

# CLIENT ALERTS

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## Community Colleges Can Play a Critical Role in Preparing for the Broadband Future

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One lesson to be drawn from the COVID pandemic is the recognition of the critical importance of broadband, which supports teleworking, remote education and telehealth services. But there is a digital divide, and not everyone has access to or can afford broadband. Congress recognizes these issues, and allocated billions of dollars of funding to the States that can be used to support broadband deployment as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 ("ARPA"). In addition, the Infrastructure bill, if adopted, will provide an additional \$65 billion in broadband funding. Thus, there is an expectation that there will be a massive amount of fiber optics deployment in the years ahead. Likewise, the wireless industry is deploying hundreds of thousands of cell sites in support of the evolution towards 5G (which also requires the deployment of fiber to connect these cell sites). But all of this new broadband infrastructure deployment will require an expanded and skilled workforce.

The communications industry recognizes that there will need to be substantial increases in training programs to create this expanded workforce, and their trade associations have developed such programs to work in partnership with community colleges to accomplish this important task. For example, the Fiber Broadband Association has created the FBA OpTIC: Optical Telecom Installation Certification program -- <https://www.fiberbroadband.org/certification>. Similarly, the Wireless Infrastructure Association has developed a training program for 5G deployment in conjunction with community colleges -- <https://wia.org/wia-launches-5g-readiness-program-for-ohios-broadband-workforce/>. In addition to such industry-sponsored deployment workforce training programs, the billions of dollars of funding made available to the States under ARPA can be used for digital literacy training programs.

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The bottom line is that the future is broadband, but in order to get there, we will need to increase our country's training capabilities. Community colleges should be prepared to take advantage of the industry resources and federal subsidies so they can play a critical role in these efforts.

**Stephen L. Goodman**

202.454.2851

goodman@butzel.com

**Carey A. DeWitt**

248.258.2607

dewitt@butzel.com