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Tele-America: A Plan for a Stronger, More Equitable, Connected Nation

Technological change is inevitable. But whether our country harnesses it to make healthcare better and cheaper, schools more effective, and our democracy and government work more effectively for all remains an open question. Answering that question well to build the country we want will not happen without deliberate, concerted effort. Otherwise, our current path is not only to an ad hoc-racy, but an unjust one at that.

Consider the recent COVID-19 outbreak, which has forced hundreds of millions of Americans to stay at home, shuttered businesses, and kept community institutions closed. Thankfully, while imperfect, technological improvements over the past decade have made it more feasible than ever for Americans to work remotely, conduct virtual doctor visits, attend school online, deliver food to the needy, participate in our democracy, and stay connected to family, friends, and community.

These tools, however, have failed to come anywhere close to reaching their potential, and too many Americans are paying the price. Access and participation are unevenly distributed, with steep divisions by race and income. Not all public institutions are prepared to deploy these tools effectively, and private sector actors face their own barriers. Moving forward, our country must be better prepared to stay connected and address issues of equity in times of crisis and disruption. The status quo leaves out far too many Americans.

Even in times of peace and plenty, however, a better-connected country is a more inclusive and flexible one. We believe it is possible to strengthen our democracy, expand our economy, improve our education system and make our healthcare system work better for everyone. This agenda suggests that rather than an ad hoc, and status quo-oriented policy framework, we should think holistically about how to use technology to the benefit of all. More specifically, we believe that:

- **Everyone needs affordable high-speed internet to accomplish these goals**, and by closing the digital divide, we can counter inequality and ensure that technological progress unites rather than divides us;

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- **Use of telehealth services**, including preventative education, doctor’s visits, and connected devices can better and more efficiently diagnose, treat, and manage conditions;
- **Participation in tele-education** at multiple levels can help students and teachers more fully tap their potential;
- **The new economy that has been promised for a generation can become a reality** – with good jobs and equal opportunity for all Americans to prosper;
- **Our safety net of food, shelter, and other basic needs** can be made to work more effectively, modernized to best help those who need it most, and structured with better tools to find work and advance careers;
- **The democracy and government that we are a part of, and serves us, can be modernized** to make sure everyone knows more about it, can participate in it, and can access what they need from it much more easily and completely; and
- **A more effective pandemic policy and response is needed** to ensure communities, states, and the nation have clear information and plans to respond to pandemics and other crises.

Achieving all of these goals will take dedicated, sustained, and significant effort. But the tremendous impacts will be worth the hard work.

- Millions of Americans will have access to food, shelter, and basic needs
- Our educational system will be improved and adaptable to a more distanced world
- Every American can get job training that prepares them for the jobs of the future
- Businesses and new enterprises responsible for creating jobs can become more effective with better technology
- Millions will get better and more convenient healthcare, without increasing costs or sacrificing quality
- Government services will be online and easily accessible, and we will support more forms of civic engagement and meaningful participation in our democracy

At great pivot points in American history, leaders and everyday Americans have been faced with huge choices. We are the beneficiaries of those who have shown vision and courage before us. Let us use this moment to make another set of critical choices, a commitment to a future America stronger for all. To that end, this policy framework offers proposals in six key categories:

1. **Closing the Digital Divide**
2. **Expanding Telehealth and Modernizing Healthcare**

3. **Supporting Education for the Future**
4. **Building a 21st Century Economy and Safety Net**
5. **Modernizing the Public Sector and Making a Commitment to Innovation**
6. **Promoting Civic Participation**

1. Closing the Digital Divide

Access to digital tools and systems, and adoption of the high-speed internet connections necessary to use them, are now the foundation for participating in almost every aspect of modern American life. Students need the internet and devices to complete homework and increasingly school itself, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Working adults need to be able to access the internet to look for, apply for, and even perform their jobs. Even the basic functions of daily life are increasingly digital, from booking and attending doctor's appointments to communicating with family and accessing services. Our dependence on the internet is tremendous and will only grow further. In short, every element of this policy agenda relies on affordable high-speed internet. The current digital divide, which runs along economic, racial, and geographic lines, must be rectified so all Americans can share in these tremendous opportunities. Ultimately, the scale of the problem demands a proportional response: what rural electrification did for America almost a century ago, we must do for broadband today.

Goal: Every American should have an affordable, reliable high-speed internet connection, as well as necessary equipment, to participate fully in modern life.

Top Priorities

1. Make major public investments in broadband infrastructure to increase access

Under the next president's leadership, the federal government should offer major direct subsidies, tax supports and low-cost loans to local governments, nonprofits and other public service organizations that build and maintain broadband infrastructure. This should include support for state or local governments to invest in building out the "middle mile" of broadband infrastructure. These investments would address a primary barrier currently preventing companies from investing in networks in rural areas, tribal lands, and other communities.

- **How to do it:**
 - **Major grant and subsidized loan program to fund widespread deployment:** The next president should work with Congress to secure major funding for broadband infrastructure construction and deployment, prioritizing underserved communities including tribal lands. Cities interested in building their own networks should be eligible for federal support, including grants for planning, and federal law should protect their right to build networks if they desire.
 - **Federal office/initiative dedicated to broadband access and affordability:** The president should create a federal body dedicated to promoting broadband access

and adoption, tracking relevant data, and coordinating among federal agencies and other relevant community stakeholders. This effort could take the form of establishing a formal initiative under the White House Office of Science and Technology, with an appointed leader with the authority to coordinate across government agencies. (Alternatively, this effort could be integrated into a larger, government-wide effort to establish a Department of Technology to centralize functions currently performed by disparate agencies).

