

AT&T Contribution to the 2025 Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR)
Best Practice Guidelines:
What does it take for regulators to become digital ecosystem builders?

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, regulators play a pivotal role in shaping ecosystems that foster innovation, digital inclusion, and trust. To effectively transition into digital ecosystem builders, regulators must cultivate innovation, provide investment incentives, adapt their capacities to emerging technological dynamics, harness transformative technologies, engage stakeholders, and promote meaningful cross-border cooperation.

Fostering Innovation in Regulatory Approaches

Encouraging an innovation-driven regulatory culture entails embracing flexibility, ensuring the availability of key inputs such as spectrum, being open to new ideas, and providing investment incentives while minimizing regulatory uncertainties. For example, ensuring that key inputs such as spectrum are available to flexibly deploy wireless new products and services to consumers while minimizing regulatory uncertainty and encouraging investment are preambles to innovation. In addition, experimentation should be encouraged. For example, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the United States has introduced initiatives such as Spectrum Innovation Zones that provide opportunities to test and trial new advanced technologies, prototype networks, and other emerging technologies under adaptive regulatory conditions. This approach exemplifies how regulators can balance innovation encouragement with prudent oversight.

Similarly, AT&T's collaboration with U.S. regulators during the rollout of 5G networks demonstrates how regulatory agility can help accelerate national connectivity goals. With adequate spectrum resources being made available and cooperative spectrum management and policy alignment, both industry and regulators have contributed to advancing next-generation connectivity in a timely manner.

To keep pace, regulators may benefit from expanding their expertise in technical areas such as artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics, to help inform effective, forward-looking policies and regulations.

Adapting and Enhancing Regulatory Capacity

As digital innovation accelerates, regulatory mandates and frameworks must evolve to remain relevant and effective and must be fashioned to incent investment. Maintaining principle-based and flexible regulatory frameworks is essential to respond to evolving business models while ensuring the protection of key societal interest, such as digital inclusion.

Moreover, investment in continuous professional development equips regulators with the agility necessary to navigate complex digital ecosystems.

Harnessing Transformative Technologies for Regulatory Excellence

Regulators stand to benefit significantly from adopting advanced technologies in their own operations. AI and big data analytics offer promising tools for real-time compliance monitoring and risk assessment, strengthening decision-making and accountability.

Additionally, digital platforms that facilitate stakeholder engagement—through accessible public comment portals and interactive data visualization tools—can strengthen transparency and public trust in regulatory decision-making.

Regulatory sandboxes, which provide a controlled environment for testing innovative products and services, also offer promising pathways. Experimental licensing programs and technology test labs in the U.S. serve as a constructive model for balancing innovation with oversight.

Cross-Border Cooperation for Building National, Regional, and Digital Ecosystems

Given the inherently global nature of digital ecosystems, international cooperation among regulators is essential. Harmonizing regulatory standards and best practices across jurisdictions helps reduce fragmentation and supports seamless innovation.

Enhanced information sharing on emerging risks and opportunities further reinforces regulatory effectiveness on a global scale.

Multistakeholder Engagement as a Cornerstone

Building resilient digital ecosystems requires robust multistakeholder engagement. Regulators benefit from creating inclusive forums that bring together government agencies, industry players, academia, civil society, and consumer groups. Such broad participation ensures that policies are well-rounded, equitable, and aligned with public interest.

AT&T's active participation in various industry consortia and public-private partnerships illustrates how collaborative engagement can lead to shared understanding and co-created solutions. By institutionalizing mechanisms for regular stakeholder input—through advisory panels, consultations, and collaborative working groups—regulators can enhance legitimacy, transparency, and adaptability in their decision-making processes.

Looking ahead, fostering inclusive public-private partnerships that engage governments, industry leaders, and civil society will be instrumental in building digital ecosystems that are open, secure, and equitable.

Conclusion

Transitioning regulators into effective digital ecosystem builders requires a balanced approach that embraces innovation, investment, adaptability, technological advancement, broad stakeholder engagement, and international cooperation. Regulators should shape environments where technological progress and societal well-being advance together to achieve overarching public policy objectives.