NEXT CENTURY CITIES

MARCH 2023

Louisville, Kentucky

DIGITAL EQUITY
AND DISABILITY
AWARENESS
MONTH 2023

GRANULAR DATA &
THE AFFORDABLE
CONNECTIVITY
PROGRAM

CONSUMER
BROADBAND
NUTRITION LABEL
REQUIREMENTS

INSIDE

Disability Awareness Month 2023

Digital Inclusion for people with disabilities

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY:

Research from the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College Haley House found that counties with a high portion of people with disabilities also have lower levels of access to computers, Internet, and broadband. This disparity was reported across rural and urban communities alike. While residents living in non-rural areas have greater access to technology, communities with higher rates of disability insurance awards had less access to technology than their peers regardless of rural status.

A 2022 report from the US Department of Labor found that people with disabilities experienced a greater recovery following COVID-19 related job losses in 2021. Despite recent improvements attributed for increases in remote work, "persons with a disability continue to experience higher unemployment and lower labor force participation compared to those without a disability and chronic disparities between the two groups persist."

WEB ACCESSIBILITY

Online tools are more prevalent than ever. Still, too often, accessibility for people with disabilities remains an afterthought. In March 2022, the US Justice Department released guidance on web accessibility. In the words of Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division: "People with disabilities deserve to have an equal opportunity to access the services, goods and programs provided by government and businesses, including when offered or communicated through websites."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Surge in remote working due to COVID fuels record employment for people with disabilities** (LA Times)
- **Remote Work Increases Accessibility, Widens Talent Pool** (Government Technology)
- **Prison and Jail Phone Justice Advocates Applaud FCC's Action to Affirm Rights for People with Disabilities** (Benton Institute for Broadband & Society)
- **Empowering People With Disabilities Through Digital Inclusion** (NCC)

LOCAL DIGITAL EQUITY CHAMPIONS SHARE THEIR EXPERTISE AT NET INCLUSION 2023 IN SAN ANTONIO

BY CORIAN ZACHER

Over 800 broadband advocates from across the US convened in San Antonio, Texas, for Net Inclusion 2023, a three-day conference organized by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance. It featured topics ranging from technology accessibility for people with disabilities to skilling incarcerated residents for economic opportunities upon reentry. Next Century Cities led discussions on why collaborating with local officials is essential for achieving digitally equitable outcomes throughout communities.

In the three years since 2020, the number of local digital equity plans increased exponentially. **Detroit, Michigan**; **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**; **Durham, North Carolina**; and **Harris County, Texas** stand alongside many municipalities across the U.S. that have worked with their community to build sustainable digital inclusion strategies.

On February 28, 2023, Juliet Yates, Digital Inclusion Manager for the City of Philadelphia; Laura B. Fogle, Founder and Board Member of Digital Durham; John Speirs, Broadband Manager for the Harris County Office of Broadband; and Autumn Evans, Deputy Digital Inclusion Director for the City of Detroit shared their digital equity expertise on a panel moderated by Next Century Cities' Senior Policy Counsel Corian Zacher.

Juliet Yates' work transcends Philadelphia, and her leadership has been instrumental in developing a statewide coalition that keeps community leaders informed about broadband policy. In her words, "You don't need 500 people in your coalition to start. Find the four people who are going to show up, and then build your coalition from there."

Continue reading about the Net Inclusion panel **here**.