2. Ensure all Americans can afford internet service

Cost remains the most significant barrier many Americans face to having broadband internet at home. No American should be denied the opportunities that now assume reliable internet access as a prerequisite, but efforts to get Americans connected have not kept up with needs. The next president should tackle cost challenges head-on.

- **How to do it:**

- **Federal subsidy for low-income Americans:** The next president should work with Congress to build a permanent subsidy program that helps low-income Americans afford high-quality internet service. This subsidy would promote broadband affordability and could be expanded in the face of major shocks (such as the COVID-19 pandemic). This subsidy will help ensure low-income Americans can work remotely, access tele-learning for their kids, and conduct telehealth visits. This subsidy program could also support access to the devices required to take advantage of the internet, such as computers or tablets.
- **Public-private partnerships:** The president should also pursue partnerships with internet service providers to expand eligibility for discounted and low-cost internet programs and improve marketing and outreach around those efforts. These partnerships could be coordinated by a presidential office of public-private partnerships (discussed elsewhere in this document).

Supporting Policies

The following policies would supplement the priorities above by expanding and augmenting existing tools for digital inclusion, as well as adjusting rules and regulations to better support access and affordability.

1. **Expand E-Rate program:** The next FCC should expand the E-Rate program to support off-school access for students, including through LTE subscriptions or the use of unlicensed TV white spaces. E-Rate beneficiaries like schools and libraries should also be able to use E-Rate funding to loan hot spots, computers, tablets, and cell phones to

community members who need them. In addition, E-Rate funding should be allowed to equip school buses with Wi-Fi.

2. **Expand Lifeline:** The next FCC should also expand the Lifeline program by increasing the number of broadband providers that can serve as Lifeline providers and simplifying the enrollment process to increase the number of users. Lifeline recipients should not be required to choose between support for cell service and home broadband. While preventing fraud remains important, the next president's appointees to the FCC should ensure that such efforts do not unduly burden recipients. (These efforts could be integrated into the broader efforts to build a federal broadband subsidy program).
3. **Deploy lending programs for Wi-Fi hotspots:** The next president should work with Congress to create a major grant program for libraries, schools, U.S. territories and American Indian tribes to purchase and deploy mobile hotspots to help ensure more Americans have high-speed internet access at home. Lending out Wi-Fi hotspots for those without internet access in their homes will help increase community internet access for low-income students, which is especially vital during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Expanding Telehealth and Modernizing Healthcare

Despite meaningful reforms, our healthcare still fails far too many Americans who have to worry about high costs and limited access. The consequences of disparities in quality of care and access to affordable treatment have been laid bare by the onset of COVID-19, and the next president must be ready and willing to address them. However, this moment has also highlighted the massive new opportunities to expand access and increase the affordability of quality healthcare for all Americans by using telehealth. Smart federal policymaking will help Americans stay in touch with their doctors, monitor chronic conditions, and seek support when needed in the comfort and safety of their own homes while potentially cutting healthcare costs for all. In addition, building a more modern healthcare system will help prepare the country to respond more effectively to future pandemics.

Goal: Every American should be able to use telemedicine to expand their access to care, improve their health outcomes, and save money on health-related costs, and modern approaches to health data should be at heart of those efforts.

Top Priorities

1. Modernize regulations to expand access to telehealth services

The next administration should lead the effort to make telehealth services accessible for all Americans by creating and incentivizing flexibility in licensing, service delivery and payment. While achieving this objective will require a major effort that cuts across all levels of government and collaboration with the private sector, the next president has powerful tools available to accelerate this transition. Under the next president's leadership, Medicare should expand covered services and reimbursement rates for telehealth providers to put them more closely on par with in-person services. This change will increase their incentive to provide needed services and improve access for a vulnerable population of Americans. Such changes should be carefully implemented to avoid creating disincentives to seek in-person care where it is medically necessary.

At the same time, the administration should work with Congress and state leaders to incentivize changes in state medical licensing to promote telemedicine. These changes will

make it easier for telemedicine providers to work with patients located across the country, ultimately increasing competition and lowering costs.

- **How to do it:**

- **Medicare rule changes:** The next president should review COVID-19 response temporary flexibilities instituted around Medicare coverage of telehealth with the intention of making most of them permanent, seeking legislation as necessary. These flexibilities that should be made permanent include allowing a person’s home to be an “originating site” in order for telehealth services to be reimbursed under Medicare. In addition, the next president should direct the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to expand the number of services for which Medicare will pay for telehealth coverage.
- **Medicaid reforms:** Future requests for Medicaid waivers or revisions states make to the federal government should be reviewed for including a greater focus on supporting the use of telemedicine.
- **State licensing:** The next administration should work with Congress to pass legislation that defines the location of services provided as a physician’s office so doctors can use their home-state license to provide telehealth services to patients in other states.
- **Private insurance coverage mandate and incentives:** To ensure everyone has access to comprehensive telehealth services, the next administration should work with Congress to institute a coverage mandate so that third-party payers are required to include telehealth interventions as covered services under insurance. In addition, the president should incentivize private insurers to cover a wider swathe of telehealth services, help providers offer telehealth services, and ensure patients can access them easily and affordably. Strategies can include expanding funding for the Federal Communications Commission’s Connected Care pilot program and the COVID-19 Telehealth program (adjusting its mission as appropriate).

