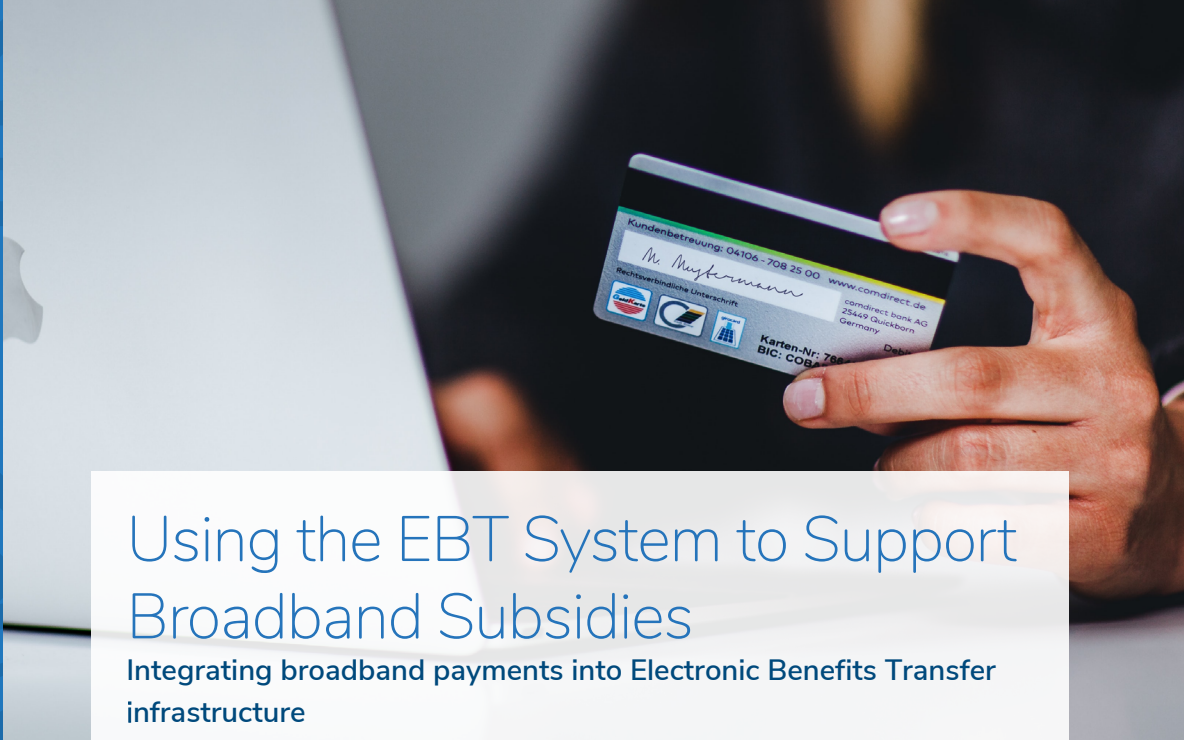




Tech Executive Leadership Initiative

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Using the EBT System to Support Broadband Subsidies

Integrating broadband payments into Electronic Benefits Transfer infrastructure

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BACKGROUND

As part of their 10-week policy training, the leaders of the Tech Executive Leadership Initiative spent 6 weeks working on a real-world government challenge. In teams of 4-5, the leaders proposed ideas to help the City of New York ensure that vendors awarded contracts through its record-setting investments in broadband infrastructure – which are further detailed in the City’s [Internet Master Plan \(IMP\)](#) and [request for proposals](#) for broadband expansion – go beyond lip service and adhere to City’s digital inclusion principles to meaningfully close the digital divide. Each team narrowed its focus to a specific part of the problem, conducted research, and developed solutions. Below is an overview of one team’s solution: integrating broadband subsidies into existing benefits infrastructure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New York City Mayor’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer (MOCTO) should implement a task force and work with relevant City and State agencies to distribute broadband subsidies using existing electronic benefit transfers (EBT) infrastructure. This program would expand broadband service options to households, and establish a permanent mechanism for distributing connectivity benefits even if the means of accessing the internet evolves.

PROBLEM

Existing efforts to expand broadband access in New York City have

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fallen short. Despite huge investments in improving broadband infrastructure, [two-fifths of New York residents still do not have access to home or mobile broadband](#). Current efforts are bogged down by a lack of service options for low-income households; high costs; internet service providers (ISPs) who are not incentivized to provide quality and affordable internet service to low-income residents; and initiatives that are unsustainable since they do not take the changing nature of accessing the internet into account.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MOCTO should work with City and State agencies and subsidize the cost of broadband for low-income households using existing EBT infrastructure. Expanding EBT infrastructure to cover broadband payments would directly lower the cost of broadband for low-income households, and would be sustainable in the long-term.

To implement this proposal, MOCTO should:

- a. **Establish a task force** with City and State agencies to implement the remaining steps.
- b. **Consult with affected communities** to confirm whether an EBT program for broadband would be useful for them.
- c. **Identify funding sources** for the program, which might include repurposing existing broadband infrastructure funds or reallocating funds from other areas of the City budget to direct EBT subsidies.
- d. **Perform a discovery of system requirements** to determine what back-end systems would need to be changed, and what additional information would need to be collected from ISPs and recipients to participate.
- e. **Update relevant legislation and policies to allow the EBT system to cover broadband payments.** Legislative changes to New York law and other policy changes may be required so that ISPs can accept EBT as a valid form of payment.
- f. **Fully roll-out the EBT program** with vendors and recipients.

For more information on this proposal, please see: (1) [an operational plan](#) for MOCTO to implement this program; (2) an [FAQ](#) guide that explains the EBT broadband proposal to existing ISPs; (3) samples of [recipient](#) and [vendor](#) application forms to collect the additional information needed for the proposal; and (4) [critical user journeys](#) that illustrate how this program would be used by recipients.

ABOUT TELI

This project was completed as part of the Tech Executive Leadership Initiative (TELI), a 10-week skills-building initiative that prepares experienced technology leaders to engage effectively with public sector challenges. Learn more at aspentechpolicyhub.com/teli.

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