

How does policy impact connectivity?

Connectivity is the ability to get online, facilitated by broadband access. The government has several programs to encourage broadband buildout, typically for underserved communities,



such as rural areas. The federal government also controls who can offer Internet access via spectrum. The FCC auctions off billions of dollars of licenses for licensed spectrum to companies like AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile, who use those to provide Internet and voice services over cell phone networks, and providers who offer broadband via satellite. Unlicensed spectrum is the airwaves that are open for use by anyone, including ones that power WiFi networks. Net neutrality ensures that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) treat all lawful Internet traffic the same. When there are net neutrality rules in place, ISPs can't block or slow access to websites or online services, and they can't engage in "paid prioritization," or charging websites for better, faster access to users.

Key takeaways:

- With a good idea and a reliable, affordable connection to the open Internet, a startup of any size, anywhere in the country can launch and grow a global business.
- Startups need policymakers at all levels to prioritize faster, more accessible broadband and access to digital literacy tools and resources.
- Startups need a level playing field when it comes to broadband access so they don't have to worry about ISPs blocking, throttling, or charging to prioritize access.

Why does it matter to startups?

With a connection to the open Internet, an entrepreneur located anywhere in the country can create and grow a company that reaches users across the world. The more people have access to the Internet and the tools and resources to take advantage of that access, the bigger the pool of startup founders, employees, and users become. Additionally, the availability of unlicensed spectrum has created opportunities for the companies that make and use technology that relies on high-frequency airwaves for wireless device-to-device communications, like Bluetooth speakers or autonomous vehicles.

Where are we now?

The federal government is constantly working to improve access to broadband across the country, including by increasing the amount of spectrum available for use by the public, funding efforts to build out wired broadband networks, and providing subsidies to consumers. As the debate over broadband in D.C. can often become dominated by the large companies, it's critical that the startup community regularly weigh in to provide the perspectives of the small companies that rely on Internet access and their users.

The FCC has a host of issues to prioritize in order to advance telecom policies that will help the startup ecosystem. These issues include opening more unlicensed spectrum for general use, reinstating net neutrality protections that were repealed in 2017, preventing digital discrimination, and improving broadband maps. Under the 2021 trillion infrastructure bill, the FCC has received billions of dollars to invest in improving broadband adoption and addressing discrimination. Simultaneously, the FCC has been updating its broadband maps, which are used to determine where to direct efforts to boost broadband access. In order to ensure the closing of the digital divide, the FCC must discover which communities across the country are missing out on opportunities for education and innovation because they lack broadband access.