



Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa

Strategic Plan for 2025/26 – 2029/30 (Revised)

March 2026

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List of Acronyms

ASO	- Analogue Switch-Off
BBI	- Broadband Infraco
B-BBEE	- Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
BDM	- Broadcasting Digital Migration
ECA	- Electronic Communications Act
ERP	- Enterprise Resource Planning
ICASA	- Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
ICT	- Information, Communication Technology
IDA	- Infrastructure Development Act
ITU	- International Telecommunication Union
GIS	- Geographic Information Systems
GNI	- Gross National Income
NDP	- National Development Plan
NDCIM	- National Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Mapping
PMFA	- Public Finance Management Act
SITA	- State Information Technology Agency
STB	- Set-Top Box
USAASA	- Universal Service and Access Agency
USAF	- Universal Services and Access Fund

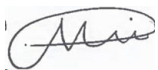
Accounting Authority Statement

As we present this Strategic Plan for 2025/26 to 2029/30, USAASA stands at a pivotal juncture in South Africa's digital transformation journey, to which we contribute. Despite remarkable progress in national infrastructure deployment, the persistence of the digital divide remains one of our most pressing equity challenges. This inequality reflects deeper questions of economic opportunity, and the fundamental right to participate fully in an increasingly digital society. The Board is committed to ensuring that USAASA fulfils its constitutional and statutory mandate to bridge these divides and advance universal digital inclusion for all South Africans, particularly those in underserved and rural communities.

This strategic plan articulates an achievable vision anchored in three transformative pathways. First, we commit to enhanced implementation effectiveness by addressing the critical gaps that have hindered past delivery, including developing the National Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Mapping (NDCIM) Platform to enable evidence-based targeting and eliminate investment duplication. Second, we are in the process of adopting the USAF Manual to foster an innovative, outcome-based financing mechanism. Third, we recognise that no strategy can succeed without organisational excellence, and therefore commit to strengthening governance, stabilising leadership, and building critical technical capacities.

The Board acknowledges that USAASA has faced governance and institutional challenges in recent years, leading to a decline in stakeholder confidence. Capacity constraints have undermined our ability to deliver on our mandate with the consistency and excellence South Africans deserve. We are determined to transform this Agency into a model of public sector effectiveness. This strategic plan represents our commitment to transparent, accountable, and results-driven governance. We are strengthening Board oversight mechanisms and establishing rigorous performance-monitoring frameworks to hold both the Board and management accountable for achieving the strategic outcomes articulated in this plan.

The achievement of universal digital inclusion by 2030, as envisioned in the National Development Plan and operationalised through SA Connect and the Digital Economy Master Plan, requires collaboration, innovation, and commitment from all sectors of society. This plan positions the Agency as a strategic convener, enabler, and catalyst, leveraging our statutory authority, fund management responsibilities, and policy advisory role to ensure that no South African is left behind in the digital revolution.



Mr Mandla Mnisi
Chairperson of the Board (Accounting Authority)

Accounting Officer Statement

The implementation of this Strategic Plan requires a significant shift in how USAASA operates, delivers, and measures success. As Accounting Officer, I am committed to leading this change by establishing the systems, processes, capabilities, and culture necessary to translate the Board's strategic vision into tangible connectivity outcomes for underserved communities across South Africa.

The first implementation priority is to maximize the effectiveness and impact of our existing broadband and broadcasting digital migration programmes while building the foundational systems required for sustainable delivery. This includes rationalising our portfolio of connectivity projects, implementing rigorous contract management protocols with clear milestone tracking and performance consequences. We are developing post-subsidy sustainability plans to ensure that infrastructure and services remain operational and accessible after initial warranty periods expire, addressing both the technical maintenance requirements and the financial sustainability models necessary for long-term impact.

Our second implementation priority is to implement the USAF Manual once it is approved, which is a competitive funding mechanism that leverage market innovation. The operationalisation of the Manual requires the development of additional organisational capabilities in fund management, proposal evaluation, outcome verification, and partnership governance. We will establish transparent, technology-neutral funding with clear eligibility criteria based on geographic targeting, innovative solution design, financial sustainability, and community participation.

The third implementation priority is organisational strengthening across all functional areas to ensure USAASA has the human capital, systems, and culture required to execute an ambitious, complex, and multi-dimensional strategy. Operationally, we are investing in digital project management platforms, enterprise resource planning systems, and integrated M&E dashboards to increase visibility into portfolio performance, financial utilisation, and outcome achievement, in line with the Digital Transformation Strategy and Roadmap.

The next five years represent a defining period for USAASA and for South Africa's universal access ambitions. Through disciplined execution, innovation, collaboration, and accountability, we will demonstrate that universal digital inclusion is achievable.



Mr Thabiso Thukani
Chief Executive Officer (Acting)

Official Sign-off

It is hereby certified that this Strategic Plan:

- Was developed by the Management and Board of USAASA under the guidance of the Minister of Communication and Digital Technologies.
- Considers all the relevant policies, legislation, and other mandates for which USAASA is responsible.
- Accurately reflects the Impact, Outcomes and Outputs that the USAASA will endeavour to achieve over the period 2026/27 – 2029/2030.



Mr Thabiso Thukani
Executive Manager:
Research, Strategy and Performance Monitoring

26/03/2026
Date

Vacant
Vacant
Executive Manager: Operations

26/03/2026
Date

Vacant
Vacant
Chief Financial Officer

26/03/2026
Date



Ms Lerato Petlele
Executive Manager Corporate Services

26/03/2026
Date

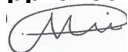
Recommended/~~Not Recommended~~



Mr Thabiso Thukani
Chief Executive Officer (Acting)

26/03/2026
Date

Approved by:



Mr Mandla Mnisi
Chairperson of the Board (Accounting Authority)

Date: 27/03/2026

Part A: Our Mandate

1. Constitutional Mandate

Universal Service and Access Agency (USAASA) derives its mandate from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. According to Chapter 10 (Section 195 [1]) of the Constitution, public administration must be governed by the democratic values and principles enshrined in the Constitution, including adhering to the following principles:

- High standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.
- Efficient, economic and effective use of resources must be promoted.
- Public administration must be development-oriented.
- Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably, and without bias.
- People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making.
- Public administration must be accountable.
- Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible, and accurate information.
- Good human resources management and career-development practices, to examine human potential, must be cultivated, and
- Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel management practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness, and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation.

In addition, Chapter 2 (Bill of Rights), sub-section 16 of the constitution prescribes that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which, among others, includes:

- Freedom of the press and other media;
- Freedom to receive or impart information or ideas;
- Freedom of artistic creativity; and
- Academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.

Therefore, in the context of USAASA, the right to freedom of expression can be interpreted as the right to access the resources, facilities, and equipment necessary to exercise this freedom. The right to access telecommunication resources, facilities, and equipment is therefore a basic human right in South Africa.

2. Legislative, Policy and Planning Mandates

2.1. Legislation

USAASA draws its legislative mandate from Chapter 14 (sections 80-91) of the Electronic Communications Act, 2005 (Act No. 36 of 2005), as amended ("the ECA"). In terms of section 81 of the ECA, the objects of USAASA are to:

- promote the goal of universal access and universal service; and
- monitor and evaluate the provision of universal access and universal service.

In terms of section 82 of the ECA, the functions of USAASA include:

- providing policy and regulatory advice to the Minister and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) on matters relating to universal access and universal service;
- managing and administering the Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF) in accordance with sections 88 and 90 of the ECA;
- making recommendations to the Minister to enable the Minister to determine what constitutes universal access and universal service, in terms of section 82(3)(a);
- encouraging, facilitating and offering guidance in respect of any scheme to provide universal access and universal service;
- conducting research into and monitoring developments in the Republic and elsewhere on information and communications technology, electronic communications services and electronic communications network services; and
- continually surveying and evaluating the extent to which universal access and universal service have been achieved.

Sections 88 and 90 of the ECA prescribe the permissible uses of the USAF and the procedures for administering subsidies and grants. In terms of section 88(1), the USAF may only be used to:

- assist needy persons, as determined by the Minister, with costs related to the provision or use of broadcasting, electronic communications network services or electronic communications services (section 88(1)(a));
- subsidise the construction or extension of electronic communications networks in under-served areas through subsidies to holders of individual licences (section 88(1)(b));
- subsidise schools and colleges, as contemplated in the South African Schools Act and the Further Education and Training Colleges Act, to procure broadcasting services, electronic communications network services, or electronic communications services, or the use of electronic communications networks (section 88(1)(d));
- subsidise community access centres, including the associated allowances (section 88(1)(e)); and
- any additional uses prescribed by the Minister by regulation, with the concurrence of the Minister of Finance (section 88(1)(f)).

Section 88(1A) of the ECA requires USAASA to determine, after public consultation, the manner in which applications to the USAF are to be made and the manner in which subsidies are to be paid.