2. Use digital tools to make health information collection and sharing seamless

The next administration will have the opportunity to support the development of innovative digital tools that will make it easier for medical professionals to store patient information and allow patients to share it. These more-effective record-keeping systems will reduce burdens for Americans and help them receive coordinated, effective care. Next-generation systems can even integrate data from wearable devices, giving Americans new tools to help their doctors keep them healthy.

Opportunities for progress include supporting development and adoption of technology platforms that allow for interoperability among systems, which can both decrease patient burdens and lower costs for healthcare systems. A companion effort would be to create a single, integrated health record for patients that will allow for easy transfer between providers and services.

- **How to do it:**

- **Innovation grants:** The next administration should direct CMS to use innovation grants and alternative payment contracts to support health systems working on these new tools and platforms and share them widely.
- **EHR standards improvements:** At the same time, they should work through appropriate federal agencies (and engage Congress as needed) to establish new, higher minimum standards for Electronic Health Record systems focused on strengthening data collection, reporting, and interoperability. Strengthening the rules for Medicare and Medicaid with respect to these topics can help drive change. Better health records will increase patient agency, support coordinated care, and make it easier for Americans to use telehealth services.
- **National Health IT Coordinator:** The next president should prioritize making an effective appointment to lead the Office of the National Health IT Coordinator and strengthen the work of this initiative to break down barriers to interoperability. This office could also increase support for technical tools that help patients understand their medical records more easily.
- **Federal data sharing system:** If progress in the private sector cannot bridge these challenges, CMS should explore developing its own patient data portal to give Medicare and Medicaid patients better access to their own records and build a platform that could be adopted by private sector providers.

3. Develop a modern, digital pandemic response framework

Learning from the massive disruptions COVID-19 has caused, the next administration should build a digital pandemic policy to prepare for not just future surges of COVID-19, but for future pandemics. This policy should include a process for using data to develop preventative tools while respecting Americans' privacy. As a companion preparedness effort, the next president should also work with Congress to secure research and development funding around 3D printing and other advanced manufacturing approaches to support manufacturers' ability to shift production to needed medical supplies (including PPE) during a pandemic emergency.

- **How to do it:**

- **Pandemic technology task force:** The next president should convene experts both within and outside of the administration to make recommendations to

develop a broader digital pandemic response strategy. Areas of focus should include identifying the challenges of collecting and using data that inform responses to pandemics, with emphasis on preventing harm to marginalized communities. The task force should also explore how public policy can support the exploration of AI in modeling and predicting the spread of viral diseases, helping monitor patients remotely, optimizing the delivery of key medical supplies, supporting physical distancing, and other related topics. (This task force could potentially complement a broader COVID-19 commission modeled on the work of the independent, bipartisan 9/11 Commission.)

- **Research funding:** The next president should work with Congress to expand funding for 3D-printing research and development at agencies like NASA, the Defense Department, and the National Science Foundation. This funding could support other advanced manufacturing strategies crucial to pandemic response.

Supporting Policies

The policies below would support the efforts described above by addressing operational and regulatory needs that would need to be addressed to fully realize the goal of ensuring all Americans have access to modernized and affordable healthcare.

1. **Explore value-based model for telemedicine:** The next president should work with Congress to pass legislation supporting efforts to deploy value-based payment models for telemedicine, which would tie payment to quality performance. These programs will allow patients to see their payments as long-term investments in quality care, and are especially relevant for those in rural areas who are more likely to rely on telemedicine to receive access to care. As part of this effort, policymakers should enlist the expertise of outside organizations to develop potential metrics. The National Quality Forum, for example, is already developing rural-specific performance metrics that could provide the basis of a value-added system.
2. **Support innovation at the intersection of technology and mental health:** The next president should work with Congress to direct additional NIH and PCORI funding toward leveraging technology to treat mental health disorders such as schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, autism, suicide, and trauma. This funding could support efforts that include developing a platform to facilitate real-time exchange with professionals and creating more engaging ways to deliver therapies or skill development (like an interactive format or game-like approach). Other efforts could help expand access to

treatment and support. For example, the FCC has recently approved 988 to be 3-digit number for national suicide hotline starting in 2022. Through a coordinated effort between the FCC, NIH, and relevant stakeholders, the government can potentially create similar resources for other mental health conditions as well as strengthen existing offerings by integrating support for texting.

3. **Improve the use of biotechnologies for early disease detection and strengthen biosurveillance platforms:** The next administration should work with experts at NIH and other federal agencies to provide funding and coordination support that would enhance their ability to conduct microbial forensics and attribution and use technology to improve information-sharing. Part of this effort should involve utilizing biosurveillance platforms like ProMed Mail, Global Public Health Intelligence Network, and CDC Early Warning Infectious Disease Surveillance System to identify emerging infectious disease outbreaks. The next president can support artificial intelligence efforts to better identify trends on these and related platforms.

3. Supporting Education for the Future

The way a country invests in its young people shows its priorities, and ultimately its future. The rapidly changing technological environment presents opportunities to direct that investment toward progress and growth, but it also risks leaving vulnerable people behind. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, a child’s educational future too often is determined by where they live, how much money their family has, their race, ethnicity, background, disability status, and how much access they have to modern tools. An educational policy agenda for the future must adapt, revise, and reconstruct many of the old processes and tools historically used to educate children and young adults and prepare them for full participation in the modern economy. As we make these investments, we have an opportunity to build for flexibility and confront the shifting nature of the modern economy.

Goal: All Americans should have access to a quality education that offers flexibility, cutting-edge tools and technology, and real-world experience to adequately prepare them for the demands of the modern economy and engagement in civic life.

