# KEEPING AUSTIN WIRED

A DISCUSSION ON THE CITY'S
STATE OF BROADBAND WITH
COLLEEN BILLIOT AND JOHN SPEIRS
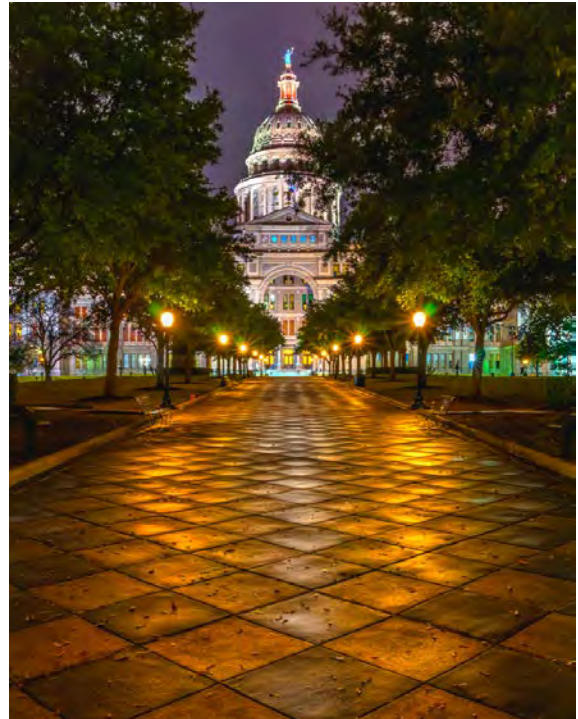
**What are potential solutions to the broadband connectivity challenges in Austin?**

Austin is focused on exploring partnerships with other government and private entities that can help to expand connectivity, provide devices, and deploy training programs. Those efforts help build resiliency for those that were impacted by COVID-19.

**What concerns do residents have about broadband access?**

Residents who lack broadband access at home cited several obstacles to adoption. The top four reasons are: privacy concerns, cost of home Internet access, lack of a digital device, and lack of digital literacy.

*Continue reading Austin's story here.*



We hope that you see some of your community's story in Austin's. Being able to share learning among local leaders within the Next Century Cities network is invaluable. To be included in an upcoming Member Spotlight, please reach out to our Communications Director,
Brittany-Rae Gregory,
at brittany-rae@nextcenturycities.org.

# FROM INDEPENDENCE HALL TO THE DIGITAL SQUARE

By Lukas Pietrzak, Policy Asscociate

On July 4, 1776, our country's founders came together, under the cover of darkness, to vote on the Declaration of Independence. This letter, which outlined the British Colonies' grievances against King George III, was the first test of the new American information network in which messages were delivered by word of mouth and various newspapers throughout the colonies. News of this document slowly spread through the Philadelphia Evening Post, then to Baltimore days later, and finally reached South Carolina in early August, about one month after its adoption.

Since that night 243 years ago, our communications networks have advanced far beyond what the founders could have imagined. What was once measured in the days it took for a horse to travel from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Charleston, South Carolina, can now be relayed in megabits per second. However, now that some households are able to send and receive information that travels at the speed of light while others are unable to create a digital footprint, we are faced with a new and urgent challenge: bridging the digital divide.

The power and reach of broadband connections, in Next Century Cities' member communities and others across the country, have allowed digital advocates to harness the power of the internet in shaping a government of the people, for the people, and by the people. Over the last two decades, we have seen students, community organizers, and everyday citizens create movements instantaneously.

For example, in Gainesville, Florida, a Next Century Cities member city, residents came together to form Connected Gainesville, an organization focused on expanding connectivity in their community. Recognizing the importance of reliable broadband networks, residents are using online tools and the power of democracy to encourage the city council to do more.

Almost 1,000 miles away in Baltimore, Maryland, another NCC member city, students unleashed the power of digital organizing. Motivated by the abrupt shift to distance learning, students circulated a petition urging Comcast to increase the speeds of Internet Essentials and provide greater opportunities for students to connect during the pandemic. Their online advocacy grabbed Comcast's attention as the company was forced to reckon with the students' demands.