NEXT CENTURY CITIES PARTNERS WITH NATIONAL DIGITAL INCLUSION ALLIANCE FOR WORKSHOP ON INFLUENCING PUBLIC POLICY AT NET INCLUSION CONFERENCE IN SAN ANTONIO
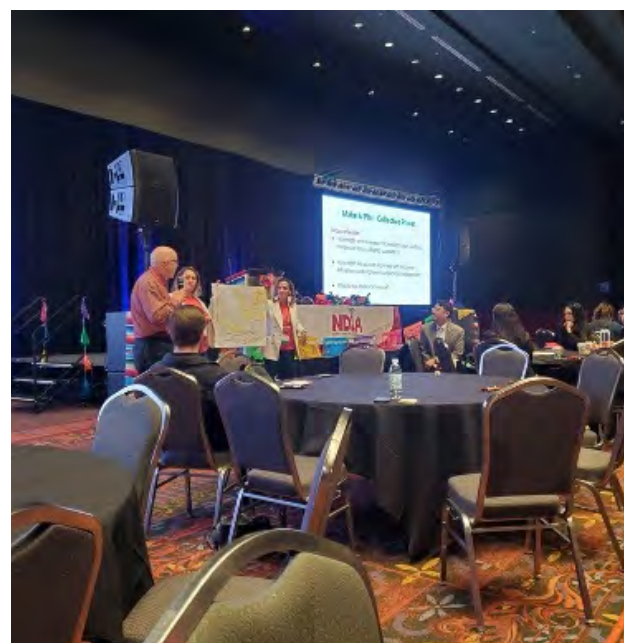
BY BRIAN DONOGHUE

One through-line of the programming presented by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) and their community of digital equity advocates at Net Inclusion was a concerted effort to empower local leaders. Ideas and collaborations launched at the conference in San Antonio will shape broadband strategies throughout communities over the next year.

Next Century Cities' Deputy Director, Brian Donoghue, joined NDIA Research Director Amy Huffman and other national leaders to lead a workshop that equipped community broadband leaders with tools and techniques on broadband advocacy. Local officials and community leaders who are able to advocate for themselves have more opportunities to improve access and adoption.

The expert panel focused on detailed ways for attendees to talk about broadband with policymakers at all levels of government. Additionally, panelists discussed various advocacy strategies, from participating in federal rulemaking to helping their local mayor understand why broadband for all is essential for economic development.

Continue reading about the workshop here.

GRANULAR DATA WOULD MAKE THE ACP AND ITS OUTREACH GRANT PROGRAM MORE EFFECTIVE

BY RYAN JOHNSTON

"THE ACP OUTREACH GRANT PROGRAM MAY BE A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD. ON ONE HAND, IT MAY HELP GET MORE PEOPLE CONNECTED. ON THE OTHER HAND, WITHOUT ADDITIONAL FUNDING, INCREASED PARTICIPATION ACCELERATES THE END OF THE ACP."

Breckenridge, Colorado

The Affordable Connectivity Program ("ACP") continues to be one of only two federal programs designed to address broadband affordability. On March 10, 2023, the Federal Communications Commission ("FCC" or "Commission") announced its awardees for the ACP Outreach Grant Program ("ACP OGP"). This program allotted 60 million dollars among 177 grantees and is primarily designed to:

- Expand and support diverse and impactful outreach efforts nationwide;
- Strengthen outreach partners nationwide, empowering them to mobilize people and organizations to help raise awareness about the ACP; and
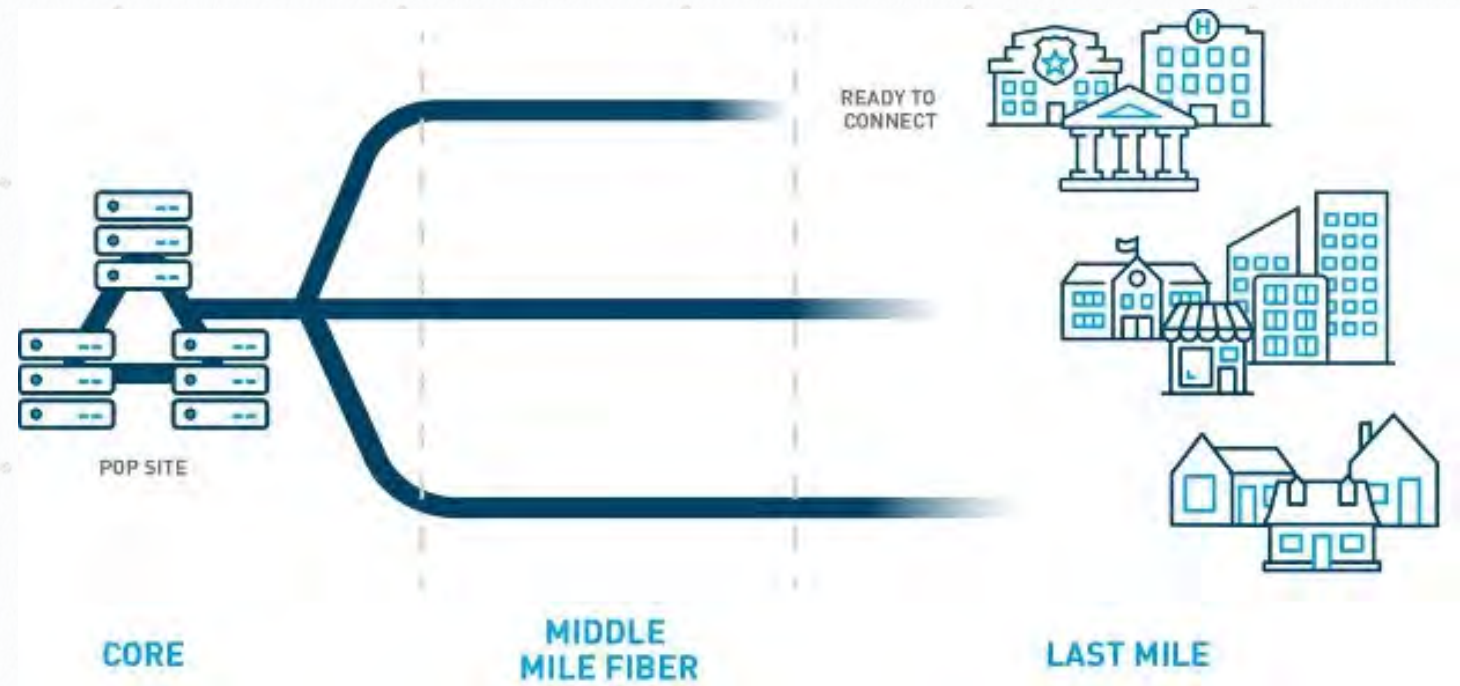- Increase ACP enrollment as a result of the ACP Outreach Grant Program-funded activities.

However, the ACP OGP may be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it may help get more people connected. On the other hand, without additional funding, increased participation accelerates the end of the ACP.

As policymakers brainstorm ways to improve public awareness and perpetually fund the ACP, a key piece of information needed is clear data on how successful the program has been. The FCC should leverage the ACP Transparency Data Collection that has been mandated by the Infrastructure, Investment and Jobs Act ("IIJA").

Continue reading **here**.

NEXT CENTURY CITIES REITERATES THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCURATE, TRANSPARENT DATA ABOUT MIDDLE-MILE NETWORKS

By Corian Zacher

On March 13, 2023, Next Century Cities filed comments in response to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) public notice about reporting requirements for Middle Mile Grant Program recipients. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed in November 2021 made $1 billion available for middle-mile infrastructure funding. After the application period closed in September 2022, NTIA requested public comments on reporting requirements for awardees.

Broadband providers across the country need accurate and transparent middle-mile infrastructure maps in order to bring high-quality, affordable broadband to communities. States like Massachusetts and Kentucky have statewide middle-mile networks, which local governments as well as community anchor institutions like schools, libraries, and hospitals, have used to improve local broadband access.

Providing robust, transparent information about middle-mile networks can help lower the cost and decrease the time communities spend collecting infrastructure data after the fact. As states implement competitive broadband grant programs for last-mile service, the information NTIA makes available about middle-mile networks will provide an important touchpoint for applicants of all types.

Read NCC's March 13th letter here.