Section 90 of the ECA provides that where USAASA intends to provide any subsidy or incentive from the USAF for the construction or extension of an electronic communications network in any under-served area, it must conduct a competitive process in consultation with ICASA and in accordance with applicable procurement legislation.

The main aim of USAASA is to promote universal access to telecommunications and digital services, especially in underserved and rural communities. The key legislative mandates guiding USAASA operations can be summarised as follows:

The Electronic Communications Act (ECA) of 2005

- The ECA provides the legal framework for USAASA to promote universal service and access to electronic communications services.
- It mandates USAASA to ensure affordable and accessible digital services in underserved areas.
- The ECA also created the USAF, which is managed by USAASA to fund initiatives that improve digital infrastructure and access.

Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act

- While not specific to telecommunications, this act encourages USAASA to support digital initiatives that contribute to socio-economic development, including empowering historically disadvantaged communities.

Public Finance Management Act (PFMA)

The PFMA governs the financial management of USAASA, ensuring transparency, accountability, and effective use of public funds.

Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) Act

USAASA collaborates with ICASA, which regulates the broader telecommunications industry, to align on goals for universal service.

These legislative mandates within which USAASA operates aim to bridge the digital divide in South Africa by enabling USAASA to develop and fund initiatives that promote digital inclusion and economic growth through access to ICT and digital infrastructure. Other legislation impacting the mandate of USAASA includes:

- The Infrastructure Development Act (IDA), 2014 (23 of 2014), as amended.
- The Electronic Communications and Transactions Act (25 of 2002), as amended,
- The State Information Technology Agency (SITA) Act (88 of 1998), as amended.

2.2. Policies

The **South Africa Connect** policy, adopted in 2013 as the country's national broadband strategy, establishes targets for universal access while explicitly prioritising underserved communities that have historically been excluded from digital connectivity. This policy framework articulates specific coverage, speed, and affordability targets designed to bridge the digital divide systematically. It positions broadband connectivity as essential infrastructure for socio-economic development, educational advancement, healthcare delivery, government service access, and economic participation. By prioritising underserved communities, South

Africa Connect directly aligns with USAASA's statutory mandate under the Electronic Communications Act to promote and pursue universal access and universal service. USAASA supports the implementation of this policy strictly within the confines of permissible funding categories under section 88 of the ECA.

The **National Broadband Policy**, also formalised in 2013, complements South Africa Connect by establishing a policy framework to achieve affordable broadband access through enhanced market competition and effective regulatory oversight. This policy recognises that universal access requires addressing infrastructure availability and economic accessibility, acknowledging that connectivity remains meaningless if costs exceed what low-income households can sustainably afford. By positioning affordability alongside availability as central policy objectives, the National Broadband Policy provides strategic justification for USAASA interventions.

The **Broadcasting Digital Migration policy**, adopted in 2008 to guide South Africa's transition from analog to digital terrestrial television, explicitly mandates USAASA to subsidise digital terrestrial television equipment for qualifying low-income households, demonstrating the Agency's role extending beyond telecommunications to encompass broader electronic communications access consistent with its statutory mandate. This specific policy directive operationalises the ECA's provision that USAF resources should be used to subsidise the cost of broadcasting and electronic communications services for needy persons.

The **ICT Policy White Paper of 2016** represents a framework for universal access, affordability, and the promotion of open network models for equitable digital participation. This policy articulates a vision of digital transformation in which ICT infrastructure and services serve as enablers of broader socio-economic development. The White Paper's emphasis on universal access extends beyond physical infrastructure to encompass the multi-dimensional nature of digital inclusion. It addresses network availability, device affordability, digital literacy, relevant content and applications, and accessible e-government services, providing compelling reasons for connectivity adoption. Its advocacy for open network models and infrastructure sharing lays the policy foundations for USAASA to support diverse ownership and operational structures, including community networks, municipal broadband initiatives, and public-private partnerships that create pathways for sustainable, locally controlled connectivity.

Collectively, these policy frameworks establish clear national priorities for universal service and access. They position USAASA as the institutional vehicle for translating policy commitments into tangible connectivity outcomes by strategically deploying USAF resources.

2.3. Plans

The **National Development Plan (NDP) 2030** establishes South Africa's long-term development vision with three main aims: eliminate poverty, reduce inequality, and reduce unemployment. The NDP emphasises that by 2030, ICT will underpin the development of a dynamic and connected information society and vibrant knowledge economy that is more inclusive and prosperous, positioning digital infrastructure as an essential enabler for

achieving objectives in health, education, and agriculture, effectively establishing universal digital access as a foundational precondition for achieving broader socioeconomic transformation goals. For USAASA, the NDP provides an overarching strategic mandate and moral imperative for universal access interventions, as well as an accountability framework against which USAASA's universal access interventions can be evaluated. USAASA contributes to the NDP Chapter 4 objectives through targeted universal service interventions.

The **Medium-Term Development Plan 2024-2029** outlines key priorities for the 7th Administration under the Government of National Unity. It focuses on three strategic priorities: drive inclusive growth and job creation as the apex priority, reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living, and build a capable, ethical, and developmental state. Strategic Priority 1 on driving inclusive growth emphasizes increased infrastructure investment, access, and efficiency, with specific recognition that improved energy security and digital transformation across the state are critical enablers. It positions USAASA's broadband infrastructure investments as directly contributing to the apex national priority.

The **Digital Economy Master Plan**, finalised in 2021, identifies physical technology production, transformative tech applications, digital platforms, and digitally traded services, with critical enablers being digital inclusion, skills for work, responsive governance, innovation and competitiveness, and digitizing the state as a central pillar of South Africa's economic transformation. For USAASA, the Digital Economy Master Plan expands the Agency's strategic mandate to encompass enabling infrastructure for digital economy participation, requiring universal access interventions to address internet connections and quality, reliability, affordability, and complementary ecosystem elements, including digital literacy, local content development, technology entrepreneurship support, and regulatory environments that enable rather than constrain innovation.

The **Digital Transformation Roadmap 2025** provides a framework for delivering government services through digital channels, data integration, and online service delivery. The Roadmap recognizes that digital government represents a fundamental reimagining of how government operates, delivers services, engages citizens, and coordinates across silos. This requires investments in digital infrastructure, platforms, systems, skills, and change management, alongside policy and regulatory reforms that enable digital-first approaches. For USAASA, the Digital Transformation Roadmap creates substantial demand for reliable, high-capacity connectivity at government facilities, public institutions, and service points. This positions the Agency's statutory responsibility to connect schools, clinics, police stations, and government offices as directly enabling core government transformation priorities with clear timelines and performance expectations.

3. Relevant Court Rulings

No court rulings applicable.

Part B: Our Context

4. Situational Analysis

External Environment

4.1. The State of Digital Inclusion

South Africa faces a complex digital access and services landscape characterised by significant progress in infrastructure deployment alongside persistent geographic and demographic inequalities. While national internet penetration reached 74.7% with 45.34 million users¹, substantial disparities persist across provinces, rural-urban divides, and demographic groups. This requires coordinated efforts from a diverse ecosystem of public and private institutions to accelerate universal access. USAASA responds to these challenges in accordance with its statutory mandates.

South Africa's digital infrastructure has experienced remarkable growth, with mobile cellular subscriptions reaching 116.8 million in 2024, representing a 7.46% increase from the previous year.² Smartphone subscriptions surged by 10.36% to 82.7 million, while fixed broadband subscriptions more than doubled from 1.4 million to 2.7 million. The expansion of fibre-to-the-home/building connections from 1.0 million to 2.4 million demonstrates significant infrastructure investment. Network coverage has achieved substantial reach, with 3G networks covering 99.79% of the population nationally, 4G/LTE coverage at 99.07%, and 5G coverage reaching 46.64% overall. However, geographic broadband coverage declined from 84.10% in 2022 to 82.06% in 2024, indicating ongoing challenges in reaching under-served areas as defined in section 88 of the ECA.