Top Priorities

1. Build upside-down degrees/stackable credits

To better position American students for the workforce, some universities have restructured degree programs in certain fields so that students can gain an industry-recognized credential in their first year of school. This essentially turns degree programs “upside-down” by putting certificates ahead of general education. From there, students can “stack” credits by earning an associate’s degree and a second certificate in their second year of education, followed by additional certificates and a bachelor’s degree in later years.

- **How to do it:**
 - **Public-private partnership:** The next administration should launch a public-private partnership that brings together academic institutions, private employers, and government stakeholders to build coordinated stackable degree and hiring initiatives.
 - **Aligning federal hiring:** The Office of Personnel Management should work with federal agencies to provide guidance on hiring from upside-down degree programs, including expanding as appropriate the range of acceptable credentials and refining job descriptions to ensure students understand where their credentials are valued.

- **Technical assistance:** To support schools that are already experimenting with this format and incentivize others to do so, the next president should work with Congress to provide technical assistance and general support for schools willing to pilot this approach. This support could come through the long-awaited reauthorization of the landmark Higher Education Act.

2. Support the development of a digital transcript for life

All American students should be able to showcase the full extent of their skills and experiences for potential employers via a standardized digital transcript. Also known as an Interoperable Learning Record (ILR), a standardized digital transcript would go beyond the limitations of a traditional academic transcript to list specific skills people have learned throughout school, work, and other life experiences, rather than just courses passed or majors declared. This digital transcript could help prospective employees find jobs calling for the skills they have, as well as make it easier for students to transfer academic credit from one institution to another.

- **How to do it:**
 - **Shared framework:** The next president should direct relevant agencies (including the Departments of Labor and Education) to convene partners in academia, the private sector and civil society, to develop or strengthen a framework for what a digital transcript would look like. This effort could build on efforts undertaken in recent years to develop a comprehensive learner record.
 - **Implementation support:** The president should work with congressional leaders to support adoption of digital transcripts for life. This legislation should provide adequate guidance for states to develop and deploy these transcripts while respecting students' privacy rights. Legislation can include funding for pilot programs, a competitive grant program for states and other partners willing to deploy these initiatives, and provisions to integrate this shared framework into existing federally funded job training programs.

Supporting Policies

1. **Require federal agencies to accept high-quality certifications from online courses in lieu of degree requirements:** Federal agencies should be required to accept alternatives to college degrees, including the completion of high-quality massive open online courses (MOOCs). This requirement should also be paired with allowing more high-quality online learning to qualify for financial federal aid. This broader recognition of credentialing could help address the staffing crisis the federal workforce faces, where massive retirements are leaving vacancies that are not being adequately filled. Beyond this immediate need, the government can pave the way for wider acceptance in the

private sector of credentials that are still rigorous, but more accessible to obtain in an increasingly digital world. The Office of Personnel Management would play a key role in implementing these initiatives. As feasible, the next president should work to push the private sector to implement similar reforms.

2. **Launch Apprenticeship America:** As part of efforts to address both the future of work and higher education reform, the next president should establish an Apprenticeship America program. This would involve building a national network for apprenticeships that is as robust and supported as four-year colleges. More specifically, such a program could support physical Flagship Apprenticeship Institutes providing a variety of services (including recruiting and guiding employers). Additionally, there should be a federal apprenticeship loan program to support employers who build apprenticeship programs.
3. **Support training all teachers in online learning:** The president should work in partnership with higher education and Congress to marshal federal resources in support of training teachers in effective online instruction techniques. Given the growth of online learning tools and the demonstrated need for flexibility in the wake of COVID-19, teachers should be adequately prepared to facilitate online learning. The Department of Education should help support research and information-sharing on effective techniques and key tools. To the extent feasible, the president should pursue funding for teacher training in these vital skills.
4. **Bring high-quality education to low-performing schools:** Technology can play a vital role in closing equity gaps in education. Technology enables students trapped in low-performing schools, where graduation rates are on average only 41 percent, to have access to high-quality courses and supplemental supports in math, science, civics and other subjects. This extended reach can even include college courses that could give them credit while in high school. Technology can also be used to create early warning systems that track attendance, behavior and course performance in core subjects that signal those students who are at risk of dropping out of school and need extra support. The next president should support these efforts.
5. **Explore college by subscription:** The next administration should direct the Department of Education to explore the feasibility of supporting a college by subscription model at public universities. In general, college by subscription would involve having students pay a monthly fee for access to courses and long-term advising and career help when

needed, allowing them to move quickly and flexibly through degrees. Support from the Department of Education could include publication of guidelines and principles for how subscription models could be structured, as well as recommendations for how the federal government could best support colleges in implementation. In addition, the administration could establish a challenge grant program to support implementation.

6. **Support blended learning:** The next president should work with their administration, Congress, and external stakeholders like philanthropists to structure and fund pilot sites for blended learning environments. Under this model, students would rotate between a computer lab and face-to-face instruction, allowing for a customized schedule. This approach will allow students to exercise greater control over the content, pace, timing and location of learning, and allow teachers to individualize instructions based on the student’s progress. This approach would also provide more flexibility in times of disruption, like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Building a 21st Century Economy and Safety Net

American workers today face challenges and opportunities that previous generations could hardly have imagined. The rapid pace of technological change has opened new doors in terms of flexible jobs and working arrangements, career opportunities in new and expanded industries, and other profound changes. The care economy also continues to grow, as more and more people work in domestic care roles or are ensuring the well-being of elderly or disabled family members and children.

