



# Connecting Residents in

## Arlington, Virginia

WITH HOLLY HARTELL

*Assistant CIO for Strategic Initiatives at  
Arlington County Department of Technology*

### How do you communicate with residents in Arlington?

To ensure that the communications are clear and consistent, four goals have been defined as guideposts for the County efforts:

- **CONNECTIVITY:** Arlington residents are able to connect to affordable broadband internet.
- **ACCESS:** All residents can access the internet with a device.
- **EDUCATION & TRAINING:** Residents have the appropriate digital skills necessary to be successful on the internet.
- **PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY & COMMUNITY CAPACITY:** Arlington's strategies to achieve its digital equity goals are sustainable and the community is engaged on the issue.

The roadmap toward these goals will ensure that all Arlingtonians have the information technology capacity needed to fully participate in the community and economy.

Multiple communication channels are being utilized to gain insight and share updates with the Community related to these goals.

The Digital Inclusion Network is a group of primarily nonprofit providers and others interested in furthering the discussion on digital equity in Arlington. The purpose of the Network is to inform those who work closely with the impacted groups in Arlington in addition to gathering input and feedback on the development of strategies and action steps that should be included in a policy framework to support the County's digital equity goals.

The County recently completed a [survey](#) and series of focus groups to gather input from those most directly impacted by digital inequities.

Continue reading about Arlington's connectivity story [here](#).



# A Democracy Without Broadband

**By Yosef Getachew**

*Media & Democracy Program  
Director, Common Cause*

In so many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that broadband is an essential service. We rely on digital connectivity to stay in touch with friends and family, work from home, log on to virtual classrooms, receive medical care through telehealth, and to meet daily needs. But the importance of broadband extends beyond economic benefits and individual needs – it is also critical infrastructure that supports our democracy.

Access to affordable broadband is crucial for a functioning 21st century democracy. As technology advances, many of our basic democratic values depend on robust connectivity.

Broadband enhances civic engagement, participation in the democratic process, and a responsive government. Yet, millions in our country lack access to affordable, high-speed broadband and continue to face significant barriers to get online.

Affordability remains the most significant barrier to broadband adoption while those on the wrong side of the digital divide are disproportionately low-income, people of color, seniors, people with disabilities, and other marginalized communities. Without broadband, these communities live in a democracy where their voices go unheard and their needs are unmet.

The link between civic engagement and broadband access has never been greater as technology has fundamentally changed democratic participation. Voting is one of the most powerful ways to be heard and the foundation for engaging in the democratic process.

Continue reading about broadband and democracy [here](#).



# Broadband Headlines

**Arkansas.** U.S. Representative Bruce Westerman and U.S. Senator John Boozman announced a \$151 million rural broadband investment made possible through the United States Department of Agriculture’s Electric Infrastructure Loan Program. The installation of fiber-optic cable will modernize the power grid for upwards of 60,000 Arkansas Valley Electric Cooperative members. Arkansas is home to two NCC municipalities, **Fayetteville** and **Mena**. **(KSFM Channel 5)**

**Chattanooga, Tennessee.** Hamilton County Schools’ Ed Connect Coalition was recognized for their work to bridge the digital divide among students across the City of Chattanooga. Through their collaborative efforts, [EPB Power and Fiber Optics](#), [Hamilton County Schools](#), [the City of Chattanooga](#), [Hamilton County](#), [BlueCross BlueShield](#), Smart City Venture Fund, and [The Enterprise Center](#), were able to provide 28,000 students with at-home internet access, a critical step in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. **(Chattanooga Trend)**

**Jacksonville, Illinois.** The City of Jacksonville broke ground on plans to provide citywide high-speed internet access by the end of 2021. Mayor Andy Ezerd remarked, “The addition of reliable fiber optic technology throughout the whole community brings digital equity to all our residents.” **(Government Technology)**

**New Mexico.** Navajo Technical University, a small institution in Crownpoint, New Mexico, implemented strategic planning that provided much-needed devices and internet access for students and members of the surrounding community. The school was able to receive permission from the Navajo Nation and the Federal Communications Commission to broadcast wireless internet from towers across the Eastern Navajo Agency. **(Searchlight New Mexico)**

# NCC is Advocating for Members' Needs

**Next Century Cities Urges the FCC to Improve Data Collection Methods and Accurately Depict Connectivity in the 2021 Broadband Deployment Report.** Next Century Cities drafted comments in collaboration with Common Cause and Public Knowledge, providing specific data points that the FCC could use to improve its analysis. The filing explains how inaccurate broadband mapping data increases costs for consumers and deprives state and local governments of funding necessary for expanding their networks. Read more [here](#). Review the September 17th filing [here](#).

**NCC Makes Recommendations to Improve NTIA Internet Use Survey.** On September 17th, Next Century Cities joined comments drafted by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) and Public Knowledge, making specific suggestions for improving NTIA's Internet Use Survey. Policymakers, researchers, and advocates use the survey to inform digital inclusion policies and strategies nationwide. A summary of the comments can be viewed [here](#).

