

## How partnerships are solving for digital inclusion



**September 15, 2023**

The seamless digital interconnections of modern life make it difficult to imagine a world without the internet. Without connectivity, how would you learn, communicate or participate in your community?

It's a situation faced by many Americans. Many people living in historically unserved or underserved communities are excluded from participating in our digital society. And it is why Lumen is going after the issue in a major way.

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For decades, Lumen has established successful public-private partnerships to connect more homes, businesses and governments in a way that benefits local communities and stakeholders. In this Q&A with **Jason Yoho, SVP Product and Technology for Public Sector** at Lumen, he talks about how collaboration between the private and public sectors is critical to enable greater connectivity for more Americans.

Digital inclusion is important for many reasons; here is his view on our path forward.

## **What is digital inclusion and who is affected?**

Checking the weather, paying a bill, scheduling a doctor's appointment—everyday tasks are made easier with an internet connection. Digital inclusion addresses individual and community access to broadband connections as well as access to devices to ensure equitable access to participate in digital society.

With broadband access comes opportunities.

Students can have access to the entire world, no longer limited by the size of a bookshelf. People can live anywhere and work everywhere. So much of our life is lived online that sometimes well-connected consumers find it hard to comprehend that digital gaps exist for millions of Americans in the most vulnerable parts of society or hard to reach areas of our country.

For people in rural, tribal and remote areas, the lack of connectivity has rippling impacts. Being unable to participate in our digital society in real and measurable ways means stifling access to things many people take for granted: the pursuit of educational goals, starting a business, participating in telemedicine or even having a voice in local issues.

Lumen is charting a new path forward, using the power of the Lumen network to close the digital divide and accelerate digital equity. One way we're doing this is by delivering middle-mile connectivity.

## **Why are we talking about the middle mile?**

Adding to the challenge of improving connectivity in rural or remote areas is that areas not only lack last-mile connectivity, but also need help with the "middle mile." It's the portion of the network that links to the global internet used by last-mile networks. Without middle-mile infrastructure, we cannot solve the last-mile connection.

## **How are states closing the middle mile?**

There is significant demand for more robust middle-mile infrastructure. States have a couple of choices to consider when expanding their middle-mile capacity.

The first is to create their own middle mile network that connects all unserved areas. The second choice is to work with existing providers that already have middle-mile capacity in their states. That path uses public-private partnerships to deliver modern, reliable and scalable connectivity that supports last-mile connections, ultimately at a lower cost to taxpayers.

## **What can partnerships do for a community?**

Partnerships mean progress when it comes to getting fiber to communities. There are two big benefits: lower costs and faster speeds.

When it comes to costs, this partnership model can eliminate much of the up-front cost of building out the network—meaning builds take advantage of existing network infrastructure and only happen in places where infrastructure doesn't already exist. And the cost savings don't end with just the upfront capital. They extend to operational savings as well as minimizing financial risk, maximizing ability to deliver on outcomes and ultimately, improving overall success.

While partnerships may take longer to negotiate, this approach can trim years off connecting communities. In addition to improving success by putting fiber in the ground quicker, partners can help save time by efficiently navigating things like permitting, right-of-way issues, railroad crossings and pole attachments. Partnerships can also capitalize on a private provider's know-how and latest technology to deliver faster speeds.

Applying creativity to how these partnerships are structured opens the door to smarter solutions.

## **What's the next step?**

The urgency to partner on last-mile and middle-mile fiber expansions has never been greater. These partnerships are essential to deliver on government funding's promises of accessibility and affordability. This is the best way to address digital equity and digital inclusion in historically unserved or underserved communities.

This investment is not optional. Faster speeds, lower latency, greater performance—these needs can all be met by the expansion of fiber networks.

If broadband deployment continues to be a collective effort, we can realize the shared goal of a better digital future for all Americans. Let's go.

<https://news.lumen.com/how-partnerships-are-solving-for-digital-inclusion>