While these changes take place, workers and employers alike have faced the limitations that come with trying to adapt old systems to these new realities. Many elements of our safety net assume stable employment with a single employer, rather than working across a variety of platform apps. A decades-outmoded government technical infrastructure delays needed benefits for vulnerable Americans (like unemployment insurance for times of crisis) and limits the ability of policymakers to respond effectively. Meanwhile, a variety of jobs require specific skills or technical sophistication, but may not (or should not) require college degrees, and as COVID-19 has shown, many jobs may be less tied to physical locations than ever before, necessitating new thinking on job training and how technology helps up work.

While progress is necessary and at times even exciting, it is vital all Americans share in its benefits and can feel secure despite major shifts. Changes in technology have driven these transformations, but they can also be a key part of the solution. An economy that meets the demands of the 21st century is one where workers are empowered to find, train for, and perform well-paying jobs that provide them with the wages and benefits necessary to live a stable, full, and happy life.

Goal: Every American should be able to participate fully in the modern economy, with access to well-paying and flexible employment and benefits that cover basic needs.

Top Priorities

1. Federalize unemployment insurance

The current variations in unemployment benefits and eligibility across states make it difficult for workers to understand what benefits they qualify for and receive them quickly. Centralizing

unemployment insurance under the federal government would create a more just and uniform system and make benefits more easily accessible. Investing in a single, high-quality, digital-first unemployment platform would improve Americans' experience with the unemployment system. This federalized system could also make it easier for workers who move across states to receive benefits, make it easier to determine eligibility and streamline the system, and allow the federal government to respond quickly to a nationwide unemployment crisis, such as the current situation caused by COVID-19.

- **How to do it:**

- **Centralized unemployment office:** The next president should work with Congress to establish a federal unemployment office overseen by the Department of Labor. Employer and taxpayer funding for the system would be directed there, and it could oversee the distribution of benefits. (Pairing this reform with providing all Americans with FedAccounts, discussed later in this document, could further accelerate the speed with which benefits could be distributed.) States could also supplement the federal system with their own additional benefits if they choose. Delivering benefits through a mobile/digital-first strategy could also reduce costs significantly while improving user experience.
- **Work-sharing:** A federalized unemployment system should include a work-sharing provision, where struggling businesses could get assistance from a federal unemployment trust fund to temporarily cover part of their payroll costs. Barely half of states currently support work-sharing, but it is generally popular among employers and could lead to fewer individual unemployment claims while allowing workers to preserve their job tenure.

2. Institute portable benefits

For too many Americans, our economy is fundamentally precarious. Losing a job means losing a paycheck, but it often also means losing access to retirement savings plans, high-quality disability insurance, life insurance, and other benefits. For independent contractors and people working in the gig economy, benefits such as workers' compensation and unemployment are largely unavailable.

Instead of having these benefits be tied to a specific job or employer, workers should be able to own their benefits, including retirement funds, workers' compensation, disability insurance, and health insurance. These benefits would travel with them as they move from job to job or create their own enterprises. Under this structure, companies would pay a fixed rate based on how much a worker is working for them. This system could also accommodate all workers, including independent contractors (a significant share of the modern economy). New

technology makes it easier to administer portable benefits across platforms, and trends in the gig economy make such a modernized system more necessary than ever.

- **How to do it:**
 - **Support local pilots:** In the short term, the easiest places to support portable benefits may be in the states and in major cities. The next president can support existing legislation that would establish a grant fund for states, localities and nonprofit groups to pilot portable benefits models for independent workers. These investments can support efforts already underway such as Alia, a technology project that supports benefits for home care workers. Supporting pilots will also provide the opportunity to identify best practices for using modern technology to facilitate the distribution of benefits quickly and effectively.
 - **Explore federal opportunities:** At the same time, the president should pursue efforts to make benefits more portable at the federal level. While many efforts will require legislation to implement, the president should explore places executive authority can be used to incentivize increased flexibility or portability. These include using waiver authorities to incentivize portability, convening private and public partners to build portable benefits collaborations, and other strategies.

3. Give every American a federal bank account

The next administration should work with Congress to give all Americans the option to open individual bank accounts housed at the Federal Reserve. Referred to as FedAccount by its proponents, these accounts would work similarly to the ones that commercial banks already offer. However, with all the normal functionality of a conventional bank account, Americans (and potentially businesses) would be able to access debit cards, mobile banking, instant money transfers, online bill pay, and direct deposit, while enjoying the benefits of a Federal Reserve account, including earning higher interest and no chance of default. These accounts would both include the unbanked more fully into our financial systems and make it simpler, cheaper, and faster for Americans and the government to handle transactions like tax payments and benefit deposits.

- **How to do it:**
 - **New legislation:** The next president should work closely with Congress to pass legislation to open up Federal Reserve accounts to individuals. While a major policy reform, actual legislative changes required are relatively minor. The development of this proposal could be pursued in consultation with other stakeholders who will benefit from a more effective, inclusive financial system,

including retailers, small businesses, and groups working on behalf of low-income Americans.

4. Incentivize employers to support telework

The federal government should provide incentives to employers that allow their employees to work from home at least part of the time. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how important the ability to work from home is not just for flexibility and work-life balance, but for public safety and health. Increasing telework and reducing commuting can also contribute to fighting climate change and reducing pollution. Moving forward, building baseline supports to encourage the adoption of telework flexibilities will help the country prepare for future disruptions as well as improve the lives of Americans by reducing commutes and improving flexibility.

