

PENNSYLVANIA

JULY 2023 NEWS BULLETIN



Pennsylvania Valley

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NCC IS EQUIPPING PENNSYLVANIA ADVOCATES WITH WAYS TO ENSURE THAT BROADBAND INVESTMENTS ADDRESS COMMUNITY NEEDS

Next Century Cities' mission is to ensure local leaders have the resources and autonomy to develop the connectivity solutions their communities need. We know that the most powerful digital equity movements involve community members who are informed and local leaders who are ready to collaborate.

In June, NCC released [Resources for Broadband Advocates: Making Digital Equity a Reality in Pennsylvania](#), proving our commitment to empowering residents with ways to advocate for themselves. On May 26, 2023, NCC hosted a webinar highlighting key takeaways from the report.

Participants received an overview of broadband access and adoption in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. NCC staff highlighted federal and state broadband developments, focusing on role-model communities statewide. Jennifer Blatz, Program Director at the Greater Pittsburgh Digital Inclusion Alliance, encouraged advocates and residents to work in coalition to advance digital equity goals. Sascha Meinrath, Palmer Chair in Telecommunications at Penn State University and Founder of X-Lab, warned participants about the consequences of poor broadband mapping and misconceived investment strategies.

Click [here](#) to review the Pennsylvania report. It is a power mapping exercise that can be replicated for local leaders in other states. We invite you to share stories or recommendations that could make the report more useful for community leaders by emailing us at info@nextcenturycities.org.

IMPORTANT STATEWIDE UPDATES



20 STATEWIDE IN-PERSON COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS INPUT SESSIONS WITH PBDA

The Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority (PBDA) is working towards bringing reliable, high-speed internet for all, along with advancing support and resources to improve digital access and skills to increase economic and social opportunities for all residents. To assist in this initiative, they are scheduling a series of meetings and events across the state to enable and encourage deeper and continued input from residents, community organizations, and municipal and county representatives.

Throughout June and July, there will be up to 20 in-person Community Conversations across the state. These sessions are designed to engage community members in discussions about broadband use and to provide information about the Commonwealth's work to develop an actionable plan to ensure equitable, affordable broadband access for all residents, businesses, and communities. Review the schedule [here](#).

PBDA SURVEY TO COLLECT INPUT FROM RESIDENTS ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA

As the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania seeks to expand and invest in improved broadband connectivity and digital access, your input as a Pennsylvania resident will provide vital support to the Commonwealth's strategies to close the digital divide. Your input will inform the 5-Year Action Plan and Digital Equity Plans being prepared in 2023 by the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority. By completing this survey, you are providing critical information that will help the Commonwealth qualify for over \$1 billion in federal funding to invest in Pennsylvania communities. Submit your responses [here](#).

INTERNET FOR ALL: CONNECTING THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA IN STATE COLLEGE

The Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration are collaborating with partners from across the Commonwealth to hold a day-long workshop in State College. This workshop will bring together critical stakeholders in Pennsylvania from the federal, state, Tribal, and local governments, industry, and other key collaborators to discuss coordination on broadband efforts as the state prepares to receive significant broadband funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. **In-person registration closes at noon on Friday, July 7th.**

PBDA'S DIGITAL EQUITY STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN FEEDBACK REPORT

The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program and the Digital Equity Act (DEA) Programs require states to develop a robust stakeholder engagement process for development of the BEAD 5-Year Action Plan and the State Digital Equity Plan. The Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority (PBDA) recognizes there are varying needs, barriers, and preferences for engagement among all users and are committed to being transparent and inclusive in their efforts. Earlier this year, the PBDA solicited feedback on a draft Digital Equity Stakeholder Engagement Plan and released a report on that feedback in April 2023. Learn more [here](#).

PENNSYLVANIA COMMUNITIES IN THE NEWS

MONDAY, JULY 10TH INTERNET FOR ALL COMMUNITY CONVERSATION INPUT SESSION IN ERIE

Sessions are designed to engage members of the community in discussions about broadband use, experiences, and to provide information about the Commonwealth's work to develop an actionable plan to ensure equitable, affordable broadband access for all residents, businesses, and communities.