The digital divide persists most prominently along geographic dimensions. Provincial disparities reveal significant inequalities in fixed internet access, with the Western Cape leading at 40.1% of households having home internet access, while Mpumalanga records only 3.1%.³ Mobile internet access shows less variation but still demonstrates disparities, ranging from 78.5% in KwaZulu-Natal to 67.2% in the Eastern Cape. Rural-urban divisions remain stark. While urban centres achieve 78% 5G coverage in the Western Cape, rural areas of the Northern Cape remain at 1% 5G coverage. This geographic inequality reflects broader patterns of infrastructure investment and challenges of commercial viability in less densely populated areas. The 2023 General Household Survey indicates that 91.2% of households rely solely on cellular phones for communication, with 3.8% having no telephone access whatsoever (Statistics South Africa, 2023).⁴

¹ DataReportal. (2024). *Digital 2024: South Africa*. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-south-africa>

² ICASA. (2025). *The State of the ICT Sector Report of South Africa 2025*. Retrieved from <https://www.icasa.org.za/uploads/files/The-State-of-the-ICT-Sector-Report-of-South-Africa-2025.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Statistics South Africa. (2024). *General Household Survey 2023*. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182023.pdf>

Significant challenges persist in the provision of universal access. Affordability remains a primary concern, particularly for lower-income populations, as fixed broadband costs consume 4.15% of GNI per capita, compared to more affordable rates in peer countries.⁵ Implementation capacity constraints affect government agencies, characterised by unclear roles, leadership instability, and gaps in project management capabilities.⁶

Future acceleration of universal access requires the effective use of competitive bidding mechanisms under section 90, enhanced coordination mechanisms, sustainability planning, and adaptive management approaches that learn from past implementation experiences. Success will depend on integrating national infrastructure planning with universal service delivery and establishing robust accountability mechanisms to ensure inclusive digital transformation for all South Africans.

4.2. Policy Goals and Performance Gaps

The *National Development Plan (NDP) 2030* envisions “a seamless information infrastructure by 2030 that will meet the needs of citizens, business and the public sector, providing access to a wide range of services required for effective economic and social participation”. This vision is operationalised in the *SA Connect National Broadband Policy*, which sets explicit numerical targets for broadband access, speed, and affordability, the *National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper of 2016* that further designates universal access and service as a national priority, and the *ICT and Digital Economy Masterplan* updates affordability and quality benchmarks in line with current market conditions.

Under SA Connect, the Government of South Africa committed to achieving 90 percent broadband coverage at minimum speeds of 5 Mbps by 2020 and 100 percent by 2030, with all schools connected at 10 Mbps and broadband affordability maintained at or below 2.5 percent of average monthly income. The Digital Economy Masterplan subsequently established a more practical affordability benchmark: universal access to 10 Mbps broadband at a cost not exceeding R399 per month. Performance data indicate that progress toward these goals remains uneven. In relation to SA Connect Phase 2, Sentech and Broadband Infraco (BBI) have deployed approximately 7,185 public Wi-Fi hotspots covering around 1.25 million households. This represents roughly 22.5 percent of the target of 5.57 million households across 32,055 hotspots, leaving a gap of approximately 4.3 million households. Meanwhile, the Broadcasting Digital Migration (BDM) programme, intended to complete analogue switch-off (ASO) and distribute free set-top boxes (STBs) to over five million indigent households, has fallen well short of this target.

The gap between national broadband policy targets and actual programme outcomes remains significant. Accelerating rollout under SA Connect Phase 2, completing BDM implementation, and institutionalising performance-based reporting will be essential to realising the universal access vision of the NDP 2030 and the Digital Economy Masterplan. Achieving these targets requires strengthened governance frameworks, transparent administration of USAF subsidies

⁵ ICASA. (2025). *The State of the ICT Sector Report of South Africa 2025*. Retrieved from <https://www.icasa.org.za/uploads/files/The-State-of-the-ICT-Sector-Report-of-South-Africa-2025.pdf>

⁶ Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa. (2024) Research Report on Universal Access and Universal Service (USAF Programme Evaluation). Unpublished Report.

within the permissible categories defined in section 88(1)(a)-(f) of the ECA, and competitive tender processes as prescribed in section 90. Performance-based reporting mechanisms must be implemented in accordance with PFMA requirements and the USAF Manual.

4.3. An Evolving Universal Access and Technology Landscape

Universal Access and Universal Service have evolved from a narrow focus on fixed voice telephony to encompass comprehensive digital inclusion, ensuring all individuals, particularly those in underserved and rural areas, can access and effectively use affordable ICTs. This evolution is critical for socio-economic development, digital participation, and competitiveness in the global digital economy.

International best practices demonstrate that successful digital inclusion requires holistic strategies integrating infrastructure deployment with affordability measures, digital skills development, and demand stimulation, all supported by transparent, market-based funding mechanisms and technology-neutral policies. The International Telecommunication Union's (ITU's) Connect 2030 Agenda recognises that access encompasses multiple interconnected layers that must be addressed simultaneously for meaningful digital inclusion. Infrastructure and connectivity form the foundational layer, providing physical access to networks via various technological platforms. In developing countries, technology-neutral approaches are increasingly favoured, recognising that different contexts require different solutions. Fiber-optic backbones remain crucial for urban areas and backhaul networks, wireless technologies dominate last-mile connectivity, with mobile broadband through 4G/LTE and emerging 5G networks now the primary platform. In remote, topographically challenging areas, Low Earth Orbit satellites offer low-latency, high-speed internet to previously unreachable locations, while TV White Space technologies utilise unused broadcast spectrum to provide cost-effective broadband over long distances, proving particularly suited to rural contexts with dispersed populations and challenging terrain.⁷

Device and affordability access constitute the second critical dimension, acknowledging that connectivity infrastructure becomes meaningless without affordable devices and data that enable actual use. Strategies to promote device access include reducing or eliminating import duties on smartphones, establishing local assembly facilities that create employment while lowering costs, and developing financing schemes specifically designed for low-income households to overcome upfront device costs. These affordability interventions recognise that the digital divide is increasingly characterised by economic barriers, with costs preventing meaningful participation even where networks exist.⁸

Digital skills and application access represent the third essential form, focusing on human capacity and the relevance of digital engagement. This dimension encompasses access to relevant, local-language content and e-services, including e-government, e-health, and e-education platforms that offer compelling reasons to go online and demonstrate tangible benefits that justify connectivity costs. UNESCO emphasises that digital skills have become

⁷ World Bank. (2021). *Digital Development: From Connectivity to Services*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/digitaldevelopment>

⁸ Alliance for Affordable Internet. (2021). *The Affordability Report 2021*. A4AI. <https://a4ai.org/affordability-report/>

as fundamental as traditional literacy and numeracy for full societal participation in increasingly digital economies and democracies.⁹

Internationally, the funding landscape for universal access has become significantly more sophisticated and market-oriented, moving beyond subsidies to strategic financing instruments that leverage public resources to unlock private investment. Reverse auctions and competitive bidding have emerged as global best practices for allocating Universal Service Fund subsidies, with operators bidding competitively for the lowest subsidy required to serve predefined underserved areas.¹⁰ Blended finance and public-private partnerships have become essential given the scale of investment required for comprehensive connectivity and the fiscal constraints most governments face. These models use Universal Service Fund capital strategically to de-risk projects and attract private investment that would otherwise avoid underserved areas due to perceived risks or inadequate returns.¹¹ While global trends favour blended finance, the ECA currently limits USAF expenditure to subsidies and grants. USAASA will therefore administer funds strictly in accordance with section 90, pending any legislative review.

Effective universal access strategies must address infrastructure, affordability, and capability simultaneously, as deficiencies in any single dimension undermine the effectiveness of interventions in others. South Africa's existing legal and institutional framework through USAASA and USAF provides foundations that, with focused reforms addressing governance, funding activation, technical capacity, and strategic integration, can drive progress.

Internal Operating Environment

4.4. Governance Challenges and Institutional Stability

USAASA has experienced persistent governance and leadership instability, which has undermined its capacity to fulfil its statutory mandate under the Electronic Communications Act. This instability manifests in frequent changes to Board composition, extended vacancies in key executive positions (including the Chief Executive Officer role), and inconsistent strategic direction resulting from leadership transitions. Governance weaknesses have eroded stakeholder confidence, with private sector partners, community organisations, and government agencies expressing frustration over perceived inconsistent engagement and unclear strategic priorities that shift with leadership changes rather than following coherent long-term plans.

The Agency possesses constitutional legitimacy and clear legislative backing through the ECA, which establishes explicit statutory functions, fiduciary responsibilities, and

⁹ UNESCO. (2021). The Digital Literacy Global Framework. UNESCO. <https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/digital-literacy>

¹⁰ World Bank. (2021). *Digital Development: From Connectivity to Services*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/digitaldevelopment>

¹¹ International Finance Corporation. (2020). *Blended Finance: A Stepping Stone to Creating Markets*. World Bank Group. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/news_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/news+and+events/news/blended-finance-report

accountability frameworks that cannot be arbitrarily changed. USAASA's recognition as the key institutional vehicle for achieving universal access and service in South Africa, combined with its statutory authority to administer USAF and supervise project execution, continues to position it to catalyse digital inclusion if governance stabilization can be achieved.