Concerned citizens, officials, and corporate stakeholders in municipalities nationwide are using high-speed connectivity to create change and foster a more perfect union. Movements, aided by high-speed connectivity, are no longer limited by geographic boundaries. Instead, they exist in our nation's digital public square online, a place with endless possibilities. This is a stark contrast to the cramped rooms of Independence Hall. Yet, its mission is just the same – to debate the present and plan for the future.

At Next Century Cities, we believe that every resident in every community should have equal opportunities to get online. And the local leaders in our network are working tirelessly to bring the power of connectivity within reach for their residents.

On this July 4th holiday, a weekend devoted to celebrating the ideals of freedom and democracy, we recognize the importance of our work towards universal broadband connectivity. We are not only working towards fast, affordable, and reliable access in every corner of the country, we are working to ensure that every resident can benefit from the information highway that started as an idea centuries ago.

# JOIN THE NCC MEMBER OP-ED WORKSHOP

Media placement is a key component of an effective advocacy plan for your community, and we are here to help you amplify your voice. Sign up for the NCC Op-Ed Workshop program by **Wednesday, July 8th**.

**Op-ed workshop participants will have access to:**
- The NCC Op-Ed Toolkit
- Weekly op-ed strategy and writing tips one-on-one sessions with a communications specialist to help you edit your piece.
- NCC partners that will help your piece get placed in a local outlet.

**Sample Topics Include:**
- Strengthening local authority
- Evaluating minimum broadband speeds
- Supporting community initiatives
- COVID-19 response measures
- Long-term connectivity solutions
- Specific asks for state and local governments

# NCC Members are in the News

**Austin, Texas:** The Morton School of Excellence in West Austin employed various methods to assist students and families with broadband adoption during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, including digital literacy training and device distribution. (**The Austin Weekly News**)

**Chattanooga, Tennessee:** The Enterprise Center's President, Deb Socia, penned an op-ed on the importance of high-speed broadband access in our country, especially during unprecedented times. (**Chattanooga Times Free Press**)

**Detroit, Michigan:** Members of the Forbes Under 30 community came together to participate in a three-week hack-a-thon designed to identify ways to narrow Detroit's existing digital divide. Split into teams, they focused on four areas: public service, infrastructure, gamification, and library. (**Forbes**)

**Illinois:** Governor J.B. Pritzker announced the recipients of the first round of grant funding under the "Connect Illinois Initiative", a project implemented to expand broadband access across the State of Illinois. Twenty-eight projects received $50 million in funding through first-round grant distributions. Those in-state grants will be matched by $65 million in non-state funding. Illinois is home to five NCC member municipalities including **Carbondale**, **Champaign**, **Highland**, **Jacksonville**, and **Urbana**. (**The State Journal-Register**)

**Long Beach, CA:** The City of Long Beach partnered with the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) to assist residents in unserved and underserved areas with accessing the Internet through the "ConnectLB" initiative. **(The Grunion)**

**New Hampshire:** The New Hampshire Electric Cooperative announced an initiative to provide high-speed internet connectivity for its 84,000 members. Sixty percent of the co-op members do not have broadband access. Three NCC member municipalities including **Bedford**, **Hanover**, and **Keene** are located in New Hampshire. **(New Hampshire Electric Co-op)**

**New Mexico:** The University of New Mexico's Native American Budget and Policy Institute **(NABPI)** recently released a report titled "Internet Access and the Impact on Tribal Communities in New Mexico," which explores the impact lack of internet access has on Native American communities in the State. Read the full report here. New Mexico is home to NCC member cities **Albuquerque** and **Socorro**. **(NABPI)**

**Pennsylvania:** The Pennsylvania Senate Communications and Technology Committee passed Senate Bill 835, Unserved High-Speed Broadband Funding Pilot Program Act. Once enacted, the law will provide funding for unserved rural communities in the State. **Erie**, **Lancaster**, and **Pittsburgh**, three NCC municipalities, may be eligible for resources. **(Pennsylvania Business Report)**

