



The Role of Universal Service Funds in Promoting ICT Accessibility

Accessible Americas: Information and Communication to All

SESSION 6: Challenges to promote accessible public services and public procurement

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INTRODUCTION

- This presentation provides an overview of global USAF
 - concepts
 - practices and
 - Approaches

- Provides Insight on how Funds can be used to promote ICT accessibility

PRINCIPLES

Availability

The service is present in inhabited areas through public, community or personal devices

Accessibility

Service can be accessed regardless of disability, age, location, gender, race, religion, etc

Affordability

Ability to pay for access/service/device

Awareness & Ability

Awareness of services

Ability to use PC, Internet, advanced ICT services

FUND MANDATES

- ❑ Many USAFs are established mainly to promote network rollout in underserved areas and promote affordable ICT services.
 - ***These laws must be modified to address the promotion of ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities.***
- ❑ If there is separate legislation establishing a universal service and access fund, it should include appropriate universal service and access-related definitions.
- ❑ Put in place a process to enrol persons with disabilities for the purposes of managing any programmes, grants or funds that may be made available to eligible persons with disabilities.
- ❑ ICT accessibility should be included as a criterion to assess gaps in **services in addition to** the existing concepts of penetration/ network coverage and affordability.

CASES OF FUNDS USED FOR ACCESSIBILITY

- Australia
- France
- Ireland
- Italy
- Jamaica
- Kenya
- Lithuania
- Malaysia
- New Zealand
- Pakistan
- Poland
- Portugal
- Slovak Republic
- Slovenia
- Sweden
- Thailand
- United Kingdom
- United States

Source: *A Global Survey of Policy Interventions and Good Practices* by The Centre for Internet & Society and The Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies, 2011

FUND OBJECTIVES

Fund with Telecoms-specific Mandate

- Law should specifically provide that the Fund may additionally be used for:
 - subsidizing accessible handsets and/or monthly subscriptions; the provision of relay services; the purchase of accessible and assistive technology tools
 - Funding customization of basic AT tools, e.g. in local languages including text-to-speech, voice recognition, captioning applications and screen readers;
 - Providing incentives for R&D of AT, e.g. development of speech-to-text engines in the official languages;
 - Facilitating the training of persons with disabilities in using accessible ICTs and the training of professionals supporting PWD in adopting and using ICT, including experts from organizations of PWD or working PWD, such as teachers, health workers and vocational counsellors; and
 - Facilitating the development of curricula and training of information technology professionals on mobile ICT accessibility.

FUND OBJECTIVES

Fund with Broadcasting Mandate

- Where a converged Fund exists, the law should allow for the fund to be used for broadcast related projects such as:
 - providing accessible set top boxes to persons with disabilities to facilitate digital migration;
 - formal help schemes to switch from analogue to digital television for older persons (who may have difficulties such as bending down to adjust televisions) and those with disabilities; and
 - making television/video programming accessible that are not otherwise required in terms of the ICT law and/or policy to be made accessible, while respecting prevailing intellectual property laws.

TYPES OF PROJECTS

□ Infrastructure Projects:

- Backhaul, Last mile Access, Infrastructure sharing
- Network should be open and provide universal coverage in the area concerned.
- Amount of the compensation for rolling out the network cannot go beyond what is necessary to cover the additional costs to deploy the network in non-profitable areas.

□ Community / Public Access Projects

- Accessible Cyber cafes, telecentres & information access points

□ Content and Applications Projects

- ICT sector strategies focus more on broadband uptake by **ALL**
- Becomes critical to focus on culturally and linguistically sensitive information, as well as needs of persons with disabilities

□ End User Subsidies

- Identified beneficiaries such as persons with disabilities, elderly, poor

ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH FUNDING RULES (1)

Funding and policy principles:

- Least market distortion
- Dynamic approach
- Incentives for efficiency
- Transparency
- Non-discrimination
- Technology neutrality
- Competitive neutrality, and
- Not more burdensome than necessary

Projects must be

- Targeted
- Measurable
- Sustainable
 - Commercially successful (i.e. successful from a market perspective) and
 - Successful from a developmental perspective.

ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH FUNDING RULES (2)

STRATEGY, PLANNING, POLICIES, AND EVALUATION

- Are people with disabilities included in planning and evaluating public access facility products and services?

PUBLIC ACCESS FACILITY STAFF TRAINING

- Are staff members familiar with the availability and use of accessible ICT features, assistive technology and alternate document formats?
- Have staff members received sensitivity training and training on use of ICTs by persons with disabilities?

HARDWARE

- Is at least one large monitor available so that a larger amount of screen can be viewed while magnified?
- Is equipment marked with large-print and/or Braille labels?
- Do you provide alternate hardware to replace the standard mouse and/or keyboard (e.g., a trackball, joystick, mini-keyboard, one-handed keyboard)?

SOFTWARE

- Do you provide special software that is beneficial to persons with disabilities (e.g., screen readers)
- Do electronic resources, including web pages, adhere to accessibility guidelines or standards?



THANK YOU

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