4.5. Organisational Climate, Culture, and Employee Morale

USAASA suffers from an adverse organisational climate characterised by low staff morale and a culture that has not consistently facilitated high performance or innovation. Internal assessments reveal that employees experience ongoing uncertainty concerning organisational direction. This negative climate manifests as high turnover among skilled professionals, difficulty attracting top talent despite the Agency's important mandate, reluctance to take initiative or propose innovative approaches, and siloed working patterns in which departments operate with limited collaboration or knowledge sharing. The organisational culture has historically been characterized by a compliance orientation rather than a results orientation; thereby emphasising adherence to procedures and the avoidance of mistakes rather than achieving measurable impacts on desired universal access outcomes.

4.6. Technical Capacity Building and Skills Development

USAASA faces critical capacity and technical skills gaps that constrain its ability to effectively evaluate diverse project proposals, supervise complex technology deployments, and adopt strategies based on emerging evidence and innovation. Skills gaps are particularly acute in monitoring and evaluation methodologies, where the Agency lacks sufficient staff trained in rigorous impact assessment, data analysis, and adaptive management to enable evidence-based decision-making. Technical expertise in emerging connectivity technologies, including TV White Space, Low Earth Orbit satellites, mesh networks, dynamic spectrum sharing, and artificial intelligence-optimized network management, is insufficient to evaluate proposals leveraging these technologies. Project management capacity, while present, needs strengthening in areas such as risk management, stakeholder coordination, milestone tracking, and adaptive implementation. Financial analysis skills necessary for assessing project financial viability and sustainability, and structuring performance-based funding mechanisms, represent another significant capacity gap.

Capacity building must prioritise skills in statutory compliance (ECA sections 82, 88, 90), PFMA financial management, competitive tender administration under section 90, milestone-based grant disbursement, evidence-based policy research to support ministerial determinations, monitoring and evaluation, and GIS/spatial intelligence for evidence-based planning. The Digital Transformation Strategy and Roadmap identifies workforce development as one of its strategic pillars, with a roadmap including digital skills training, change management, and data governance capabilities.

4.7. Data Systems and Performance Measurement Frameworks

USAASA's monitoring and evaluation system is not fully embedded, resulting in a lack of timely, evidence-based information needed for adaptive management and strategic

adjustments. Available data is often fragmented across different projects and systems, not standardized for aggregation and analysis, and not readily accessible to decision-makers when needed for planning or course corrections. Performance measurement frameworks have focused disproportionately on input and activity metrics, rather than outcome and impact metrics. Establishing robust data-driven decision systems is a strategic imperative that requires investment in both technical infrastructure and organisational processes. Digital M&E dashboards should be implemented, providing real-time visibility into project progress, key performance indicators, and early warning signals of implementation challenges or underperformance. Data integration platforms that consolidate information from diverse projects and sources, enable analysis and visualization, and generate automated reports can reduce manual effort while improving accessibility.

USAASA's Digital Transformation Strategy and Roadmap seeks to modernise its operations. A key component is the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as decision-support tools for spatial intelligence and evidence-based planning. GIS platforms, such as the National Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Mapping (NDCIM), will be used for monitoring and oversight.

5. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

Based on the SWOT noted below, USAASA's strategy must build on its clear mandate and partnerships, while addressing governance and capacity challenges, invest in innovation and leverage emerging technologies, implement robust M&E systems for evidence-based decisions, and prioritise inclusive digital access that protects against deepening digital divides through a balanced approach to technology, partnerships, and targeted interventions.

Table 1: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Clear mandate aligned with national priorities • Legacy experience and institutional knowledge • Government buy-in and policy support • Multi-stakeholder engagement experience	• Governance instability and leadership challenges • Technical skills and capacity gaps in key areas • Adverse organisational climate and culture issues • M&E systems in the nascent stage of development
Opportunities	Threats
• Digital economy growth and infrastructure modernisation • Alternative finance models and innovative funding mechanisms • Emerging satellite and alternative technologies • Potential for expanded private sector participation	• Funding sustainability concerns in the context of a constrained fiscal environment • Technological disruption outpacing capacity to respond • Widening digital divides if access remains unequal • Policy uncertainty and implementation delays

Part C: Our Strategic Focus

This section describes the strategic orientation and positioning of the USAASA over this planning cycle.

6. Vision

USAASA's vision is:

Inclusive, sustainable and meaningful universal digital access and service for all.

7. Mission

USAASA's mission is:

To provide citizen-centric and participatory universal access and service to digital communication, infrastructure, and broadcasting services through:

- Increased deployment of sustainable and reliable digital communication, infrastructure and broadband services to underserved areas.
- Collaboration and partnership with relevant stakeholders.
- Conducting insightful research, monitoring and evaluation.
- Improved governance of USAF subsidies and funding.
- Creating a culture of performance and excellence.

8. Values

The Agency seeks to engender the following values in line with the Batho Bele principles:

Table 2: Values

Values	Description – What it means in practice
<i>Batho Pele</i>	We believe in providing excellent, efficient and effective service to all customers and stakeholders.
<i>Integrity</i>	We uphold high standards of trust, condemn bribery and corruption, and support honesty and respect in all interactions with stakeholders.
<i>Accountability</i>	We foster employee ownership and responsibility in ensuring quality service.
<i>Innovation</i>	We support employee creativity in delivering all our services.
<i>Transparency</i>	We encourage openness in all our activities.
<i>Teamwork</i>	We strive to create a harmonious work environment, where all employees and contributors are respected.

9. Theory of Change

USAASA advances digital equity and inclusion by fulfilling its statutory mandate to promote, pursue, encourage, and facilitate universal access and universal service for electronic communications throughout South Africa. As a statutory public entity established under the Electronic Communications Act (ECA) 36/2005, the Agency operates at the nexus of policy development, programme coordination, and fund administration to promote universal access and service. Digital exclusion is characterised by infrastructure gaps resulting from market dynamics that exclude communities that would benefit considerably from connectivity. USAASA contributes to this change by defining what constitutes universal access and service, fostering innovative methods and technologies to attain connectivity, administering the Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF), and empowering communities as active partners in building their digital futures.

USAASA undertakes evidence-based analysis in collaboration with communities, government agencies, including ICASA, private sector partners, and civil society organisations. This collaboration aims to understand the multidimensional nature of digital exclusion and advance knowledge that can inform policy recommendations and progressive interventions. Through community profiling, situational assessments, technological analysis, connectivity mapping, and consultation with stakeholders, the Agency generates data and insights about beneficiary needs, capabilities, aspirations, and the specific barriers, whether infrastructure, affordability, literacy, or accessibility, that prevent meaningful digital participation. This work provides the empirical foundation for USAASA's statutory responsibility to recommend and define universal access and service, challenging assumptions about commercially viable markets and demonstrating the social and economic costs of digital exclusion. The evidence is used to strategically target USAF resources, design interventions responsive to local contexts, establish baseline metrics for measuring progress, publish definitions that guide sector-wide understanding, and build the case for sustained investment and supportive policy frameworks.

USAASA draws on this knowledge to fulfil its statutory functions of encouraging, facilitating, and guiding schemes to provide universal access. This includes designing and coordinating competitive mechanisms administered through USAF, providing technical assistance to potential implementers, and building capacity among diverse stakeholders, including community networks, social enterprises, innovative technology providers, telecommunications operators, and public-private partnerships. The Agency's mandate to foster new methods, technologies, and approaches to attain universal access positions it as an innovation catalyst, actively seeking solutions to address traditional infrastructure barriers. The Agency's coordination function extends to developing transparent governance frameworks, establishing fund management structures, defining milestone-based performance requirements, and implementing rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems that ensure accountability while remaining responsive to emerging opportunities.

USAASA administers the Universal Service and Access Fund and supervises the execution of projects funded through USAF. The Agency coordinates stakeholder engagement to ensure alignment among government priorities, private-sector capabilities, community needs, and

regulatory frameworks. Through capacity-building programmes, the Agency empowers beneficiary communities, equipping them with the requisite digital literacy and technical skills to maintain infrastructure, and the agency and ability to advocate for their connectivity needs.

USAASA collaborates with government agencies, regulatory authorities, including ICASA, development partners, civil society organisations, private sector innovators, academic institutions, and community movements through strategic partnerships, alliances, networks, and coordination mechanisms to garner support and advocate for policies and practices that facilitate equitable outcomes. By fostering multi-stakeholder dialogue through memoranda of understanding, advisory committees, and formalised partnerships, the Agency creates platforms to align incentives, share data and lessons learned, and address regulatory barriers. Ensuring beneficiary voices are centred in decision-making and recognising intersecting forms of exclusion based on geography, income, gender, disability, age, and language is crucial to promoting truly inclusive solutions. USAASA uses monitoring dashboards, impact evaluations, and knowledge-sharing platforms to promote evidence of what works, advocate for scaling successful models, and inform its recommendations on regulatory framework adaptations needed to accommodate innovation.