**Next Century Cities Hosts a Webinar and Provides a [Legal Summary](#) on the *City of Portland v. FCC Decision*.** On September 17th, NCC hosted a webinar with telecommunications attorney, Mark Del Bianco, to explain the local impact of the Ninth Circuit's decision on local government authority. The discussion, moderated by NCC's Federal Policy Counsel, Ryan Johnston, covered fees structures, tower spacing, equipment design, and concealment requirements. The full webinar can be viewed [here](#), and the summary memo of the Ninth Circuit decision can be found [here](#).

**Next Century Cities Joins 18 Public Interest Groups in Asking the FCC to Maintain Lifeline Minimum Standards.** On September 14th, Next Century Cities along with other public interest organizations signed-on to comments drafted by the National Consumer Law Center. The comments focus on strengthening Lifeline, a program that helps local officials expand connectivity for low-income residents. The filing can be accessed [here](#).





**Next Century Cities Suggests Data Points and Protocols for the FCC’s Digital Opportunity Data Collection.** The FCC recently solicited public input in order to establish the Digital Opportunity Data Collection and modernize the Form 477 Data Program. Policy recommendations from NCC’s previous filings were incorporated into the [Commission’s Second Report and Order](#) which established measures to improve the agency’s data collection. On September 8th, NCC filed comments reiterating the importance of working with local and state officials who are intimately familiar with the connectivity needs in their respective communities. Click [here](#) to review the filing.

**How Broadband Could Impact Shared Community Goals in Fort Collins, Colorado.** On September 14th, Next Century Cities’ Executive Director, Francella Ochillo, made a presentation, Pragmatic & Visionary Approaches to Digital Inclusion, for the City Council. **Mayor Wade Troxell** moderated the discussion as council members brainstormed ways to incorporate digital equity and inclusion strategies into the City’s long-term broadband deployment strategies. Click [here](#) to access the recording and more info about the Futures Committee in Fort Collins.



# The Policy Note

## Closing the Digital Divide to #PlanYourVote

By Lukas Pietrzak, NCC Policy Associate

Over the last 244 years, our country has worked to form a more perfect union through the greatest right afforded to American citizens: the right to vote. For most of modern history, everyday Americans have shared in the practice of heading to their local polling place on the first Tuesday of November, election day. We all recognize the image of someone walking into their booth, marking the ballot, and walking out with an “I Voted” sticker. This year, thanks to the pandemic, our storied democratic process will look slightly different.

As the COVID-19 pandemic loosens its grip on the nation, local boards of election and municipal officials are working to revamp election day plans. Nationally, elected officials, advocates, and local governments are urging citizens to #PlanYourVote, encouraging voters to determine how they plan to cast their ballot on or before election day.

Residents with a reliable internet connection will be able to go online to get information on the processes and regulations for their locality. However, millions who do not have reliable, high-speed connectivity, will have to search for other ways to stay abreast of fast-changing developments in polling locations, expanded mail-in and early voting, updated voter ID laws, and registration issues.

For the almost [20 million Americans](#) without affordable and reliable access to broadband, staying plugged in to an election is more difficult than ever. Before the pandemic, the disconnected could turn to libraries, schools, and in-person resources to register, request a ballot, and clarify contradictory information. However, in the present moment, those voters have limited information and fewer options as many government agencies and voter help centers have migrated services online.

Election day requirements are developed far in advance, but the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted those plans. Naturally, residents who are struggling with connectivity may require additional assistance from community leaders to get information for this election cycle. For example, early voting has started in multiple states across the country. States have begun mailing absentee ballots. The updated information on participating in the process is primarily available online, meaning that unserved and underserved communities will have to rely on chance interactions with news outlets and other community members instead of being able to verify information online.

Broadband allows every member of a community to participate in democracy and municipal leaders are aware of how the digital divide could impact, and possibly disenfranchise, voters in their communities. This election cycle is another reminder of why widespread broadband access simply cannot wait. Amidst these unprecedented times.

# An Investment in HBCUs is an Investment in America

BY ALISA VALENTIN, PH.D.

*Dr. Valentin, an alumna of Howard University, penned the following in recognition of National HBCU Week 2020.*

Just two decades ago, many of us could not have imagined a world where Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) would garner such nationwide attention. Institutions like Howard University, Spelman College, and Norfolk State University are the subjects of network news segments, sought after pit stops for political hopefuls, and the recipients of financial contributions from billionaires. Through these actions, people in this country, although delayed, have come to realize something that students, alumni, and even our favorite 1990s sitcom characters have known all along – HBCUs are the backbone of Black communities across the nation.

HBCUs are a source of social, economic, and political change. These institutions for higher learning are able to move mountains even though they are chronically under-resourced. HBCUs serve as community hubs across the nation because they invest in the people who live in surrounding neighborhoods and towns. As anchors of the community, upgraded broadband infrastructure will help HBCUs serve the needs of unserved and underserved communities that are too often overlooked or ignored.

