

Policy and Regulation for Community Networks

Recent Changes

While much has been written about affordable technologies that communities have been able to use to design and build their own communication infrastructure, less is known about the policy and regulatory frameworks that have a significant impact on how easy it is to establish a community network, what kind of scale is possible and how sustainable it is likely to be.

Given that network operators use similar technologies around, you would be forgiven for thinking that policy and regulation governing telecommunications networks, and by extension community networks, are generally the same across countries. There are indeed many similarities but when it comes to community networks, there are critical differences in policy and regulation that can have a profound effect on the the viability of community networks.

This wiki is intended to help clarify those issues on a country by country basis with the intent of helping emergent community networks navigate the often confusing landscape of rules and regulations governing community networks. It is also hoped that the wiki will be useful for community networks to advocate for more enabling regulation, drawing on examples from other countries to inform their work.

Finally, recognising that policy and regulation is always changing and that capturing these changes across many countries is a mammoth task, we have chosen a wiki in the hope that you will join this effort to document and compare policy and regulation around the world. Note that the site is multi-lingual and if you would like to document information in another language, we encourage you to do so. You can change languages by clicking on the little flag icon above.

Exploring the Wiki

Country Profiles

If you're serious about building a community-owned network, it is essential to understand what you need to do to be compliant with existing laws and regulations. Understanding policy and regulation can also help reveal opportunities for support from universal service programs or other government mechanisms to enable community development. These country profiles look at policy and regulation from the perspective of small-scale operators and community networks, including key legislation and regulation, barriers, and opportunities.

Explore this topic further:

- [Country Profiles](#)

Good Practice

One of the benefits of reviewing national policy and regulatory frameworks from around the world is that examples of good practice inevitably emerge. In this part of the wiki, we try to draw out examples of policy and regulation that establish an enabling environment for community network development. There wide range of examples of good practice including operator licensing, spectrum access, access to affordable backhaul, funding mechanisms, and more.

Explore this topic further:

- [Good Practice](#)

Contributions to National Public Consultations

So what do you do if your country fails to embody good practice when it comes to enabling policy and regulation for community networks? Starting to engage in a dialogue with your regulator is an important first step. That can begin with something as simple as a meeting to help better understand the regulation governing community networks but also to introduce community networks to regulators. But to bring about real changes in regulation, regulators have strict processes they have to follow to solicit input from the public. These 'consultations' are often key opportunities for community networks to provide input that they can be sure will be read and, at the very least, acknowledged by the regulator. Submissions become part of a permanent record. At best, input can help regulators see a different point of view and result in better regulation.

Making a submission to a national consultation by a regulator can be daunting if you have never done it before. That's why we have gathered together a wide range of submissions across a variety of countries that have been made in support of enabling regulation for community networks. These submissions may be a useful template or have useful ideas to inform your own response to a consultation. If you have made a submission to a national consultation in your country, please share a copy of it hear for others to learn from.

Explore this topic further:

- [Contributions to National Public Consultations](#)

The Role of International Organisations

Because telecommunications involves significant coordination among countries, the role of international organisations is also key to bringing about change. Regulators, especially less well resourced one, often defer to recommendations from international organisations like the ITU to guide the implementation of their national strategies. Thus having a voice for community networks in these international fora becomes increasingly important in order to normalise community networks as a complementary strategy in addresses unserved and underserved regions of the world. This section profiles policy processes from international organisations and, where relevant, lists submissions including or proposing language favourable to addressing barriers faced by community networks

Explore this topic further:

- [The Role of International Organisations](#)

Experimental Areas

We're working to expand the functionality of this policy and regulation wiki. This section contains links to experimental resources that may become more formalised within the wiki.

Spectrum Assignments

- [Global IMT Spectrum Assignments](#)
- [Digital Dividend Spectrum Assignments](#)
- [MTN Spectrum Assignments Across African Countries](#)

Mapping Cooperatives

- Experimental [Map of Telecommunications / Broadband Cooperatives](#) Around the World

A Community Networks Reading Syllabus

Experimental [syllabus](#) of community network research and documentation.

communitynetworks.group

If you have questions about community networks in general or policy and regulation in particular, please join the online discussion platform for community networks at [communitynetworks.group](#).

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