NEXT CENTURY CITIES PARTNERS WITH CONSUMER REPORTS TO FILE COMMENTS AND REPLIES ON THE

FCC's Consumer Broadband Nutrition Label Requirements

BY RYAN JOHNSTON

Broadband Facts

Provider Name
Service Plan Name and/or Speed Tier
Fixed or Mobile Broadband Consumer Disclosure

Monthly Price [$]

This Monthly Price [is/is not] an introductory rate. (If introductory rate is applicable, identify length of introductory period and the rate that will apply after introductory period concludes)

Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)
The ACP is a government program to help [ ]
cost of internet service. To learn more abo[ ]
to find out whether you qualify, visit afford[ ]

Participates in the ACP

Speeds Provided with Plan
Typical Download Speed
Typical Upload Speed
Typical Latency

Data Included with Monthly Price

The Consumer Broadband Nutrition Label ("CBNL") was designed by the Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") to help consumers understand the true cost of their broadband plans. The labels are intended to detail the charges, fees, and other components of the final cost a consumer sees on their monthly bill. They are also designed to show critical service information like network outage time and data caps.
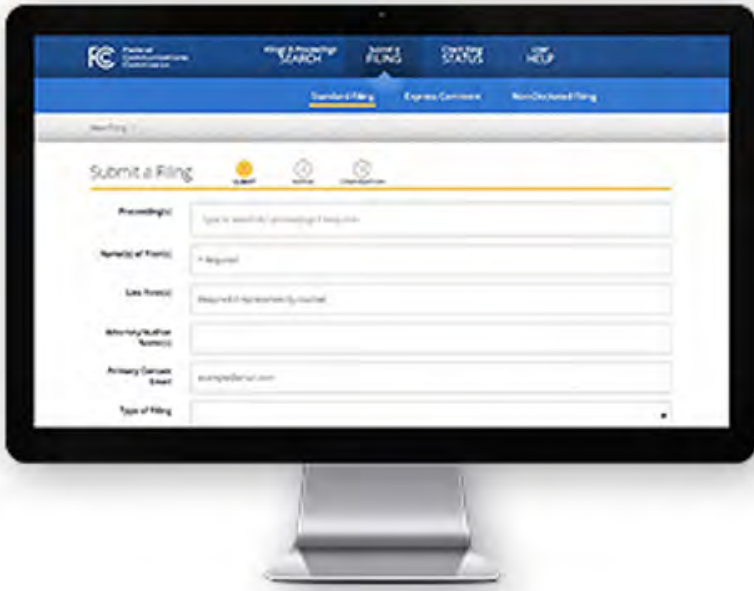
On November 17, 2022, the FCC released a _Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking_ to clarify what information the label should include regarding accessibility, pricing, network performance information, network management practices, and formatting requirements. In response, Next Century Cities and Consumer Reports filed _comments_ and _reply comments_ urging the FCC to require providers to:

- Make the label available in English, Spanish, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, Arabic, and any other language a specific provider advertises in;
- Utilize the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines to make the label more easily accessible to those with disabilities;
- Include an average monthly speed on the label, instead of a "typical" speed range;
- Include all applicable discounts and state and local taxes on the label to provide a clear bottom line price for consumers;
- Provide a clear bottom line price for consumers with all applicable discounts and state and local taxes on the label; and
- Break out the Internet portion of service plan bundles so consumers can clearly identify what they pay for broadband service separate from phone and cable TV services.

Read more **here**.

NEXT CENTURY CITIES JOINS ALLIES IN REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION ON DIGITAL DISCRIMINATION REPLY COMMENTS

BY RYAN JOHNSTON

On March 13, 2023, Next Century Cities joined Public Knowledge, Benton Institute for Broadband & Society, Center for Accessible Technology, Common Cause, Common Sense Media, Communications Workers of America, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Free Press, The Greenlining Institute, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, MediaJustice, National Urban League, National Digital Inclusion Alliance, and TURN–The Utility Reform Network in a motion for extension of time for reply comments in the FCC's digital discrimination docket.

