we went into the pandemic, the digital divide became quite an important issue because we had to move to remote work and school, and some families and communities were cut off from remote learning," said Rob Silverberg, Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer, State & Local Government with Dell Technologies. "As we look to address the digital divide, improving connectivity to underserved communities is an important challenge that our state and local governments are looking to resolve."

Silverberg said that Dell Technologies was working with several local communities to add 5G and 5G/4G LTE hybrid communication options to underserved communities. The positive results and lessons learned from those programs will be used to help connect even more communities and finally start to close the digital divide.

Tucson, Arizona Proves the Power of 5G for Underserved Communities

The digital divide is not always just a matter of technology. There are some communities that are technically wired for broadband, but are still locked out due to other factors like economics when all of the available offerings are too expensive. When the pandemic struck, this economic-based digital divide became even larger.

"Once the pandemic hit and everyone moved to remote work and school, there were some areas that were cut off right in the middle of cities. Areas like low-income neighborhoods and trailer parks didn't have the same advantages as wealthier areas," said Todd Landry, Corporate Vice President, Product & Market Strategy with JMA Wireless. "If you look at a city map and see areas where people are not using broadband,

often the reason for that is that the residents could not afford it because they live in poverty."

One city where 5G made the difference was in Tucson, Arizona. Tucson's local government worked with JMA Wireless and Dell Technologies to help connect an underserved neighborhood sprawling across 70-square miles in the middle of the city.

Using Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding, Tucson was able to place a series of 80 5G/4G LTE hotspots to cover the entire community. The 4G LTE connection, which has a wider circle of range, showed 50MB of internet speed, and the 5G connection showed as much as 100MB per second inside the smaller coverage radius. Both options are faster than most wired broadband connections and are able to provide the needed connectivity to that community.

Dell and JMA Wireless hope to use the Tucson model to help other communities use 5G to bridge the digital divide until the day when everyone has the connectivity and broadband access they need regardless of where they live or how much money they have.

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