



BROADBAND MAKES US BETTER

LESSONS FROM THE LONE STAR STATE

BY CORIAN ZACHER AND BRIAN DONOGHUE

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NOVEMBER 2022

Brownsville, TX

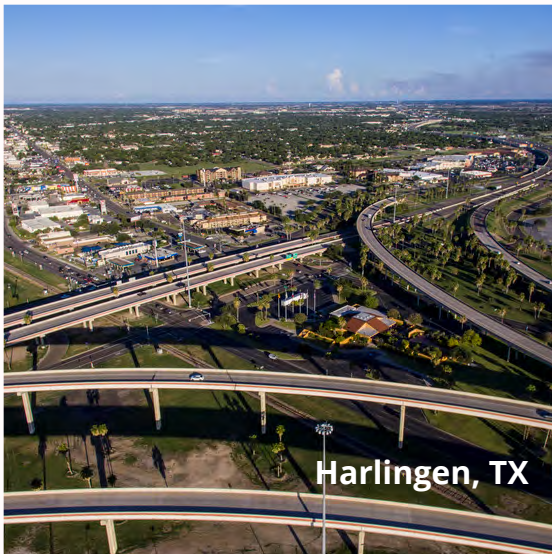


BROADBAND MAKES US BETTER: LESSONS FROM THE LONE STAR STATE

featuring research by
Corian Zacher, Senior Policy Counsel
& **Brian Donoghue, Deputy Director**



Pharr, TX



Harlingen, TX

Texas is home to seven Next Century Cities member municipalities: **Mont Belvieu, Arlington, San Antonio, Austin, Gainesville, College Station, and Bryan.** Like many states across the US, Texas did not have a centralized broadband office until 2021. Local governments and nonprofits in Texas have been working to improve broadband for their residents since long before the pandemic, but COVID-19 brought the issue to light. In particular, broadband plays a critical role in healthcare, education, economic development, entrepreneurship, and access to the legal system.

Next Century Cities case study, [Broadband Makes US Better: Lessons from the Lone Star State](#) documents broadband stories from across Texas. Through ongoing relationships with community organizations, local leaders across the state have been able to bolster participation in access and adoption programs. The range of local broadband programming in Texas spans the gamut from distributing devices, providing digital skills training to building infrastructure, and developing community relationships that outlast individual programs.



Community Partners are Necessary Components of Trusted Broadband Programs

As detailed in the report, "By empowering local leaders with the resources necessary to meet residents' needs, federal and state policymakers can design programs that grow on-the-ground efforts. Fundamentally, investing in community-based programs and expertise helps build a legacy of inclusion into the broadband networks of tomorrow."

Public programming throughout the pandemic in the Cities of Pharr, Brownsville, Mont Belvieu, San Antonio, Austin, and Harlingen as well as Tarrant and Harris Counties, provides a case study illustrating how local partners are critical to building trust and accountability in broadband programs.

Showcasing Efforts in NCC Member Communities

Using CARES Act funding, the **City of San Antonio** acted quickly after the start of the pandemic, setting up public wireless to its 40 most disconnected neighborhoods. After identifying over 130 organizations working to address various aspects of the digital divide, community partnership SA Digital Connects is seeking sustainable, long-term solutions that harness collective resources and collaboration to build high-quality infrastructure. Responding to the needs of local partners, SA Digital Connects released an ACP toolkit and enrollment guide to help community organizations assist with program applications.

The **City of Austin** offers matching grants to community organizations to support local digital inclusion efforts. Through its Grant for Technology Opportunities Program (GTOPs) that was established in 2001, the City of Austin helps sustain the ecosystem of local organizations working to improve digital outcomes for residents. Additionally, the City has a dedicated team member to conduct community outreach activities to increase ACP enrollment and coordinate with other supporters and Travis County.

