

Resolution Promoting Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Digital Literacy

WHEREAS, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Digital Literacy is defined as using digital technology, communications tools and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate and create information in order to function in a knowledge society; *and*

WHEREAS, The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Geneva in 2003 reaffirmed on a global level the need for digital literacy skills in the 21st century; *and*

WHEREAS, An ICT Digital Literacy policy is complementary of efforts to bring broadband services to all Americans; *and*

WHEREAS, Implementation of an ICT Digital Literacy policy will help ensure that students and employees are ready for the workforce of the 21st century, where digital literacy skills will be critical to a nation's ability to compete successfully in a global information and knowledge economy; *and*

WHEREAS, An ICT Digital Literacy policy framework would support benchmarking, diagnostics, remediation and metrics, and will ensure accountability for assessing progress and success; *now, therefore, be it*

RESOLVED, That the Board of Directors of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, convened in its 2008 Winter Meetings in Washington, D.C., supports steps to enable the people of the United States of America to participate meaningfully in the 21st century workforce, and harvest the benefits of an information and knowledge society; *and be it further*

RESOLVED, That there should be a full opportunity for all the people of the United States of America, its firms, institutions, and governmental entities to fully participate in a 21st century global economy, while enjoying access to and use of advanced technologies; *and be it further*

RESOLVED, That promotion of digital literacy and the possibilities that technologies can improve the quality of life in the 21st century should be encouraged at the national, State and local levels; *and be it further*

RESOLVED, That NARUC should encourage digital literacy strategies to government, education, health care, business and other areas in order to enhance opportunities for people, firms, institutions and government entities to be leaders in technological innovation; *and be it further*

RESOLVED, That NARUC will promote: (1) access to information and communications technology by our people regardless of income or advantage; (2) the provision of ubiquitous broadband service in a competitive marketplace at affordable cost; and (3) opportunities for people to acquire ICT Digital Literacy skills to benefit academically, economically and socially; *and be it further*

RESOLVED, That NARUC authorizes and directs the Staff and General Counsel to support adoption of ICT Digital Literacy policies and public awareness of ICT Digital Literacy efforts.

*Sponsored by the Committee on Telecommunications
Adopted by the Board of Directors February 20, 2008*

ADDENDUM: Background Memorandum for NARUC Resolution on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Digital Literacy Policy

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Geneva in 2003 reaffirmed on a global level the need for digital literacy skills in the 21st Century. This NARUC resolution proposes that NARUC adopt a policy supporting ICT Digital Literacy policies, which is complementary to our efforts to bring broadband service to all Americans.

Since the WSIS released its consensus report, momentum has been building globally for standardization and assessment of digital literacy skills. Prior efforts throughout the world have gained a legitimacy of mission. The United Nations, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and many other international policy entities have already convened task forces focused on the importance of ICT indicators and digital literacy. European countries now use standardized ICT literacy assessment metrics as benchmarks for employment. Schools in many countries are now requiring assessment of digital literacy skills in the basic testing programs.



**Excerpt from the Declaration of Principles
Building the Information Society: a global challenge in the new Millennium**

Our Common Vision of the Information Society

We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, assembled in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003 for the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- Each person should have the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge in order to understand, participate actively in, and benefit fully from, the Information Society and the knowledge economy. Literacy and universal primary education are key factors for building a fully inclusive information society, paying particular attention to the special needs of girls and women. Given the wide range of ICT and information specialists required at all levels, building institutional capacity deserves special attention.
- The use of ICTs in all stages of education, training and human resource development should be promoted, taking into account the special needs of persons with disabilities and disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.
- Continuous and adult education, re-training, life-long learning, distance-learning and other special services, such as telemedicine, can make an essential contribution to employability and help people benefit from the new opportunities offered by ICTs for traditional jobs, self-employment and new professions. Awareness and literacy in ICTs are an essential foundation in this regard.

ICT Digital Literacy is fast becoming the new literacy of the 21st Century

In the United States, a wide range of business, government, and research organizations are also calling for students of all ages to master digital literacy as an integral part of essential and critical 21st century life and workforce preparation skills.

The gap between those able, and those unable, to participate in the knowledge economy has been termed the “digital divide.” This digital divide is evident within nations, and between the developing and the developed world. It also is evident that a gap exists based on geographical location, socio-economic status, and availability or not of advanced ICT and broadband technology capabilities, and the understanding of how to apply and use the technologies once they are available. While significant steps have been made to ameliorate or bridge some of the digital literacy gaps, there remains an absence of a coherent and sustainable national public policy that will encourage support and understanding of the importance of 21st century skills for education and the workforce.