- **How to do it:**

- **Major partnership:** The next administration should use its convening power to build a telework alliance of private employers who commit to expanding the use of telework in their companies. These employers can then showcase their policies and practices to encourage other companies to make similar commitments.
- **Financial incentives:** Working with Congress, the president could develop financial incentives to spur the adoption of telework in the private sector, such as preferential tax treatment of equipment to enable telework and/or direct incentives to employers to increase access to telework. This support could take the form of a telework standard tax deduction for every employee.

Supporting Policies

The following policies would supplement the priorities above by supporting and supplementing needed infrastructure for the modern economy.

1. **Expand teleworking for federal employees:** The next president should direct the Office of Personnel Management and relevant agency leaders to change their rules to expand the availability of complete or partial telework for federal employees and contractors in appropriate roles. They should also work with Congress to establish new rules and procedures given the expansion of telework in the past decade.
2. **Provide training and technical assistance for flexible working arrangements:** The next administration should provide technical assistance and training for both employees and employers on how to effectively implement flexible working arrangements. This support could include a real-time technical assistance hotline for employers and employees, as well as trainings to be provided via conferences, calls, webinars, and more.

3. **Ensure transparency in credentialing:** As a complementary effort to creating digital infrastructure for credentialing, the next administration should work with Congress to require Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act grantees to publish their credentials in a centralized repository. The next president should also direct the Department of Labor to provide technical assistance to job training providers to help them publish information about the skills they teach via a shared open data format.
4. **Invest in training for the future of work:** The next president should work with Congress to pass legislation that would help prepare American workers for the changing economy. These investments could include support for individual choice in job training or skill-building and incentives for employers that provide significant training to lower- and moderate-income workers.
5. **Explore replacing unemployment with reemployment:** The next president should work with state leaders to establish pilot programs exploring the feasibility of replacing the current unemployment system with reemployment support. With reemployment, the government would continue to provide temporary income to unemployed Americans, with some additional supports. These include: expanding eligibility to independent contractors, a universal training voucher to replace training programs tied to worker displacement; a job search stipend to support job seekers who want to move to pursue employment in a different part of the country, and bonus payments for workers who find new jobs before their temporary support expires.
6. **Establish long-term wage insurance:** The next administration should establish pilot programs and/or a competitive grant program to support the implementation of long-term wage insurance. This insurance would provide partial income replacement for workers whose wages fall from either a pay cut or job loss. If pilot results are promising enough to scale, this effort could be built on top of the existing unemployment insurance system (a federal-state partnership) or the federalized system proposed earlier in this document. Alternatively, it could be part of restructuring or replacing that system, with the goal of minimizing costs to taxpayers beyond current spending levels on unemployment insurance, or through a different approach.
7. **Provide unemployment through unions:** The next administration should support partnerships between unions and state and local governments to provide unemployment insurance and other government services. Unions already play a role in distributing benefits, and the federal government could help strengthen this relationship

by funding pilot projects in select states and providing technical assistance for these systems.

8. **Institute universal paid sick leave:** Universal paid sick leave would be beneficial to both the individual health of America’s workers and also to the long-term health of the economy. The next president should make it a priority to work with Congress to institute paid sick leave for all working Americans, including gig and part-time workers.
9. **Allocate funding for modernization of state unemployment websites:** If the president is unable to federalize the unemployment insurance program, the president should instead prioritize securing funding to help state governments to design and implement modern unemployment processing frameworks. In addition to updating decades-old back-end systems with appropriate replacements, these funds could support scalable applications, pursue a mobile-first design strategy, and use consistent and integrated design across websites and platforms for those accessing unemployment benefits and connecting the unemployed to job opportunities. This investment will ensure that state unemployment websites are user-friendly, accessible, reliable, and effective during times of increased demand.
10. **Expand SNAP benefits for use in online grocery shopping:** The Department of Agriculture should expand its pilot program allowing online food purchases to be funded with SNAP benefits. The extension of this pilot program to all states will ensure that SNAP recipients can access their benefits online, cutting down on transmission risks in the face of pandemics as well as providing more support for home-bound recipients and the elderly.
11. **Incentivize adoption of online and/or text-based public benefit applications:** The next administration should coordinate with groups already working in this space to support pilot programs that use text messages and/or effective online tools to manage the benefit process. Developing a smart-phone-friendly process for benefit applications, renewals, eligibility information and more prevents vulnerable Americans from being unintentionally dropped from benefits programs. The Integrated Benefits Initiative has already launched pilots in Louisiana, Michigan, Colorado, Alaska, and Vermont, and the administration should provide additional funding and technical support for public-private partnerships in states and localities to launch additional pilots.

5. Modernizing the Public Sector and Making a Commitment to Innovation

While the private sector has increasingly leveraged 21st century technology to solve modern social problems, the public sector’s technology adoption and user experience continues to lag behind. This lack of technology modernization in the public sector undermines the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery for Americans, who are understandably frustrated with having to navigate complex and outmoded bureaucracy that has failed to keep pace with the changes they see in other parts of their lives. The public sector must modernize and adopt innovative technology to ensure all Americans receive government services effectively and that technology makes government as effective as it can be.

In a broader sense, technology also has the potential to provide new, creative solutions to complex policy challenges. In an age of rapid technological change and innovation, it is essential to pay close attention to how these new tools can reach beyond the private sector and be used to improve public life. Policymakers have an opportunity to steward this process through investment, convening power, and other forms of essential support. This commitment should suffuse all that government does — responding to the major challenges of our time, like climate change, will require a concerted strategy on technology and innovation throughout government and in public life.