Linking the approaches and actions outlined above and applying an ‘if-then’ logic while recognising that change is a dynamic and iterative process with complex feedback loops and interdependencies, the pathway to change can be expressed as follows:

If... USAASA fulfils its statutory research mandate by conducting evidence-based analysis through community profiling, connectivity mapping, technological assessment, and stakeholder consultation to understand digital exclusion and identify opportunities for intervention, and uses these insights to recommend and publish definitions of universal access and service that guide sector-wide efforts and inform its strategic planning...

Then... USAASA can fulfil its statutory promotion and facilitation mandate by designing transparent governance frameworks, coordinating competitive bidding mechanisms through USAF administration, providing technical assistance and capacity-building support, and fostering innovative methods and technologies that attract quality applications from diverse implementers, including community networks, technology innovators, and social enterprises, proposing solutions responsive to beneficiary needs and local contexts...

Then... USAASA supervises the execution of subsidised ICT projects that deploy innovative technologies and business models, with rigorous monitoring, ensuring projects achieve technical and financial milestones and empowering beneficiaries through participatory design, digital literacy training, and local ownership structures that integrate telecommunications into broader development initiatives...

So that... underserved communities gain sustainable, affordable access to digital infrastructure and services designed and built with their specific contexts in mind; beneficiaries develop capabilities to use and maintain these systems, innovative solutions are validated as replicable models, local digital ecosystems emerge leveraging connectivity for economic and social development...

So that... universal access and service as defined and recommended by USAASA becomes reality across South Africa, with digital inclusion achieved through deploying cutting-edge, contextually appropriate solutions, markets transformed as proven innovations achieve scale and attract ongoing investment beyond initial subsidies, regulatory frameworks evolve to accommodate technological innovation, and communities exercise agency over their digital futures...

So that ultimately... USAASA fulfils its core statutory mandate such that connectivity becomes a foundation for meaningful participation, economic opportunity, and civic engagement, contributing to a more equitable South Africa where access to electronic communications enables all communities, regardless of geography, income, or marginalisation, to secure and sustain their livelihoods, access essential services including digital, exercise their rights, and participate fully in increasingly digital economies and democratic processes.

Key Assumptions and Enabling Conditions

USAASA's Theory of Change depends on several critical statutory and operational assumptions:

- adequate and sustained USAF funding enables multi-year commitments essential for infrastructure projects and innovation;
- regulatory and policy frameworks provide supportive environments willing to adapt to technological innovation and alternative ownership models;
- reliable data on connectivity gaps, demographics, and technological options enables evidence-based targeting and definition-setting;
- timely ministerial determinations under section 88.
- effective fund management capacity with technical capabilities can evaluate diverse proposals fairly and manage complex portfolios;
- transparent, PMFA-compliant governance structures and procurement processes maintain credibility and stakeholder trust;
- communities co-design and ownership where feasible within statutory scope;
- innovative technologies prove technically viable and financially sustainable in challenging deployment environments; and
- licensee contributions generate sufficient revenue for USAF operations.

10. Institutional Policies and Strategies over the Planning Period

Three strategic pathways to impact have been identified.

The **first strategic pathway** is focused on **enhanced implementation effectiveness**. This pathway addresses critical implementation gaps through the following institutional strengthening initiatives:

- Improve beneficiary targeting

- Lead the conceptualisation, development, and implementation of the National Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Mapping (NDCIM) Platform
- Strengthen project governance and management
- Enhance contract management systems
- Consolidate performance monitoring and accountability
- Plan for sustainability and post-subsidy transition
- Improve delivery by rationalising and scaling where feasible

Improvements in implementation effectiveness will focus on delivering value for money within the existing broadband and digital broadcast migration delivery arrangements, as well as on transition planning for post-subsidy infrastructure ownership and maintenance to address STB repairs and broadband maintenance after the initial warranty period, to avoid service dependency and deterioration.

Critical capability enhancements include project management that professionalises delivery capabilities, M&E systems development that creates data-driven performance management infrastructure, and stakeholder relationship management that equips staff to navigate the complex multi-party coordination requirements inherent in universal access delivery.

Two pathbreaking initiatives will be implemented. The *first* is focused on improving beneficiary targeting through data-driven beneficiary selection that leverages socio-economic, geographic, and sectoral data to identify underserved areas. The *second* is to develop and implement the National Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Mapping (NDCIM) Platform. The platform is addressing fragmented infrastructure data, limited visibility into underserved areas, duplication of investments, and a lack of tools for integrated planning. The NDCIM would support evidence-based broadband planning, enable multi-stakeholder coordination and integrated infrastructure rollout, enhance project transparency, cost-efficiency, and community-level impact, and strengthen alignment with national initiatives such as SA Connect and the District Development Model.

The **second strategic pathway** is focused on **expanding the delivery model** through the rigorous application of section 90 competitive bidding processes for network construction in under-served areas, and the finalisation of statutory recommendations to enable subsidies for needy persons. These modalities will facilitate a shift from direct implementation to enablement, addressing barriers to digital inclusion that deliver transparent, outcome-based, and high-impact investments in under-served communities. The following implementation strategies will guide this initiative:

- Design, develop, adopt, and operationalise the Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF) Manual, once it is approved
- Develop the governance and management capacity to implement the USAF Manual effectively
- Engage stakeholders to promote participation in the funding calls or competitive bidding processes

- Crowd-in multi-stakeholder investment and delivery in previously underserved areas and sites

This approach will incorporate public calls for proposals, followed by a rigorous multi-sector evaluation and pre-qualification process. Funding is then disbursed contingent on achieving verifiable coverage, access, and inclusion targets, rather than upfront costs. The approach will be enabled by a strong governance framework that incorporates geospatial targeting using official data, technology-neutral eligibility criteria, and integrated digital platforms for real-time monitoring and public reporting, ensuring accountability and alignment with national strategic objectives. This approach is intended to effectively crowd in multi-stakeholder investments and support innovation.

The **third strategic pathway** focuses on **enhancing governance and stabilising the organisation at all levels** by promoting a high-performance, accountable culture, among other initiatives, and establishing robust operational systems for effective project management and partnership development, in pursuit of impact-driven service delivery. The implementation strategies to realise this goal are to:

- Build organisational coherence, leadership unity, and financial stability to create a predictable delivery environment
- Create a disciplined, transparent, and efficient operational platform for planning, contracting, and monitoring delivery
- Ensure the organisation has the skills and tools to improve delivery and adapt to the expansion of implementation modalities
- Generate visible, measurable delivery results to rebuild confidence and demonstrate progress toward national targets

11. Strategic Outcomes and Implementation Programmes

11.1 Strategic Outcomes

The strategic outcomes for the period 2025/26 to 2029/30 that USAASA seeks to realise are set out in the table below:

Table 3: Strategic Outcomes for the 2025/6 – 2029/30 period

Goal Statement 1	To promote universal digital inclusion in South Africa by providing sustainable broadband connectivity
Strategic Outcome 1	Increased availability of broadband connectivity services in targeted communities.
Strategic Outcome 2	Enhanced effectiveness of the national universal service subsidy framework
Goal Statement 2	To strengthen the governance and administration of the Universal Service and Access Fund

Strategic Outcome 3	Improved governance performance and institutional stability at USAASA.
Strategic Outcome 4	Strengthened governance and administration of the Universal Service and Access Fund
Strategic Outcome 5	Improved organisational efficiency and governance in contract lifecycle management across the organisation
Goal Statement 3	To enhance public trust and institutional credibility through improved governance effectiveness and organisational performance.
Strategic Outcome 6	Increased stakeholder trust in USAASA

11.2 Implementation Programmes

The following Implementation Programmes, comprising several sub-programmes and functions, will enable the realisation of these outcomes:

Programme 1: Business Support

Programme 1: Business Support, comprising Corporate Services, Stakeholder Engagement, Information Technology, Finance & Supply Chain Management, Legal Services, Risk Management, and Internal Audit, serves as the operational backbone of USAASA's strategic transformation. The current structure reveals significant capacity gaps, with critical senior positions vacant, directly undermining the department's ability to support the ambitious digital inclusion strategy outlined in the performance plan.

The department requires immediate recruitment to fill key funded positions to support the rollout of competitive bid processes within Finance & SCM and achieve targets. The IT function must be significantly strengthened to oversee the establishment of the organisation's enterprise architecture, ERP implementation, and digital dashboard development, supporting the National Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Mapping Platform and integrated project monitoring systems, in line with the USAASA Digital Transformation Strategy and Roadmap. Stakeholder engagement capabilities need strengthening to support partnership development, dissemination events, and the coordination of multi-stakeholder governance structures. Risk management must evolve from traditional compliance to strategic risk assessment for innovation-driven funding models. Meanwhile, contract management needs to be enhanced to handle performance-based funding and agreements that will characterize the competitive bidding approach.

Programme 2: Business Intelligence

Programme 2: The Business Intelligence Division, which includes Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation, and Research functions, is understaffed compared to the data analytics, evidence-based decision-making, and performance management requirements outlined in the strategy.