**San Antonio, TX:** The San Antonio Innovation Office conducted a Digital Inclusion Survey and Assessment over the course of a three-month period. The results of the survey revealed a stark difference in connectivity and access to digital devices throughout the city. The data will be used to inform the City's broadband expansion plan. **(The Rivard Report)**

Albuquerque, New Mexico

# Broadband News



**Charleston, South Carolina**

**FCC Chairman Submits Letter to Congress Urging Broadband Protection Legislation.** Chairman Ajit Pai sent a letter to Congress asking for legislative action to protect U.S. residents impacted by the Keep Americans Connected pledge, which is set to expire on June 30th. The letter's top three takeaways are detailed below and can be accessed in full here.

- The Keep Americans Connected pledge should serve as a model for future public-private partnerships.
- Broadband and telephone companies must be paid if they are expected to continue to provide service to unserved and underserved communities.
- It is important to enact laws that will maintain universal connectivity throughout the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic.

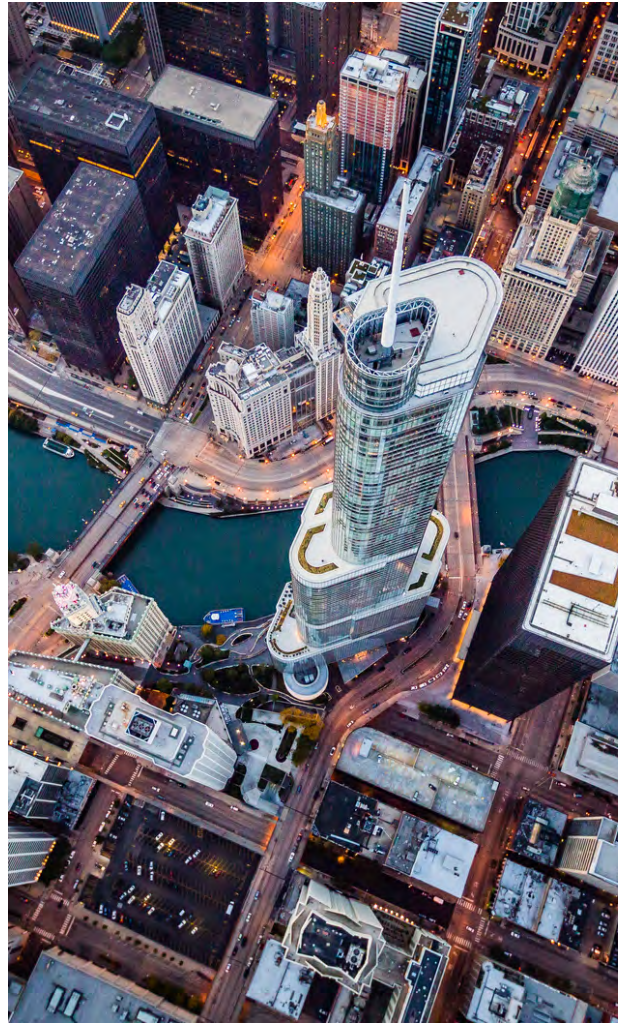**Rural Broadband Task Force Introduces Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act.** Members of the U.S. House of Representatives' Rural Broadband Task Force introduced the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act, which would provide $100 billion in funding for high-speed broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved communities nationwide. The bill would encourage universal broadband access, ensure internet affordability, and promote internet adoption. (**Broadband Breakfast**)

**Majority Whip Clyburn Launches First-of-Its-Kind Online Broadband Map Repository.** Majority Whip James E. Clyburn (SC-06) recently launched the South Carolina Digital Drive, a website housing broadband access maps displaying available connectivity across the State's 46 counties. The site is the first of its kind and all maps can be downloaded for free. On June 23rd Representative Clyburn hosted a webinar debuting the site.