12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Jefferson Educational Society
3207 State Street
Erie, PA 16508

PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE EDITORIAL: FEDS SHOULDN'T LET RURAL COUNTIES MISS OUT ON BROADBAND AID

Broadband is an economic lifeline for both urban and rural communities. But a process for determining where federal broadband assistance would be allocated was so rushed that it all but assured that rural counties needing the most help wouldn't get it. To prevent communities with the most resources from gobbling a disproportionate share of federal broadband assistance, the FCC should streamline the process by extrapolating the needs of smaller, poorer counties from broadband mapping data.

PENNSYLVANIA BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY KICKS OFF PUBLIC LISTENING SESSION TOUR IN NORTH PHILADELPHIA

At the corner of Broad and Venango Streets in North Philadelphia, the historic Zion Baptist Church Of Philadelphia has been the headquarters for vital community conversations. It is also home to civil rights leaders who led social and economic justice movements that ignited reform worldwide. On June 24, 2023, residents gathered to discuss a 21st-century movement that still needs immediate attention – expanding broadband access and adoption.

Tapping into the social infrastructure in North Philadelphia neighborhoods, the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority (PBDA) selected Zion Baptist Church for an Internet for All Community Event. It is the first in a series of public listening sessions designed to inform Pennsylvania's Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) and Digital Equity grant programs.

The June 24th conversation was part of a daylong expo that connected residents with information about housing support by State Senator Sharif Street, Councilwoman Cindy Bass, and a local Community Development Corporation, "Called To Serve." The goal was clear – gather firsthand perspectives from members of underinvested communities whose voices often go unheard in policy development, ensuring their insights play a crucial role in shaping the future of broadband accessibility in Pennsylvania.

PBDA is responsible for developing strategic action plans to minimize the digital divide, improve the provisioning of broadband services to unserved and underserved areas, and enhance access to digital skills. Gathering input from populations facing broadband obstacles will ultimately determine the efficacy of these programs. Although the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is set to receive substantial federal funding through the Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act, the success of these initiatives depends on aligning federal grant funding with state investments that genuinely respond to community needs.

Hearing directly from residents, businesses, and local leaders not only humanizes statistics but also provides policymakers with an unfiltered picture of how broadband gaps can hamstring communities. North Philly residents emphasized the need to prioritize their community in funding timelines. They also reiterated the importance of broadband adoption support coming from trusted local partners.

The participation and shared enthusiasm in the June 24th listening session were a testament to the role that local government officials and community anchors play in community engagement. Find upcoming listening session dates [here](#).

CLEARFIELD COUNTY OFFICIALS: FCC MAPS OF COVERAGE ARE INACCURATE

Residents in Clearfield County encounter cell phone and internet issues throughout the area. According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), all of Pennsylvania is covered by major providers, but Clearfield County Commissioners say the maps are inaccurate. "You lose coverage or the coverage is very poor and the service is very poor," Commissioner John Sobel said. "That's something we're working to resolve because it's a quality of life issue in the county. It's very important."

ERIE COUNTY AWAITING RESULTS OF FCC BROADBAND ACCESS MAP CHALLENGE

According to Erie Area Council of Governments Executive Director Michelle Jaggi, the organization identified 3,500 homes and businesses that lack access to broadband. "The areas that are uncovered throughout the county from corner to corner, primarily below I-90 but going west to east, it's completely under I-90 throughout the county," said Jaggi. "Fairview, Girard area, but also up through North East, there's quite a bit. Corry is having some areas that are uncovered, so it's hitting almost every municipality that has parcels that are not covered in regards to internet."

OFFICIALS APPROVE TWO COMPANIES TO HELP EXPAND BROADBAND SERVICES IN CENTRE COUNTY

On June 6th, it was announced that Centre County would pursue plans with two companies as part of their proposals for state broadband funding: Centre WISP and Comcast. "Centre WISP offered projects in Boggs Township and Penns Valley. These are areas that were underserved. They are also areas that were previously funded. Comcast is looking more at the Curtin/Liberty area, as well as Rush Township. Again, they had projects already started there," says Elizabeth Lose, Center County Planning Department.

Next Century Cities Presents

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JULY



COMMUNICATIONS

DAY CAMP

9:30 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.

1828 L Street NW, Suite 300-A
Washington, DC 20036



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