That is why it is imperative to invest in HBCUs in the digital age by (1) expanding access to broadband for students, faculty, and staff on and off campus and (2) creating opportunities to recruit and retain HBCU students and alumni in the technology and telecommunications sectors

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us that access to affordable, reliable broadband is necessary to participate in modern life. It is the tool that we use to access educational platforms, create businesses, and remain connected to loved ones, no matter the distance. Despite the necessity of this tool, millions of Americans lack access to broadband, largely people of color, rural areas, and low-income populations. In HBCU communities, many of which are concentrated in the South, geographic location and income inequality compounds the impact of the digital divide.

Investing in HBCUs as well as their students benefits the nation.

Continue reading about HBCUs [here](#).



HAVE ALL OF YOUR  
RESIDENTS BEEN

# Counted ?

The 2020 Census deadline is quickly approaching.

In this final week, make sure that your residents are aware of how they can complete the Census for their household.

Access NCC's toolkit for local officials [here](#). Visit the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) for the latest announcements.



# Upcoming Policy Note: "Legacy Critical Systems: Complex Problems and Unclear Solutions"

By Ryan Johnston,  
NCC Policy Counsel

As municipalities strive to achieve the goal of bringing all of their residents online, they are naturally aware of the new amounts of data generated by their communities. Likewise, as communities upgrade their telecommunications and information systems, they will be able to collect more data from their citizens.

Data empowers local governments with information needed to make informed decisions, improve services, and plan for the future. In light of ongoing security threats, communities must prioritize safeguarding new data collections in addition to educating residents, especially those who are new to the online ecosystem, with information on ways to protect themselves.

October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month. Policy Counsel, Ryan Johnston, will share thoughts on cyber challenges related to keeping legacy critical systems in place and the necessity of updating, patching, and replacing these systems in order to keep the data collected safe and secure.

Are you interested in sharing your community's story? Share insights with Ryan at [ryan@nextcenturycities.org](mailto:ryan@nextcenturycities.org).

# Member Resources

September 22-25 2020, is National Small Business Week. In collaboration with Public Knowledge, Next Century Cities created one pagers to highlight the significance of broadband for small businesses growth and sustainability.



## BROADBAND KEEPS SMALL BUSINESSES ALIVE

**Broadband Access is a key factor for the success of small businesses and economic development.** For years, the internet has been critical for day to day operations in many small businesses. In a 2010 Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy study, business owners indicated that "high-speed (broadband) Internet access is as essential to their business as other utilities such as water, sewer, or electricity."<sup>1</sup> Ten years later, when COVID-19 has shuttered operations, non-essential businesses have had no other choice but to participate in an online marketplace.

Broadband provides access to: VoIP phones, distance training, secure customer and research databases, remote collaboration tools, ordering office supplies online, in office postage printing, advertising and more. In municipalities such as Clinton County, Iowa, where 75% of small businesses state they could not operate without the internet<sup>2</sup> or in Oxnard, California, where over 80% of businesses stated that fast inexpensive broadband was required for them to stay and grow, broadband helps charge local economies.

### Economic Impact of Small Business and the Internet

- Small businesses were responsible for 2018 <sup>3</sup>
- Retail E-commerce accounted for 11.4 quarter of 2020: \$146.5 billion <sup>4</sup>
- Over 100,000 small businesses were shuttered in 2020, triggering a loss for entrepreneur economies that they support.
- In 2017, the Digital Economy was the \$1.35 trillion of US GDP <sup>5</sup>



## BROADBAND KEEPS SMALL BUSINESSES ALIVE

### Risk of Limited Broadband Access

- Cloud business tools empower small businesses, but without stable and strong internet access, these are inaccessible. These tools span databases, email accounts, finance software, and remote workspaces. These might span everything from a customer database, to email, accounting software, or a remote workspace run in the cloud. If employees cannot access a customer's information when they call in due to delayed loading, that company can face losing clientele.
- Slow internet loading speeds negatively impact employee productivity and morale. <sup>6</sup>
- Improving the digital literacy of small business owners would allow the 46% of small businesses without websites to reach more customers and grow their companies.
- Broadband access allows businesses to access customers, training, research vendors and access cutting edge business services. Without broadband access, businesses will face significantly more challenges.

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### Small Business Success Local Insights



#### Boston, Massachusetts

Like in other cities, the COVID-19 pandemic forced Boston businesses to transition to a new digital marketplace overnight. Local officials partner with the non-profit organization Tech Goes Home to bring the power of digital tools and platforms to up and coming small business owners across the city. With a focus on under-served or unserved communities, the program teaches critical skills for managing a successful business online. Additionally, the program educates small business owners on connecting with local and state resources.

#### Gainesville, Texas

In Texas, Gainesville officials originally developed a plan to deploy a city-wide fiber loop to support municipal services, but recognized fiber's potential for the larger community. Instead of implementing their original plan, officials worked with an incumbent provider to develop a more widespread deployment strategy. This public-private partnership introduced fiber infrastructure and gigabit speeds to businesses and residences. They placed a heavy focus on the city's core business corridor and immediately saw positive results for the business community. Broadband access is critical to the success of small businesses across America.

It is no longer just about gaining a competitive advantage in the marketplace. It is a basic necessity that helps businesses remain operational. Congress, state governments, and local officials must promote broadband adoption and access for small and micro businesses.