Learn more about these and many other community stories in [**Broadband Makes Us Better: Lessons from the Lone Star State.**](#)

Broadband By All *and* For All

Local leaders are on-the-ground points of contact who help residents take advantage of broadband programs, filling trust barriers between federal leaders and community members. In a world where everyone has a role to play in expanding and improving broadband access and adoption, local governments are collaborating with residents and area nonprofits to maximize community impact.

Find your community highlights in the [**report.**](#)

View the [**press release.**](#)

Read the [**blog post.**](#)

RECOGNIZING INDIGENOUS BROADBAND LEADERS

November is National Native American Heritage Month. During this time, we would like to recognize some of the Indigenous local leaders working to ensure that their communities and Tribal populations have access to Internet and necessary technology needed to thrive.

KIMBALL SEKAQUAPTEWA | COCHITI PUEBLO, NM

Sekaquaptewa of the Hopi Tribe is the Chief Technology Director at the **Santa Fe Indian School**, an off-reservation boarding school that serves 700 students from the 19 Pueblos, the Apache, and Navajo tribes of New Mexico.



KEVIN SHENDO | JEMEZ PUEBLO, NM

Shendo serves as the Education Director for Jemez Pueblo. In this role he works alongside students and their families to ensure that they are connected to the Internet and are able to reap its full benefits.

CHRISTOPHER KEY | DEL MAR, CA

A member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, Key is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of True North Diversified. As a board member of **Hesperus**, he is dedicated to advocating for underserved Tribal populations, especially technology access.



NEW REPORT: BEYOND BROADBAND ACCESS



THE NEED FOR ADVOCACY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN THE K-12 DIGITAL WORLD

By Symone Campbell, Communications and Research Fellow

Challenges within the American educational system have been documented since its establishment. Educational barriers acutely impact the country's marginalized populations. The most recent area of focus has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reports have suggested the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a decline in two decades worth of progress in educational testing scores and comprehension for kindergarten through twelfth grade ("K-12") students nationally. Among the most

impacted students are low-income Black, Latinx, and Tribal youth. Although historically, federal funding has been allocated to provide these students with access to educational technology, disparities persist.

[Beyond Broadband, Access, and Adoption: The Need for Advocacy and Cultural Competency in the K-12 Digital World](#) provides a historical overview of how educational access barriers that have been perpetuated by the digital divide affect low-income, Black, Latinx, and Native students. Specifically, the report draws correlations between disenfranchised students who were further disadvantaged by broadband access and adoption barriers during the COVID-19 era. The analysis includes examples of the detrimental effects in addition to information about federally-funded and community-based programs that support cultural competency.

“

Broadband access barriers are reinforced by systemic issues related to race and class, such as digital redlining. These practices indirectly and directly impact low-income primary and secondary students of color's access to technology that has been deemed necessary to thrive in today's digital society.

NEXT CENTURY CITIES'

Day on the Hill

On Wednesday, October 19, 2022, several members of the Next Century Cities team visited with United States House and Senatorial offices to discuss broadband access and adoption challenges faced by many residents in member municipalities.

While on the Hill, the team spoke with technology staff members from the offices of Senator Brian Schatz (HI), Senator Dianne Feinstein (CA), Senator Deb Fischer (NE), and Representative Marcy Kaptur (D-OH 9th district). During each meeting, the conversation focused on the challenges that residents and local leaders have with collecting, submitting, and challenging broadband mapping data. Team members also highlighted recently issued reports, [“Resounding Silence: The Need For Local Insights In Federal Policymaking”](#) and [“Changing Our \(Virtual\) Reality: Telehealth and the United States Maternal Health Crisis.”](#)

The team also followed up with a virtual meeting with the Subcommittee on Communications, Media, and Broadband to discuss broadband mapping, middle-mile infrastructure, and network resilience.

The NCC team prioritizes visiting Congressional offices twice annually, to help foster relationships between representatives and the constituents they serve. We encourage all local leaders to reach out to NCC directly if you are interested in visiting in-person or virtually with your representatives during our next #NCCDayOnTheHill.



