

the INTERNET: no longer a luxury

Any discussion of broadband and Internet policy should begin here:

Communication is an essential human need and a fundamental human right.

As adopted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."*

Article 19 makes it clear that freedom of expression is the basis of individual and societal development. Communication enables the way we find, create and share knowledge. It should be a participatory and collaborative process, open to everyone.

Using a communication rights platform to create community-based and people-centered communication technologies is critical. It can help ensure that communities maintain the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as well as address democratic media governance, media ownership and control, the right to participate in one's own culture, language rights, rights to education, privacy, peaceful assembly, and self-determination.

As communities, states and the federal government actively begin to address today's broadband and communications challenges and opportunities, there are seven important principles tied to communications and human rights, which should guide their work.

① ENSURE UNIVERSAL ACCESS

Rather than focus on service providers, broadband policy needs to address the human impact – the opportunity for all people, regardless of their digital skills, geographical and socio-economic situation, to create and to share information useful for their own life plans.

Elements of universal access include:

- **Infrastructure access.**
Policy should support bandwidth that will enable people to use it – regardless of where they live.
- **Affordable access.**
Broadband infrastructure, including rules, pricing and taxes, should make access affordable for all income levels.
- **Workplace access.**
This is especially important for those with no or limited access at home.
- **Public access.**
Because many people don't have home computers and Internet access, communities must provide enough public access points (telecenters, libraries, community centers, clinics and schools) so that access is within walking distance of home or work.
- **Multi-cultural and multi-language information access.**
Communities and states should ensure that local content is developed in non-Latin languages spoken by local populations. Technical development should encourage linguistic diversity on the Internet and simplify the exchange of information across languages.

Main Street Project, Media Mobilizing Project and Access Humboldt created this document jointly at a meeting hosted by the Media Democracy Coalition in April 2009.

② USE PUBLIC EDUCATION TO SUPPORT MEDIA & DIGITAL LITERACY

States should fund digital and media literacy as a component of public education. State government, community organizations and private sector entities should support and promote free or low-cost training opportunities on using the Internet in multiple settings (such as libraries, YMCAs and public housing community centers).

Education should include basic literacy, media production, and e-commerce (how to start a business online).

③ PRESERVE NET NEUTRALITY

In 2005, the FCC adopted four principles to encourage broadband deployment and preserve and promote the open and interconnected nature of the public Internet (FCC 05-151). According to these principles, people are entitled to:

- Access lawful Internet content of their choice
- Run applications and use services of their choice (subject to needs of law enforcement)
- Connect their choice of legal devices that do not harm the network
- Choose between multiple network providers, application and service providers, and content providers

State governments should enforce network neutrality laws mandating the equal treatment of all communication consistent with FCC principles.

④ PROHIBIT 'PAY TO PLAY' FEES

Broadband 'pay-to-play' refers to the content provider practice of charging customers for high-quality performance, and /or controlling what people access online. This leads to a closed, proprietary Internet, rather than one committed to a principle of openness.

State governments should ensure that control of information remains with the user, not the company that provides the connection.

⑤ PROTECT RIGHT TO PRIVACY

The freedom to hold opinions without interference isn't possible without safeguards to protect privacy. All members of the Internet community must be protected from government and corporate surveillance.

The right to privacy on the Internet includes:

- Personal data protection, including the collection and handling of data such as credit information, medical and government records
- Communications privacy, including the security and privacy of mail, phone, e-mail and other forms of communication

⑥ SPEED: PLAN FOR TOMORROW

Networks must make it as easy to produce content as it is to consume or use it. Technically, that means that speed standards for broadband access must be based on symmetrical upload and download rates. Upload speed should be weighted over download speed to ensure participation.

Yet, standards for broadband speed are changing – so it's important not to get locked in a regulatory framework that limits us to obsolete technology. Instead, government must promote and fund networks that offer high-quality service, low-latency (the delay associated with the connection) and the functionality to meet the service and application needs of our communications future.

Communications infrastructure needs to prioritize competition, innovation and localism. We have a right to demand higher speeds from corporately owned networks at rates competitive with other industrialized nations.

The Internet is a global public infrastructure. The build out and regulation of networks must connect to the backbone of the Internet globally, at high speeds that go beyond the frontiers of communication and commerce.

⑦ MAKE MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES PART OF THE STRATEGY

Mobile phone use has surpassed that of the Internet, and in some parts of the world, now rivals television in reach.

Because many people don't have and can't afford private access to computers or the Internet, we must recognize the importance of mobile devices as a means of accessing public information. States should require improvements to Internet service that people already have, as well as increased access to other affordable, high-quality mobile devices and services.