

## **Policy Options for Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion – Phase II** **Contribution of Facebook**

### **Introduction**

Facebook appreciates the opportunity to share its experience and insights on connecting the next billion. Expanding access around the world will continue to require partnerships and coordination among a broad range of stakeholders – including government, industry, civil society, and local communities.

Various factors continue to impact connectivity in both rural and urban areas. Key barriers to expanding access include issues such as the availability of connectivity infrastructure, the affordability of connectivity, and people’s awareness of the relevance and value of being online. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to overcoming these barriers, and a range of different approaches is needed.

By fostering a regulatory environment that encourages and enables innovative approaches to bringing more of the unconnected online, governments can help to accelerate the expansion of connectivity around the world.

Below are a number of examples of the types of different approaches that, when facilitated by a supportive regulatory environment, can help to overcome the barriers to connecting the next billion.

### **Connectivity Lab**

Facebook’s Connectivity Lab is exploring the use of different access technologies and network architectures – such as unmanned aerial systems, satellites, lasers and terrestrial wireless systems – to help extend affordable internet access to areas that are not yet covered by existing infrastructure solutions.

### **Express WiFi**

Express WiFi is empowering local entrepreneurs with the tools and technology to sell affordable WiFi connectivity in an economically sustainable way. The program works with local partners by providing software and initial seed capital to help jumpstart deployment of each WiFi hotspot.

### **Telecom Infra Project (TIP)**

TIP is an engineering-centric, broad industry initiative allowing operators, providers, integrators, and technology companies to reimagine traditional approaches to building and deploying telecom network infrastructure. These new methods and ideas aim to lower network costs, providing the opportunity for this cost savings to be passed down to users, while making it more affordable for operators to extend their network coverage.

### **Free Basics**

Even in areas with adequate connectivity infrastructure, many people are not online because they are not aware of the relevance and value of connectivity. Free Basics helps to address this barrier. In partnership with mobile operators, Free Basics provides people with no-cost access to basic online services on their mobile phones – including news, job postings, health and education information, and communication tools. Free Basics is an open platform where anyone can add their services as

long as they meet the same technical criteria, which are openly published.<sup>1</sup> By enabling people to experience the value and relevance of connectivity, Free Basics provides users with an onramp to the broader internet.

### **Examples of the Real-World Impact of Connectivity**

Below are a number of representative illustrations of how expanding connectivity and access can help to address real-world problems. Through Free Basics, developers around the world have been able to provide valuable services to more users, including, for example:

- Maya Apa is an intuitive, anonymous messaging service that connects its users to qualified, real experts and each other. The service is aimed at breaking the social, financial, and geographical barriers women face in Bangladesh every day. While health-related topics are most top of mind, the service is seeing a growing number of questions submitted related to issues such as domestic violence.
- 1doc3, a digital platform from Colombia that helps doctors answer medical questions, has been able to expand its reach into new markets and has been able to engage the Colombian government in new ways. When 1doc3 noticed questions submitted regarding “condom water” from remote areas of Colombia, they investigated and found out that people in certain remote areas believe that boiling a condom and drinking the water helps prevent pregnancy. Taking that information back to the government, the service collaborated with the government on an education campaign targeted to remote areas where people believed in the practice.
- Tambero.com, a global platform for dairy cattle farming, beef cattle, and agriculture, has scaled from two languages and a focus on Latin America to supporting 21 languages and a global presence.
- SmartBusiness, a South African service that helps users launch and run businesses, receives five times more daily searches and has seen 500,000 new users through Free Basics.
- Refunite, a family reconnection platform for refugees, is available in a range of countries, including Iraq, Pakistan, Ghana, Philippines, Tanzania, Niger, Rwanda, South Africa, Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Malawi. The service allows displaced families with access to smartphones or feature phones to search for missing loved ones free of charge.

### **Factors That Promote Connectivity**

Governments can promote connectivity by fostering a regulatory environment that encourages investment and innovative approaches to bringing more people online. When adopted by governments, a number of policies can help support and accelerate efforts to overcome the barriers to connectivity in a community. Such policies include:

- **Incentivizing the Deployment and Sharing of Connectivity Infrastructure:**  
Governments can facilitate quicker and cheaper deployment of internet infrastructure by streamlining local licensing processes and reducing other legal barriers to entry. Another effective policy is to promote the sharing of passive infrastructure by adopting a “dig once,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://developers.facebook.com/docs/internet-org/participation-guidelines>.

build once” philosophy that encourages providers to determine if others wish to share in the initial costs of deploying connectivity infrastructure and then share its use. Tax incentives can also accelerate internet deployment and adoption processes, such as accelerated depreciation for connectivity infrastructure investments, R&D tax credits to promote infrastructure innovation, and a tax credit to companies that provides mobile broadband to employees.

- **Expanding Access to Spectrum:** Countries should establish spectrum policies that maximize the utilization of this scarce and valuable resource. Central to achieving this goal is the adoption of a balanced spectrum policy that fosters both licensed and unlicensed allocations. Licensed spectrum is important to build out coverage of large and dense areas. Unlicensed spectrum is critical to fostering experimentation and innovation, and improving coverage and network capacity, especially in underserved areas.
- **Promoting a Free and Open Internet:** Maintaining a free and open internet is essential for online innovation and growth. Governments should prohibit internet service providers (“ISPs”) from blocking, throttling or building fast lanes to privilege certain products over others. ISPs should not impose barriers between people and the content and services they want to access. When introducing new legislation relevant to the internet industry, governments must also be cautious to avoid inhibiting innovation. Innovative business arrangements that promote connectivity and economic development, such as zero-rating of content, give more people more access to more content and are critical for expanding access.
- **Adopting a Balanced and Transparent Regulatory Approach:** Governments can help foster greater investment, innovation and deployments by adopting regulatory frameworks that are balanced, transparent, and enforced in a predictable, fair manner.

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Facebook appreciates the opportunity to provide its insights and experience, and looks forward to continuing to work with stakeholders across the public and private sectors to connect more of the unconnected, bridge the digital divide, and help to advance the world’s global development goals.