Goal: Every American should reap the benefits of technological progress, including **accessible and effective** service delivery and improvements to daily life that stem from public investments in innovation.

Top Priority

1. Establish an “ARPA-T” research agency for technology and the public good: The next president should work to create a federal agency tasked with supporting innovative, cutting-edge research into technologies that would improve public life. Modeled after the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) at the Department of Defense and its counterpart ARPA-E within the Department of Energy, ARPA-T (Technology) would bring together experts from academia, the private sector, and government and provide funding for transformational research. The agency would not be limited to any one policy area, but would be more broadly focused on the intersection of emerging technologies and public policy.

- **How to do it:** ARPA-T could be housed in an existing federal agency (as DARPA and ARPA-E are) like the National Science Foundation. Doing so will require working with Congress to pass legislation establishing and funding this new agency. To avoid duplication and unnecessary expenses, some existing federal research capacities could be consolidated into ARPA-T.

2. Create a public-private partnerships office

Closing the digital divide, modernizing healthcare, addressing climate change, and many of the other objectives outlined in this policy framework will require collaborations between government at all levels, the private sector, community partners, and other stakeholders. However, when partners outside the government want to help, they are often on their own to figure out where to begin or what government agencies might be running related efforts. An office with dedicated staff and a mandate to build partnerships that serve the public interest while avoiding corruption can help channel this civic energy for the benefit of the country in telemedicine and other arenas.

- **How to do it:** The president should use executive authority to establish this office and ensure it is staffed appropriately. The convening power of the presidency can help build and launch initial partnerships, and many ideas for such collaborations are highlighted throughout this document.

3. Deploy data science for the public good

The next administration should lead the federal government in building and strengthening the government's ability to infuse data science expertise throughout all levels of government. This Data Science for Public Good initiative would be aimed at making government processes more innovative, efficient, and technologically advanced. One component of this effort would be creating digital service agencies in all 50 states, modeled after the United States Digital Service (USDS). USDS and 18F should deploy their technologists across state governments to help them distribute social services, purchase requisite technology, and create necessary digital infrastructure.

- **How to do it:**
 - **Allocate meaningful funding:** The next president should work with Congress to secure increased funding to expand USDS. In addition, while 18F is self-funding, the president should pursue funding to expand this initiative and make it easier for agencies to use its service (potentially including a budgetary subsidy to partner agencies).
 - **Recruit top technical talent:** The next president should prioritize the recruitment of top technical talent. Doing so includes devoting personal attention to top hires,

increasing the prestige of the USDS and related efforts, and showcasing the work of relevant staff members. This effort should also include active recruiting to complement traditional “post-and-pray” approaches.

- **Partner with states:** The president should convene state leaders to support learning on effective digital service development and provision. In addition, USDS and/or other federal technical expertise could be leveraged to provide technical assistance to state governments. Finally, a grant program could be established to support the creation and/or scaling of effective digital service agencies in all 50 states.
- **Create and strengthen What Works Clearinghouses:** Public, private and public sector institutions, including those seeking grants and other federal support, deserve better information on what federal programs are actually effective at achieving outcomes. Government should invest at least 1 percent of appropriations for agencies in building the evidence base of what works and using technology to make this information publicly available through What Works Clearinghouses.

Supporting Policies

The following policies would supplement the priorities above by creating and supporting additional structures for leveraging technological innovation to address issues that matter in Americans’ daily lives.

1. **Launch a national lab-to-market initiative to strengthen technology transfer:** The next administration should convene a commission tasked with developing a national approach for strengthening the technology transfer pipeline. This effort should take place across a wide range of issue areas, including healthcare, climate science, and education. Commission members should include representatives from NIH, NSF, the Office of Technology Policy, and other relevant agencies, as well as relevant stakeholders in the private sector and academia. Their work should include a comprehensive review of current federal policies around research and innovation. From there, the commission should develop an action plan for addressing current gaps in the pipeline, with recommendations for expanding the scope and access for current federal programs and otherwise restructuring them to improve efficacy.
2. **Establish a citizen science grant program:** The next administration should direct federal research funding to support citizen science efforts, using both discretionary authorities

and collaboration with Congress to do so. While progress has been made in recent years, prominent leaders in the field need additional support to further refine what types of models are scalable and replicable. Current efforts also largely focus on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Establishing grants for those exploring additional applications for citizen science can accelerate progress in other areas.

3. **Government-wide user experience review:** In the early days of the next administration, the president should launch a government-wide user experience review to identify priorities for improvement and recommendations to carry them out. Following this inter-agency review, the president should appoint a senior official or establish an effort with responsibility for updating these assessments and ensuring recommendations are implemented. This council should build on the work of the 2018 21st Century Idea Act, which mandated modernization of government websites.
4. **Expand government use of APIs:** The next administration should direct federal agencies to utilize APIs to make it easier for people to access public benefits and participate in public programs. These tools will make it easier for nonprofit partners and private companies to access appropriate federal data and build tools to make The federal government has made some progress along these lines, like through the login.gov website, but should invest in fully updating legacy technology to support API utilization.
5. **Launch a user experience partnerships initiative:** The president should establish an initiative on user experience partnerships designed to develop and launch collaborations between the public and private sector to improve access and usability of government services such as public benefits and government data. These partnerships can be fueled by better and more-effective use of APIs, and they could be coordinated by the Office of Private-Public Partnerships described earlier.
6. **Pursue Paperwork Reduction Act reform:** The next president should pursue major reforms to this law to make it easier for agencies to implement good-faith efforts to digitize services without needless regulatory delays. While such reform efforts are underway, the president should direct their Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs to further streamline barriers to implementing effective digital services and providing a good user experience.