NCC Celebrates DELL Program Graduates Who Are Operationalizing Digital Equity in Baltimore Neighborhoods



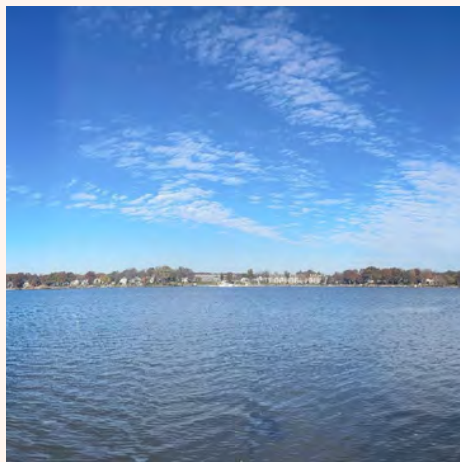
The Robert W. Deutsch Foundation launched the Digital Equity Leadership Lab (DELL) in 2021. Community leaders working in various disciplines – education, healthcare, art, entrepreneurship, anti-poverty, and more – were selected for the program, which strengthens their ability to advocate for fast, affordable, and reliable broadband. Upon graduation, the graduates are invited to submit proposals for microgrants that support local digital equity initiatives in Baltimore neighborhoods.

On November 10, 2022, Executive Director Francella Ochillo provided remarks at the Digital Equity Showcase featuring the second cohort of DELL graduates. From building computer labs to WiFi-equipped parks, the newly minted advocates shared the many ways in which their organizations are operationalizing digital equity. As Ochillo stated, “communities are think tanks for local problem-solving.” She explained that, by filling in gaps in technology, these community leaders are empowering disconnected “residents to stay, invest in, and give back to the communities they call home.”

Next Century Cities congratulates the 29th St. Community Center, Village Learning Place, Central Baltimore Partnership, Open Works, Neighborhood Design Center, Mt. Sinai Baptist Church/ReBUILD Johnston Square, and others for their commitment to closing Baltimore’s digital divide. Watch the full presentation [here](#).

ready, go!

NCC PARTICIPATES IN ANNUAL MICHIGAN BROADBAND SUMMIT



Deputy Director Brian Donoghue represented Next Century Cities at the [Michigan Broadband Summit](#) in Holland, Michigan, on November 3rd, 2022. Merit Network hosted this informative event that included presentations from federal and state officials. Conversations with local leaders about their broadband program success stories were one of many program highlights.

The annual gathering kicked off with presentations from Ben Fineman, Michigan Federal Program Officer for NTIA, and Eric Frederick, Chief Connectivity Officer of the Michigan High-Speed Internet Office. After Fineman shared highlights of NTIA's BEAD and Digital Equity Programs, Frederick provided an overview of the Michigan High-Speed Internet Office and shared more information about their upcoming programs and FCC data challenges.

Continue reading about the 2022 Michigan Broadband Summit [here](#).

WHAT LOCAL LEADERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE FCC'S AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM

ACP OUTREACH GRANTS



WHO CAN APPLY?

A diverse range of governmental and nongovernmental entities are eligible, including:

- State, Local, and Tribal governments
- Community-based organizations
- Anchor institutions
- Workforce development organizations
- Public and Tribal housing agencies
- Social service providers
- Nonprofits

WHAT IS COVERED?

Eligible entities are able to request funding from a minimum amount of \$50,000 to a maximum of \$1,000,000. These funds can cover costs including:

- In-person ACP application assistance
- Creation and distribution of outreach materials
- Direct mail outreach
- Personnel costs
- Planning, travel, facility rental, and supplies.
- Digital Marketing and paid media campaigns
- Consumer research and focus groups

HOW TO APPLY

The FCC hosted a [webinar](#) on Nov. 15, 2022 outlining the application process. **Applications are due on Jan. 9, 2023** at 11:59 p.m. ET. The FCC will announce awards by March 10, 2023.

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE OUTREACH PROGRAM (NCOP) - \$60 MILLION

Funds outreach activities to increase awareness of and encourage participation in the ACP for eligible low-income households.