It is the opinion of many, including California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger that the United States *must take immediate steps to enable all of its citizens to participate meaningfully in the knowledge society and the 21st century workforce.* The gaps that exist can be overcome with a clear vision, commitment of resources, and a sound policy that moves the United States and its citizens forward in harnessing the benefits of the Information Age. A consensus on a national ICT Digital Literacy Policy would be a giant step forward in bridging the digital divide, and in ensuring that our citizens make the most of broadband technologies, and are ready for the workforce and a competitive global economy.

The dangers posed by complacency regarding the digital divide, and the risks of having its citizens being excluded further from the knowledge economy and social development should propel policymakers to support a digital literacy policy framework.

Key considerations of a digital literacy policy are to:

- Capture the full opportunity for the United States of America and all of its citizens to fully and competitively participate in a 21st century global economy while enjoying access to and use of advanced technologies like broadband.
- Include all citizens, firms, institutions and governments in the benefits of 21st century global economy and citizenship.
- Support a nationwide mindset that encourages digital literacy and the possibilities technologies can bring to improving our quality of life in the 21st Century.
- Encourage institutional support of digital literacy strategies in government, education, business and other entities in order to enhance the opportunities for positioning the United States as leader in technological innovation and workforce readiness.
- Support benchmarking and metrics that ensure a digital literacy policy framework is comprised of elements reflecting globally accepted standards.
- Develop timetables and milestones to ensure appropriate accountability for assessing progress and ultimate success.

Recent innovations in broadband technologies and applications have increased the potential, for economic and social development and empowerment of individuals and communities. Affordable communication services, the growth of global networks, and mobility made possible by these technologies and applications are creating new growth opportunities for those poised to take advantage of them. Yet these trends also make more acute the risk that poor policies and

unwise investments will leave certain sectors of our society as well as nations and States further behind in an increasingly open and competitive global economy.

Definition of ICT Digital Literacy

According to an international independent panel of experts convened by Educational Testing Services (ETS) in 2001, ICT literacy was defined in the following way:

ICT Literacy is using digital technology, communications tools and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge society.

This definition has become the basic concept upon which national and international efforts have built policy and frameworks.

NARUC should support a national ICT Digital Literacy Policy for the 21st Century and voice this support in its advocacy before federal agencies and Congress.

NARUC should support efforts to bring a national ICT Digital Literacy Policy for the 21st century in its advocacy before federal agencies such as the FCC, NTIA and Congress. Solid progress has already been made in the area of digital literacy policy and assessment. Frameworks and assessment instruments exist that offer good models for required elements and metrics. These basic elements of digital literacy have been endorsed by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and are being adopted globally.

They are:

BASIC ELEMENTS OF DIGITAL LITERACY ASSESSMENT IN EXISTING FRAMEWORKS	
Elements	Definitions
Access	Knowing about and knowing how to collect and/or retrieve information.
Manage	Applying an existing organizational or classification scheme.
Integrate	Interpreting and representing information - summarizing, comparing, contrasting.
Evaluate	Making judgments about the quality, relevance, usefulness, or efficiency of information.
Create Information	Generating information by adapting, applying, designing, inventing, or authoring information.
Ethical and Human Element	Developing and practicing ethical, cultural and societal attitudes toward technology uses.

Note: Existing international and national digital literacy frameworks and assessment instruments all share these common elements.

Digital literacy is not only about education and the workforce preparedness. It is key to a full and successful life in the 21st Century. Children, youth, young adults, under skilled workers, underserved families -- each require a different approach. The importance of addressing children in schools, the community and at home cannot be understated, as their needs will be greater as ICT is further integrated into all aspects of their lives.

Special attention is required for students and workers with disabilities to access the tools they need to become digitally literate, to be able to access the assessments themselves. This includes attention to learning management systems, central management systems and vendors addressing accessibility in their

products. This means addressing these issues at the very beginning of the planning and design phase, and in the policy itself.

Clearly, information and communication technologies are driving the need for a fundamental change in the literacy skills required for a global 21st century work place, educational institutions, the community, and public sector services. Achieving the goal of a digitally literate United States of America requires collaboration and a “call to action” on the part of regulators, policy makers, educators, business leaders, politicians and community leaders. NARUC is in a unique position to offer national leadership in this effort, by supporting ICT digital literacy concepts on the national scene. Further, State regulatory commissioners can champion the ICT digital literacy agenda back in their home States by engaging broadband providers, educators, schools, libraries, universities, community colleges, adult education providers, community-based organizations, non profit organizations, and senior centers to support ICT digital literacy policies. They can facilitate access to information about ICT Digital Literacy, adopt policies that promote ubiquitous broadband capacity, ensure service availability at affordable rates, and support public awareness of the issue.

Background Memorandum Prepared by



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