7. **Explore opportunities for technology to make government more effective and reduce regulatory burdens:** Better integrating technology into federal compliance, permitting, and regulatory processes could save money for government and time for businesses. The next president should expand efforts to use tech to make government easier to do business with. Potential opportunities include using AI to identify higher-risk applications and prioritize enforcement time, using automation to pre-populate information in permit applications and citizen contacts with government agencies, and explore places where connected devices can reduce the need for human monitoring.

6. Promoting Civic Participation

Technology can deepen civic participation in America through its usage in expanding access to voting rights, bolstering civil society, increasing volunteering and national service, and promoting transparency in government proceedings. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person voting has become a precarious activity, and many Americans will be disenfranchised without the expansion of mail-in voting. Many other aspects of civic participation have moved online and into the digital sphere. New regulations and innovations are required to ensure that this civic participation in the digital era is accessible and effective for all.

Goal: Technology should help every American participate meaningfully in our democracy and in our communities.

Top Priorities

1. Broaden online voter registration

Online voter registration enables voters to register to vote through an online form that is verified electronically by election officials, and this practice is currently offered in 40 states and the District of Columbia. Online voter registration is essential to ensuring that at-risk citizens are able to exercise their constitutional rights and engage in civic participation.

- **How to do it:** In addition to pursuing legislation to require all states to offer easy online voter registration, the president should deploy federal expertise to offer technical assistance to ensure that existing voter registration platforms are as easy to use as possible.

2. Create federal service year technology platform

The next president should prioritize helping the tremendous energy of young Americans to tackle real social challenges and strengthen their communities find meaningful outlets. Currently, only 75,000 Americans annually participate in service year programs provided by the Corporation for National and Community Service, but this number should continue to grow until 1 million youth are participating annually.

- **How to do it:** The next president should direct US Digital Service and 18F to provide technical assistance to create a national service technology platform that would connect service-minded young people with service organizations willing to host them. This platform could build from existing tools like the platform developed by serviceyear.org.

Such a system also certifies nonprofits, faith-based institutions and local agencies as national service organizations that can utilize service year corps members to tackle public challenges at low-cost to taxpayers.

3. Create a National First Amendment Fund to support local journalism

The federal government should create a National First Amendment Fund modeled after the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium. The Consortium is a grantmaking fund tasked with distributing grants for innovative media and civic technology projects that partner with higher education partners and community organizations such as libraries or nonprofit organizations. A National First Amendment Fund will empower local communities to create innovative solutions and use technologies to meet their civic information needs and fill information voids that have emerged as local journalism institutions have declined.

- **How to do it:** The next president should work with Congress to secure funding for this initiative and launch the fund either as an independent fund or as a program of existing public journalism initiatives.

Supporting Policies

The following policies would supplement the priorities above by expanding access to government proceedings, fortifying public media, and promoting civic participation in the digital sphere.

1. **Establish Tech for America Corps:** Recruit and train thousands of young Americans to do a year of national service in providing technology support to nonprofits, small and new businesses, and local agencies. Corps members would work to improve the provision of services, collection and reporting of data, marketing and communications, and efficiency in solving problems or addressing customer needs. The Corporation for National and Community Service should provide living stipends and education awards to such Tech for America Corps members. The private sector should recruit, train and deploy such corps members to meet community and business needs.
2. **Televising Supreme Court hearings:** The next president should work with Congress to pass a bill permitting television coverage of all open sessions of the Supreme Court. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Supreme Court has for the first time in history conducted oral arguments over the phone, the audio feed of which was made available to the public through a media pool. Televising Supreme Court hearings will increase

public understanding of and access to critical legal questions in American society and of the roles of different branches and levels of government.

3. **Expand funding for Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB):** The next president should propose a budget with increased funding for CPB, the entity that distributes funding to support public radio and media. This expanded funding should focus on increasing access in small and rural public broadcasting stations that lost private support as a result of COVID-19 because such stations serve as critical sources of reliable information to underserved populations.
4. **Expand eligibility for and access to mail-in voting:** The next president should work with Congress to pass the Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act, which prohibits states from imposing additional requirements on the eligibility of those casting a mail-in vote in federal elections. Some counties, including LA County, are already sending mail-in ballots to all residents, and this model should be adopted nationwide. Passing the Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act will increase ballot access for at-risk Americans and ensure everyone can participate in our democracy, while also limiting fraud and ensuring every vote counts.
5. **Develop and maintain an emergency volunteer system:** The next president should create an emergency volunteer registry and system through Volunteer.gov, utilizing technical assistance from US Digital Response or other partners. This system could be modeled after a revamped version of the Department of Health and Human Services' approach to recruiting and verifying credentials for medical volunteers such as the Medical Reserve Corps, and could also apply to Community Emergency Response Teams and Contact Tracers during public health crises. This system should also include a robust website and public awareness campaign. The creation of an emergency volunteer system through Volunteer.gov will further civic aims in promoting volunteering during emergencies and expand the ability of the country to respond to a variety of disasters.
6. **Create a task force and pilot projects on local participatory budgeting:** The next president should create a task force to support the identification and dissemination of best practices for county- and municipality-level participatory budgeting. The president should then procure additional funding for US Digital Service to implement pilot projects in counties and municipalities nationwide to test the efficacy of technology-

based participatory budgeting. These pilot projects will increase the transparency and agency of local citizens to engage in the allocation of local resources.