TRIBAL COMPETITIVE OUTREACH PROGRAM (TCOP) - \$10 MILLION

Funds outreach activities to increase awareness of and encourage participation in the ACP for households on tribal lands.

YOUR HOME, YOUR INTERNET (YHYI) OUTREACH GRANTS - \$5 MILLION

Notice of Funding Opportunity and application deadline are forthcoming.

AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (ACP) NAVIGATOR PILOT PROGRAM (NPP) OUTREACH GRANTS - \$5 MILLION

Notice of Funding Opportunity and application deadline are forthcoming.

CLICK FOR MORE RESOURCES:

- [FCC Notice of Funding Opportunity](#)
- [Affordable Connectivity Pilot Programs](#)
- [Apply Now to Receive Support for Your ACP Outreach Efforts \(Benton\)](#)



 broadbandhub.org

 info@nextcenturycities.org

 nextcenturycities.org

WHERE IS YOUR COMMUNITY ON THE MAP?

Here's What Your Community Can Do to Improve Broadband Mapping



RYAN JOHNSTON

On November 18th, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) [released the first edition of maps](#) required under the Broadband DATA Act. They utilize an underlying fabric of broadband serviceable locations and layer provider availability data on top, providing a more granular view of how homes and businesses across the nation are served.

Unfortunately, the first iteration of these maps has notable errors and is missing information. For instance, broadband serviceable locations that should be included in the maps may not be, and some multi-tenant environments are recorded as one unit even if there are multiple in the complex.

Visit <https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/home> to find out what the FCC's maps state about broadband access in your community. The challenge process is now open. NTIA is encouraging local governments to submit mapping corrections [before January 13th](#) to be reflected in each state's BEAD funding allocation.

Have questions? The **FCC's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs** (IGA) is responsible for outreach to state and local governments. State and local officials should reach out via email at: IGA@fcc.gov. Local officials can also reach out to ryan@nextcenturycities.org for support.

UPCOMING NCC EVENTS

BUILD BROADBAND TOGETHER | A HYBRID EVENT



**Catherine
Nicoalou**

Broadband Program Manager
at City of Albuquerque



**Jennifer
Nevarez**

Director and Lead Educator at
CommUNITY Learning Network



**Kimball
Sekaquaptewa**

Chief Technology Director at
Santa Fe Indian School



**Roxanna
Barboza**

Program Director at Next
Century Cities

Local and state officials nationwide are working to increase broadband access and adoption. On **December 7, 2022, at 1:00 p.m. MT/ 3:00 p.m. ET** Participants will learn about best practices being implemented in New Mexican communities from local leaders who are taking ownership of persistent digital divides. Following the panel discussion, local and state leaders will have the opportunity to network and share ideas about how upcoming broadband grant programs could address local connectivity needs.

[CLICK FOR IN-PERSON REGISTRATION](#)

[CLICK FOR VIRTUAL REGISTRATION](#)

USING INTERACTIVE DATA TO INFORM LOCAL BROADBAND STRATEGIES

Register for the December 8th
interactive broadband data discussion [here](#).

**BRIDGING THE
U.S.
BROADBAND
DIVIDE -FAIRLY:**

PRESENTED BY DIGITAL PLANET AT
THE FLETCHER SCHOOL AT TUFTS
UNIVERSITY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
NEXT CENTURY CITIES

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8TH, 2:00 P.M. ET

FLETCHER

Digital Planet

Next
Century
Cities

Digital Planet is an interdisciplinary research initiative of The Fletcher School's Institute for Business at Tufts University. Using publicly available data from the US Census Bureau, BroadbandNow, and Microsoft, Digital Planet created an interactive broadband mapping toolkit to pinpoint broadband access gaps and affordability deserts by zip code nationwide.

Join us on **December 8, 2022, at 2:00 p.m. ET** for a discussion on how local, state, and federal policymakers and community leaders can use data from the interactive tool to inform broadband strategies. Welcome remarks will be provided by Bhaskar Chakravorti, Dean of Global Business at Tufts University's Fletcher School. Register [here](#).