The motion requested an extension for 30 days, moving the reply comment date to April 20, 2023. Additional time will allow public interest groups to address over 1400 pages of complex legal arguments filed in the docket. The motion highlights FCC Chairwoman Rosenworcel's words:

> **Getting to final rules next year will require more engagement, more collaboration, and more work. The input we have received thus far from stakeholders is an awfully good start. But to get this right, we still need more input and ideas because we can't reach our goal of connecting everyone, everywhere unless we eliminate digital discrimination.**

Read the full motion for extension here. The request was granted on Friday, March 17th. The new comment deadline is **Thursday, April 20, 2023**. Review NCC's guide to file your own comments here.

MEMBER REQUEST

IS YOUR COMMUNITY WORKING ON DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR INCARCERATED POPULATIONS?

DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR

INCARCERATED RESIDENTS

Next Century Cities

INCARCERATION IN THE U.S.

While the United States is only home to 4% of the world's population, 16% of people incarcerated globally live in the U.S. That amounts to over two million residents nationwide. While the prison population began to decrease after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, local jail populations grew. (**Incarceration Statistics, Vera Institute of Justice**)

THE NEED FOR DIGITAL TOOLS

Researchers at the Marshall Project asked inmates what could have decreased the likelihood of them going to prison in the first place. The answers align directly with resources that reliable broadband connections provide, such as employment opportunities, access to healthcare, and the ability to further education.

CLICK FOR MORE RESOURCES:

- KU professor helps formerly incarcerated women develop digital media skills
- Imprisoned by the Digital Divide: Unincarcerated the Podcast
- How Corrections Departments Are Preparing People for In-Demand Careers That Support America's Infrastructure

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🌐 nextcenturycities.org

LEGAL AID PROVIDERS: NONTRADITIONAL ALLIES

Remote court proceedings have become a fixed component of the legal system over the last several years. Even though remote court options offer greater flexibility, it creates new obstacles for civil and criminal litigants who do not have reliable broadband access to participate effectively in their own proceedings. Legal aid organizations could support this effort. They are uniquely positioned to overcome trust barriers by helping clients enroll in low-income programs. Local leaders should seek their partnership when conducting community outreach. Read more in **Cut off From the Courthouse: How the Digital Divide Impacts Access to Justice and Civic Engagement**.

LOCAL BROADBAND LEADERSHIP

Like other underserved populations, incarcerated residents face both access and adoption connectivity barriers. Some communities have taken steps to address deficiencies in the underlying networks that connect jails and prisons. For example, Ohio municipal broadband network FairlawnGig partnered with the Summit County Criminal Justice Technology Project to utilize CARES Act funding to build a fiber ring connecting Akron's jail systems, a project which is now complete. As well as improving reliability and redundancy, Fairlawn's local network offers a secure alternative to incumbent providers. Learn more about Fairlawn's story in **The Ohio Case Study**.

Do you have resources that we can share with another member municipality? Please email us at info@nextcenturycities.org.

opportunities for members

EMPLOYMENT

Digital Inclusion and Community Engagement Manager | The City of Durham, North Carolina

Digital Equity Manager | The Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network

Resident Technology Instructor | Shillman House

Workforce Development Consultant, Digital Equity Ecosystem | The State of Kentucky

SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCE

FCC Regional Listening Session in Baltimore, MD | The FCC's Taskforce to Prevent Digital Discrimination

Iowa Town Hall Meetings on Digital Services | The State of Iowa

Closing the Digital Divide Listening Tour | The North Carolina Department of Information Technology

Broadband Connectivity Survey | The Maine Connectivity Authority

TRAININGS AND CONVENINGS

Boston Digital Navigator Training | The Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

Indigenous Connectivity Summit in Anchorage, AK | Connect Humanity

The North American School of Internet Governance | NASIG