Currently lacking dedicated M&E specialists, the Programme 2 provides limited support to meet the extensive demands of outcome measurement.

The Programme needs to build capacity in data analytics, GIS mapping, statistical analysis, and digital platform management to operationalize the Digital Inclusion Index and NDCIM Platform. Research capacity requires expansion into technology assessment, market analysis, and policy research to support the competitive funding rounds and inform evidence-based strategy adjustments. The Programme also needs project management information systems integration to support active contracts with performance dashboards and ensure that key project data points are updated regularly.

Part D: Measuring our Performance

This section describes the institutional performance information regarding the impact and outcomes the Agency seeks to achieve.

12. Measuring Impact

The anticipated impact of the strategic investment and interventions by USAASA is as follows:

Table 4: Impact

Impact Statement	To enhance equitable access to connectivity that drives inclusive economic growth, social empowerment, and improved quality of life.
Impact	Increased participation by digitally included communities in economic and educational opportunities.

13. Measuring Outcomes

13.1 National Planning Outcomes, Indicators and Targets

The alignment of USAASA's outcome to national priorities is set out below.

Table 5: Alignment to National Development Outcomes

USAASA Strategic Outcome	National Development Plan (NDP 2030)	Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP 2024-2029)	ICT Policy White Paper (2016)	Digital Transformation Roadmap (2022)	National Infrastructure Plan (NIP 2050)
Outcome 1: Increased availability of broadband	Chapter 9: Improving Infrastructure - Universal access to	Priority 1: Basic Services - Digital transformation initiatives to	Universal Service & Access - All people can access	Pillar 3: Digital Services - Citizen-centric digital service delivery	Digital Vision - High-speed broadband universally accessible

USAASA Strategic Outcome	National Development Plan (NDP 2030)	Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP 2024-2029)	ICT Policy White Paper (2016)	Digital Transformation Roadmap (2022)	National Infrastructure Plan (NIP 2050)
connectivity services in targeted communities	modern ICT achieving 100% broadband penetration by 2030 with 5MB/s minimum speed	bridge digital divide through enhanced connectivity in underserved communities	communications services" regardless of location or economic status; Open Internet principles	requiring reliable broadband infrastructure at community level	
Outcome 2: Enhanced effectiveness of the national universal service subsidy framework	Chapter 13: Building a Capable State – Improve state capacity, accountability, and efficient resource utilisation in public service delivery	Priority 1: Basic Services – Strengthen institutional capacity and improve efficiency in delivery of services through better coordination and monitoring	Policy on Universal Service & Access Fund – Efficient, transparent and accountable management of universal service funds to achieve universal access	Pillar 1: Digital Foundations – Strengthening governance, regulatory frameworks, and institutional capacity to enable digital transformation	Enabling Mechanism: Financing & Delivery – Efficient funding models, strengthened governance, and improved implementation of infrastructure programmes
Outcome 3: Improved governance performance and institutional stability at USAASA.	Chapter 13: Building a Capable and Developmental State – A capable state requires professional, meritocratic, and ethical public servants, with stable leadership and effective governance structures	Priority 5: A Capable, Ethical, and Developmental State - Strengthen institutional capacity, stability, and governance in state entities to improve service delivery and accountability	Institutional Governance and Capacity – USAASA must be repositioned with appropriate governance structures, skilled personnel, and financial sustainability to effectively execute its mandate	Pillar 4: Enabling Environment - Build institutional capacity and digital capabilities within government entities to drive transformation and ensure effective program implementation	Institutional Effectiveness - State-owned enterprises must demonstrate sound governance, operational stability, and financial discipline to deliver infrastructure efficiently
Outcome 4: Strengthened governance and administration of the Universal Service and Access Fund	Chapter 9: Improving Infrastructure - Advances the NDP's goal of bridging the digital divide by ensuring efficient investment in ICT infrastructure for inclusive economic and social participation.	Priority 6: Social Cohesion - Implementing concrete mechanisms to fund and monitor universal digital access targets.	Transparency & Accountability Principles - Governance model to enhance transparency, accountability, and strategic impact in closing access gaps.	Governance Principles - Accountable funding vehicle to execute the Roadmap's critical foundational pillar of achieving universal, affordable broadband access.	Institutional Framework - Aligns the investment strategy with the NIP's long-term, integrated spatial planning to ensure digital infrastructure is rolled.

USAASA Strategic Outcome	National Development Plan (NDP 2030)	Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP 2024-2029)	ICT Policy White Paper (2016)	Digital Transformation Roadmap (2022)	National Infrastructure Plan (NIP 2050)
Outcome 5: Improved organisational efficiency and governance in contract lifecycle management across the organisation	Chapter 9: Improving Infrastructure - Government must improve project management capacity and ensure infrastructure delivery is timely, cost-effective, and meets quality standards	Priority 3: Economic Transformation - Accelerate infrastructure delivery through improved contract management, reduced project delays, and enhanced oversight of service providers	Universal Service & Access Fund Reform - The USAF must adopt robust project and contract management practices to ensure funded interventions are delivered efficiently and achieve intended outcomes	Pillar 3: Digital Services - Timely rollout of digital infrastructure requires strong contract management capabilities to hold service providers accountable for delivery timelines and quality	Infrastructure Delivery - Efficient contract management is essential to ensure infrastructure projects are completed on time, within budget, and to specified standards
Outcome 6: Increased stakeholder trust in USAASA	Chapter 13: Fighting Corruption - Transparency and accountability and maximum transparency in service delivery conditions	Priority 2: Strengthening Institutions - Enhanced governance, transparency, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms	Transparency & Accountability Principles - Right to access information and maximum transparency in service delivery	Governance Principles - Transparent, accountable digital transformation with multi-stakeholder participation and trust-building	Institutional Framework - Safe, secure and ethical environment for public infrastructure delivery

13.2 Strategic Outcome Indicators and Targets

USAASA's strategic outcomes and targets are set out below:

As aligned with South Africa's major national development frameworks, creating pathways toward inclusive digital transformation the outcomes advance the National Development Plan's vision of universal ICT access and e-government transformation by 2030; while supporting the Medium Term Development Plan's *three* core priorities: (1) enhanced basic service delivery through community connectivity, (2) strengthened public institutions via transparent governance and stakeholder engagement, and (3) job creation through innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships and private sector co-investment.

USAASA's approach operationalises the National Infrastructure Plan 2050's digital communications vision of universally accessible high-speed broadband and the ICT Policy White Paper's universal service principles, ensuring that "all people, regardless of location or economic status, can access communications services." Furthermore, the strategic outcomes support the Digital Transformation Roadmap's citizen-centric service delivery goals by enhancing community connectivity and government service digitization. By focusing on increased broadband usage, enhanced public service engagement, leveraged multi-

stakeholder funding, scaled innovation models, local ownership development, stakeholder trust building, performance standards maintenance, and expanded partnership ecosystems, USAASA creates an integrated approach that simultaneously addresses digital inclusion, economic growth, social equity, and institutional strengthening, all of which are core pillars across all national development frameworks from the NDP 2030 through to the Digital Economy Master Plan.

Table 6: Strategic Outcome 1

Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Baseline	5-Year Target
Increased availability of broadband connectivity services in targeted communities	Percentage of targeted communities with operational USAF-funded broadband services	New Target	35%

Table 7: Strategic Outcome 2

Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Baseline	5-Year Target
Enhanced effectiveness of the national universal service subsidy framework.	Percentage of universal service subsidy programmes administered using approved governance and procedural framework instruments	New Target	80%

Table 8: Strategic Outcome 3

Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Baseline	5-Year Target
Improved governance performance and institutional stability at USAASA.	Percentage improvement in organisational performance effectiveness score	New Target	25%

Table 9: Strategic Outcome 4

Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Baseline	5-Year Target
Strengthened governance and administration of the Universal Service and Access Fund	Percentage of USAF-funded programmes administered in accordance with approved governance, procedural and performance monitoring frameworks	New Target	85%

Table 10: Strategic Outcome 5

Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Baseline	5-Year Target
Improved organisational efficiency and governance in contract lifecycle management across the organisation	Percentage of organisational contracts executed in accordance with approved lifecycle management standards	New Target	90%

Table 11: Strategic Outcome 6

Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Baseline	5-Year Target
Increased stakeholder trust in USAASA	Percentage of key stakeholder expressing trust in Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa as measured through approved stakeholder perception surveys	New Target	25% cumulative

13.3 Explanation of Planned Performance Over the Five-Year Planning Period

USAASA's strategic outcomes are aligned with South Africa's major national development frameworks, creating pathways toward inclusive digital transformation. The outcomes advance the National Development Plan's vision of universal ICT access and e-government transformation by 2030, while supporting the Medium-Term Development Plan's *three* core priorities: enhanced basic service delivery through community connectivity, strengthened public institutions via transparent governance and stakeholder engagement, and job creation through innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships and investment.