**Bridging the Digital Divide for Chicago Public School Students.** Chicago's Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced the formation of "Chicago Connected", an initiative that is slated to provide 100,000 Chicago students with high-speed internet access over the next four years. (**Chicago Sun-Times**)

**Millions of Americans Depend on Libraries for the Internet. Now They're Closed.** Students in Cherokee, Iowa, a city where 40% of families with school-aged children do not have at-home internet access, many students rely on the library's resources to complete their schoolwork. Though the library is closed, many of them still sit outside of the library to connect to the building's WiFi network. (**Markup**)



Chicago, Illinois

**In Case You Missed It.** A variety of reports on broadband access and adoption have been published over the last four weeks.
Closing the K–12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning by Common Sense Media (June 2020)
COVID-19:Opportunities to Improve Federal Response and Recovery Efforts by US Government Accountability Office (June 2020)
Limiting Broadband Investment to "Rural Only" Discriminates Against Black Americans and other Communities of Color by Angela Siefer and Bill Callahan (June 2020)
Toward Inclusive Urban Technology by Denise Linn Riedl (June 2020)
The New Landscape of Digital Literacy by National Skills Coalition (May 2020)

# NCC is Advocating on Our Members' Behalf


Boise, Idaho


Gainesville, Florida


Huntsville, Alabama

**Documenting Local Stories for the FCC's BDAC Report.** In May 2020, Next Century Cities was appointed to the FCC's Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee's Disaster Response and Recovery Working Group. The Working Group is actively documenting COVID-19 specific stories and measures employed by municipalities like yours to address broadband connectivity concerns among residents. Do you have a story or initiative that you would like to share with us? Please use the linked form to submit your community's story or local initiatives by **July 8, 2020**.

**Expanding Grant Funding Opportunities in Idaho.** On Friday, June 19th NCC submitted comments to the Idaho Department of Commerce on behalf of Idaho members Ammon, Boise, and Emmett in relation to the Idaho Broadband Grant Application and Guidance. On Friday, June 26th we followed up to the initial letter urging action on items which remained unaddressed.

**Developing Municipal Case Studies.** As part of our work to expand affordable and reliable high-speed connectivity, NCC is drafting a report on the increasing need for universal broadband connectivity in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using six cities across the country, our research will explore the state of connectivity, ongoing challenges to broadband adoption, and local perspectives on what is required from stakeholders at every level of government to make broadband access ubiquitous. The municipalities include Albuquerque, New Mexico; Detroit, Michigan; Huntsville, Alabama; Long Beach, California; Memphis, Tennessee; and Mesa, Arizona.

**Emphasizing the Importance of Digital Equity in Education.** Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) invited Next Century Cities to participate in a webinar on incorporating digital equity and inclusion strategies into K-12 restart and recovery plans. Executive Director, Francella Ochillo, joined the June 17th webinar to discuss closing the digital divide as well as insights on societal loss when segments of the US population are unable to get online. Click here for more details.

# Digital Opportunity Equity Recognition (DOER) Program: Have you submitted your form?

The Digital Opportunity Equity Recognition (DOER) Program, created by FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks, will recognize projects that go above and beyond to address the unique connectivity needs of individuals and communities that promote digital inclusion and expand high-quality, affordable broadband access. Click here for program information. Submit this nomination form to celebrate organizations, institutions, companies and individuals who have helped to eliminate internet inequality, particularly in unserved or underserved communities. The deadline is **July 8, 2020**. The DOER Advisory Board will help review applications.

# Welcome to Medvis Jackson, NCC Fellow

Extending a warm welcome to the newest member of the New Century Cities team and one of the first in NCC's Fellowship Program, Medvis Jackson. He is focused on uncovering stories that highlight the impact of high-speed internet access. A Colgate University graduate and avid cricket player, Medvis has helped business owners in Detroit's Northwest side strengthen their online presence and to access additional public resources. This summer, he'll conduct research on disconnected communities in Detroit, Michigan; Huntsville, Alabama; and Long Beach, California. If you have contacts and/or resources that could help with Medvis' research, email him at medvis@nextcenturycities.org.