In Case You Missed It

The **Washington State Broadband Office** is hiring for several roles. They are [Digital Equity Manager](#), [Broadband Equity Engagement Coordinator](#), [Commerce Specialist 3](#), and [Digital Equity and Broadband Planner](#). Learn more about the respective roles through the linked descriptions.

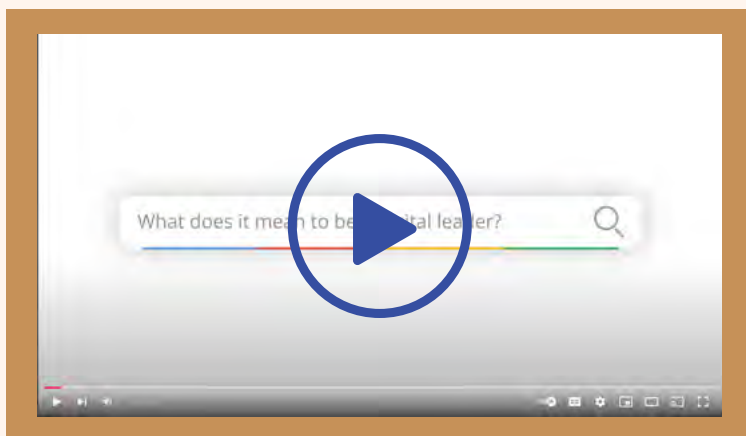
The **Massachusetts Broadband Institute** seeks a [Digital Equity Planner](#).

Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority is hiring an [Infrastructure Program Manager](#). The application closes on **Wednesday, November 23rd**.

The **City of Philadelphia** has an open role for a [Broadband and Smart Cities Manager](#).

New York State is hiring for a [Senior Director, Digital Equity](#). The application closes on **November 28th**.

The **Community Health Plan of Washington** seeks a full-time remote [Digital Navigator](#).



Established in 2012, [KC Digital Drive](#) has a goal of "making Kansas City a digital leader." NCC's Francella Ochillo recently spoke about the significance of digital leadership as part of KC's National Digital Leader highlight. Listen to Francella's reflections [here](#).

Federal Broadband Policy Highlights

Next Century Cities Supports the Broadband Connects America Coalition's Call for the FCC to Incorporate Speed-Test Data Into the New Broadband Availability Challenge Process

On October 18th, Next Century Cities joined with the Broadband Connects America Coalition and other public interest allies to send a letter to the Federal Communications Commission's Broadband Data Task Force. This letter highlighted the need for the FCC to allow the collection of speed test data for the new FCC map's availability challenge process. The letter also called for the FCC to release guidance on how consumers can participate in the availability challenge process. Read the full letter [here](#).



NCC's Program Director, Roxy Barboza, discusses BEAD Programs with NTIA's Deputy Associate Administrator, Evan Feinman

NCC Files Ex Parte on Digital Discrimination

On November, 3, 2022 Next Century Cities and other public interest allies met with the Federal Communications Commission's Digital Discrimination Task Force. During the meeting NCC emphasized that the Commission must partner with local and state governments to identify digital discrimination. NCC also highlighted that states and localities are already developing digital equity plans that the FCC can use to understand how other governments are responding to digital discrimination. NCC also highlighted ways in which the FCC can help bring more individuals into the process. Ensuring that consumers can participate in the Broadband Data Collection Challenge Process or establishing a call center will guarantee that consumer's voices will be heard. Read the Full ex parte [here](#).

NTIA's Evan Feinman Joins NCC to Discuss BEAD Program Details for Local Leaders

On October 5th, 2022, Next Century Cities' Program Director Roxy Barboza sat down for a fireside chat with Evan Feinman, Program Director for the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). Feinman discussed how the BEAD Program will inject billions of dollars into local and state broadband projects. Barboza asked questions on behalf of local leaders, collecting details on what potential grant applicants can expect in months to come. Their full conversation can be viewed [here](#).