USAASA implements the National Infrastructure Plan 2050's vision for universal high-speed broadband and the ICT Policy White Paper's universal service principles, ensuring all people can access communications services regardless of location or economic status. This approach advances the Digital Transformation Roadmap's goals through eight strategic outcomes: increased broadband usage, enhanced public service engagement, multi-stakeholder funding, scaled innovation models, local ownership, stakeholder trust, performance standards, and expanded partnerships. Together, these outcomes address the core pillars of national development frameworks, that is, digital inclusion, economic growth, social equity, and institutional strengthening, from NDP 2030 through to the Digital Economy Master Plan.

14. Factors that Would Enable Achievement of the Five-Year Targets

The achievement of USAASA's strategic outcomes depends on the following ten critical enablers:

- **Timely implementation of the Digital Transformation Strategy and Roadmap**, with 10% Year 1 delivery covering governance frameworks, enterprise architecture, ERP procurement, and National Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Mapping (NDCIM) platform scoping.
- **Submission and approval of statutory recommendations** under sections 82(3)(a), 88(1)(a), and 88(4) of the ECA, providing USAASA with clear definitions of universal access and service, permissible beneficiary categories, and subsidy modalities.
- **Publication of procedural guidelines** under section 88(1A) establishing transparent, PFMA-compliant processes for USAF project appraisal, approval, contracting, disbursement, and monitoring.
- **Board and executive stability**, ensuring continuity of strategic direction, accountability, and institutional memory.
- **Adequate capitalisation of the USAF** via the Universal Service and Access levy, license fees, and National Revenue Fund appropriations to support the approved pipeline of projects within the five permissible categories under section 88.
- **High-quality data and spatial intelligence**, including updated under-served area determinations (section 88(3)), accurate beneficiary databases, and GIS layers for evidence-based targeting and impact measurement.
- **Effective risk management and internal controls**, systematically addressing the root causes of prior audit findings and implementing the recommendations of the Auditor-General.
- **Strong inter-agency coordination**, particularly with ICASA (for under-served area determinations and regulatory policy advice), DCDT (for policy alignment and ministerial determinations), and National Treasury (for PFMA compliance and funding frameworks).
- **Organisational capacity development**, including recruitment and retention of grant management, M&E, GIS, compliance, and ICT specialists; training in new digital systems; and fostering a high-performance culture.
- **Constructive stakeholder engagement and trust-building**, through transparent communication, participatory consultation processes, timely reporting, and demonstrated responsiveness to stakeholder input.

15. Key Risks

The risks, and associated mitigation strategies linked to achieving each outcome are described below.

Table 12: Risks and Risk Mitigation

Outcome	Key Risk(s)	Risk Mitigation
Outcome 1 Increased availability of broadband connectivity services in targeted communities	• Device inaccessibility, low digital literacy, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities limit meaningful use despite infrastructure deployment	• Complementary programmes for device access and affordability • Digital skills training and literacy programs • Privacy protections and cybersecurity measures • Community digital hubs for shared access
	• Lack of community ownership means infrastructure isn't maintained	• Participatory design involving community members • Technology transfer and skills development programmes • Capacity building for local governance structures • Community-led maintenance protocols
Outcome 2 Enhanced effectiveness of the national universal service subsidy framework	• Weak compliance and governance across USAF-funded projects • Misalignment with Beneficiary Needs and Market Realities	• Strengthen and enforce compliance controls, including mandatory pre- and post-disbursement checks, internal audits, and consequence management • Standardise and enforce MEL reporting requirements with built-in data quality checks and linkage to disbursement conditions • Demand-side assessment and community engagement • Post-completion utilisation monitoring
Outcome 3 Improved governance performance and institutional stability at USAASA	• Leadership Instability and Critical Staff Turnover • Weak Accountability Culture Undermining Performance Management	• Succession planning and talent pipeline development • Institutional memory and continuity mechanisms • Strengthened performance monitoring and consequence management

Outcome	Key Risk(s)	Risk Mitigation
		Integrated governance oversight and early warning system
Outcome 4 Strengthened governance and administration of the Universal Service and Access Fund	Budget reductions, delays, or appropriation constraints undermine investment certainty and disproportionately impact experimental projects	- Multi-year funding commitments secured through Board advocacy - Board advocacy for adequate USAF capitalisation - Transparent governance frameworks
Outcome 5 Improved organisational efficiency and governance in contract lifecycle management across the organisation	Systemic Contract Management Failures Leading to Project Delays and Cost Overruns	- Strengthened contract management capability and systems - Robust contractor performance management and accountability - Proactive risk monitoring and early intervention - Strengthened contract design and procurement practices
Outcome 6 Increased stakeholder trust in USAASA	Fraud or misuse damages USAASA credibility and breaches public trust	- Transparent processes and competitive selection - Independent audits and verification - Strong accountability mechanisms - PFMA compliance and financial controls

Part E: Technical Outcome Indicator Description

The technical outcome indicator descriptions are provided below.

Indicator for Outcome 1: Increased availability of broadband connectivity services in targeted communities

Indicator title	Percentage of targeted communities with operational USAF-funded broadband services
Definition	This indicator measures the proportion of targeted communities that have operational broadband connectivity services established through Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF) interventions during the reporting period. A community is considered to have operational broadband services when USAF-funded connectivity infrastructure has been installed, commissioned, and is actively delivering broadband services in accordance with approved technical and contractual requirements. Operational services refer to connectivity infrastructure that has successfully passed technical acceptance testing and is available for use by intended beneficiaries.
Source of Data	• Approved broadband rollout plans and project implementation schedules • Site commissioning and service activation reports • Implementing agent progress reports • USAASA monitoring dashboards and project tracking systems • MEL system performance data (where applicable)
Method of Calculation/ Assessment	Percentage of communities with operational USAF-funded broadband services = (Number of targeted communities with operational USAF-funded broadband services ÷ Total number of targeted communities identified for intervention in the reporting period) × 100
Assumptions	• Targeted communities are identified through approved planning instruments (e.g., Digital Inclusion Index or rollout plans) • Funding allocations for broadband projects are disbursed as planned • Implementing agents perform in accordance with contractual obligations • Required regulatory approvals and spectrum availability do not materially delay service activation • Infrastructure deployment conditions remain reasonably stable
Disaggregation of Beneficiaries (where applicable)	• By province • By district / municipality • By type of beneficiary site (e.g., schools, community access centres, households where applicable) • By priority classification as determined through approved targeting methodologies
Spatial Transformation	This indicator contributes to spatial transformation by prioritising broadband connectivity interventions in under-served, rural, and historically

(where applicable)	disadvantaged communities to improve equitable access to digital services and opportunities.
Reporting Cycle	Annual reporting with quarterly monitoring
Desired Performance	Achievement of planned annual targets as set out in the Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan
Indicator Responsibility	Primary: Programme 1: Operations (Broadband Implementation Function) Support: Programme 2: Research, Strategy and Performance Monitoring (Targeting and monitoring oversight)

Indicator for Outcome 2: Enhanced effectiveness of the national universal service subsidy framework

Indicator title	Percentage of communities with operational USAF-funded broadband services
Definition	This indicator measures the proportion of universal service subsidy programmes administered by USAASA that are implemented in accordance with formally approved governance and procedural framework instruments, including subsidy guidelines, administrative procedures, and compliance protocols. A subsidy programme is considered compliant when its planning, application processing, evaluation, approval, disbursement, monitoring, and reporting processes are conducted in line with approved governance and procedural instruments.
Source of Data	• Approved governance and procedural framework instruments (e.g., subsidy guidelines, administration procedures) • Programme implementation and administration records • USAASA monitoring and reporting systems • Internal audit or compliance monitoring reports • Programme performance reports
Method of Calculation/ Assessment	Percentage of subsidy programmes administered in accordance with approved governance and procedural framework instruments = $\left(\frac{\text{Number of universal service subsidy programmes administered using approved governance and procedural framework instruments}}{\text{Total number of universal service subsidy programmes administered during the reporting period}} \right) \times 100$
Assumptions	• Governance and procedural framework instruments are formally approved and operationalised • Subsidy programmes are implemented within planned funding cycles • Programme administration records are complete and reliable • Internal compliance monitoring mechanisms are functioning effectively • Institutional capacity exists to administer programmes in accordance with approved frameworks
Disaggregation of Beneficiaries (where applicable)	• By programme type (e.g., broadband connectivity, broadcasting, access support interventions) • By geographic coverage (province, district, municipality) • By beneficiary category (e.g., schools, community access centres, needy persons where applicable)
Spatial Transformation (where applicable)	This indicator contributes to spatial transformation by strengthening the governance and administration of subsidy programmes that target under-served and historically disadvantaged communities, thereby improving the equitable delivery of universal service interventions.
Reporting Cycle	Annual reporting with quarterly monitoring

Desired Performance	Achievement of planned annual targets as set out in the Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan
Indicator Responsibility	Primary: Research, Strategy and Performance Monitoring (Subsidy Framework Oversight) Support: Programme 1 – Operations (Programme Administration) Support: Corporate Services – Legal and Compliance Functions

Indicator for Outcome 3: Improved governance performance and institutional stability at USAASA

Indicator title	Percentage improvement in organisational performance effectiveness score
Definition	This indicator measures the annual percentage improvement in USAASA's overall organisational performance effectiveness, assessed through an approved composite performance effectiveness score that reflects institutional governance performance, operational efficiency, performance management effectiveness, critical capacity stability, and implementation progress of key organisational transformation initiatives. The organisational performance effectiveness score is derived from an integrated institutional performance assessment framework that consolidates validated performance data across strategic, operational, governance, and audit performance dimensions.
Source of Data	• Approved organisational performance scorecard • Moderated individual performance assessment results • Internal Audit and Auditor-General audit outcomes • Human resources capacity and critical vacancy reports • Digital Transformation Strategy implementation progress reports • Organisational performance monitoring and evaluation reports
Method of Calculation/ Assessment	Percentage improvement in organisational performance effectiveness score = $(\text{Current year organisational performance effectiveness score} - \text{Previous year organisational performance effectiveness score} \div \text{Previous year organisational performance effectiveness score}) \times 100$ The organisational performance effectiveness score shall be calculated using an approved institutional performance assessment methodology incorporating weighted performance dimensions.
Assumptions	• The institutional performance assessment framework is formally approved and consistently applied • Performance data across organisational units is accurate, validated, and complete • Organisational performance moderation processes are implemented effectively • Governance reform and digital transformation initiatives progress as planned • Critical institutional capacity is progressively stabilised
Disaggregation of Beneficiaries (where applicable)	Not applicable
Spatial Transformation	Not applicable

(where applicable)	
Reporting Cycle	Annual reporting with quarterly monitoring of contributing performance dimensions
Desired Performance	Achievement of planned annual percentage improvement targets as set out in the Strategic Plan
Indicator Responsibility	Primary: Research, Strategy and Performance Monitoring (Organisational Performance Oversight) Support: Corporate Services – Human Resources, ICT, and Internal Audit Functions Oversight: Executive Management and Accounting Authority

Indicator for Outcome 4: Strengthened governance and administration of the Universal Service and Access Fund

Indicator title	Percentage of USAF-funded programmes administered in accordance with approved governance, procedural and performance monitoring frameworks
Definition	This indicator measures the proportion of Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF)-funded programmes that are administered in accordance with formally approved governance instruments, procedural guidelines, and performance monitoring frameworks, including the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system. A programme is considered compliant when its planning, approval, implementation, reporting, monitoring, and oversight processes are executed in line with approved administrative and performance management instruments adopted by the Agency.
Source of Data	• Approved governance and procedural framework instruments (e.g., subsidy guidelines, programme administration procedures) • MEL system programme performance data and reports • Programme implementation and monitoring records • Internal compliance and monitoring reports • Programme performance review documentation
Method of Calculation/ Assessment	Percentage of USAF-funded programmes administered in accordance with approved frameworks = $\left(\frac{\text{Number of USAF-funded programmes administered using approved governance, procedural and performance monitoring frameworks}}{\text{Total number of USAF-funded programmes implemented during the reporting period}} \right) \times 100$
Assumptions	• Governance and procedural framework instruments are formally approved and operationalised • MEL system functionality and adoption is sustained across programmes • Programme administration records are complete and reliable • Institutional capacity exists to administer programmes in accordance with approved frameworks • Funding cycles and programme implementation timelines remain stable
Disaggregation of Beneficiaries (where applicable)	• By programme type (e.g., broadband connectivity, broadcasting support, access interventions) • By geographic coverage (province, district, municipality) • By beneficiary category (e.g., schools, community access centres, households where applicable)
Spatial Transformation (where applicable)	This indicator contributes to spatial transformation by strengthening governance and oversight of subsidy programmes targeting under-served and historically disadvantaged communities, thereby supporting equitable access to digital connectivity and services.
Reporting Cycle	Annual reporting with quarterly monitoring

Desired Performance	Achievement of planned annual percentage targets as set out in the Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan
Indicator Responsibility	Primary: Operations (USAF Programme Administration) Support: Research, Strategy and Performance Monitoring (MEL and governance oversight) Support: Corporate Services – Legal Services

Indicators for Outcome 5: Improved organisational efficiency and governance in contract lifecycle management across the organisation

Indicator title	Percentage of organisational contracts executed in accordance with approved lifecycle management standards
Definition	This indicator measures the proportion of organisational contracts that are planned, procured, executed, monitored, varied, and closed in accordance with formally approved contract lifecycle management standards and procedures adopted by the Agency. A contract is considered compliant when all key lifecycle stages, including contract planning, approval, award, implementation monitoring, performance management, amendments, and close-out, are administered in line with approved governance, procurement, and contract management frameworks.
Source of Data	• Enterprise contract management system records • Approved contract lifecycle management policies, procedures, and standards • SCM and Legal contract administration records • Internal audit and compliance monitoring reports • Contract performance monitoring and reporting documentation
Method of Calculation/ Assessment	Percentage of organisational contracts executed in accordance with approved lifecycle management standards = $(\text{Number of organisational contracts administered in compliance with approved lifecycle management standards} \div \text{Total number of organisational contracts active during the reporting period}) \times 100$ Compliance shall be determined through documented evidence of adherence to approved lifecycle management processes across all key contract stages.
Assumptions	• Approved contract lifecycle management standards are formally adopted and operationalised • Enterprise contract management system is progressively implemented and utilised • Contract administration records are complete and reliable • SCM, Legal, and programme management capacity is sufficient to support compliance • Procurement planning and budget availability remain stable
Disaggregation of Beneficiaries (where applicable)	• By contract category (e.g., infrastructure implementation, professional services, goods procurement, operational services) • By programme or organisational division • By contract value category (e.g., below threshold, above threshold, strategic contracts)
Spatial Transformation (where applicable)	Not applicable

Reporting Cycle	Annual reporting with quarterly monitoring
Desired Performance	Achievement of planned annual percentage targets as set out in the Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan
Indicator Responsibility	Primary: Supply Chain Management Function Support: Legal Services Function Support: Contract Owner Divisions Oversight: Executive Management

Indicators for Outcome 6: Increased stakeholder trust in USAASA

Indicator title	Percentage of key stakeholder expressing trust in Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa as measured through approved stakeholder perception surveys.
Definition	This indicator measures the proportion of surveyed key stakeholder groups who express trust and confidence in USAASA's governance, transparency, service delivery effectiveness, and institutional credibility, as determined through an approved stakeholder perception survey conducted during the reporting period. Stakeholder trust refers to the level of confidence stakeholders place in the Agency's ability to effectively administer universal service and access interventions in a fair, accountable, and transparent manner.
Source of Data	• Approved stakeholder perception survey instruments • Survey reports and datasets • Stakeholder engagement and communications monitoring reports • External research or evaluation reports (where applicable)
Method of Calculation/ Assessment	Percentage of key stakeholders expressing trust in USAASA = $\left(\frac{\text{Number of surveyed stakeholders indicating trust or confidence in USAASA}}{\text{Total number of stakeholders surveyed}} \right) \times 100$ Trust shall be measured using a standardised scoring scale incorporated into an approved perception survey methodology.
Assumptions	• Stakeholder perception survey methodology is formally approved and consistently applied • Survey sample adequately represents key stakeholder groups • Survey responses are reliable and collected in accordance with accepted research standards • Institutional reforms and engagement initiatives are implemented as planned • External environmental factors do not materially distort stakeholder perceptions
Disaggregation of Beneficiaries (where applicable)	• By stakeholder category (e.g., implementing agents, beneficiaries, regulators, industry partners, civil society) • By geographic location (province, district, municipality where relevant) • By programme interaction type (e.g., funding recipients, oversight stakeholders, service beneficiaries)
Spatial Transformation (where applicable)	This indicator contributes indirectly to spatial transformation by improving institutional trust among stakeholders involved in delivering universal service interventions to under-served and historically disadvantaged communities.
Reporting Cycle	Annual reporting aligned with the timing of the approved stakeholder perception survey

Desired Performance	Achievement of planned annual percentage improvement targets as set out in the Strategic Plan
Indicator Responsibility	Primary: Communications and Stakeholder Management Support: Research, Strategy, and Performance Monitoring (Stakeholder research and performance oversight) Oversight: Executive Management