NEXT CENTURY CITIES

ENGAGING WITH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Local, State, and Federal

WHY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

Community Organizations Are Your Greatest Assets

PARTICIPATE IN THE 2021 NCC SURVEY

Feedback Helps Us Grow

See What's Inside

November 2021

Engaging with Local, State & Federal Officials Through Broadband Surveys and Speed Tests

By Corian Zacher
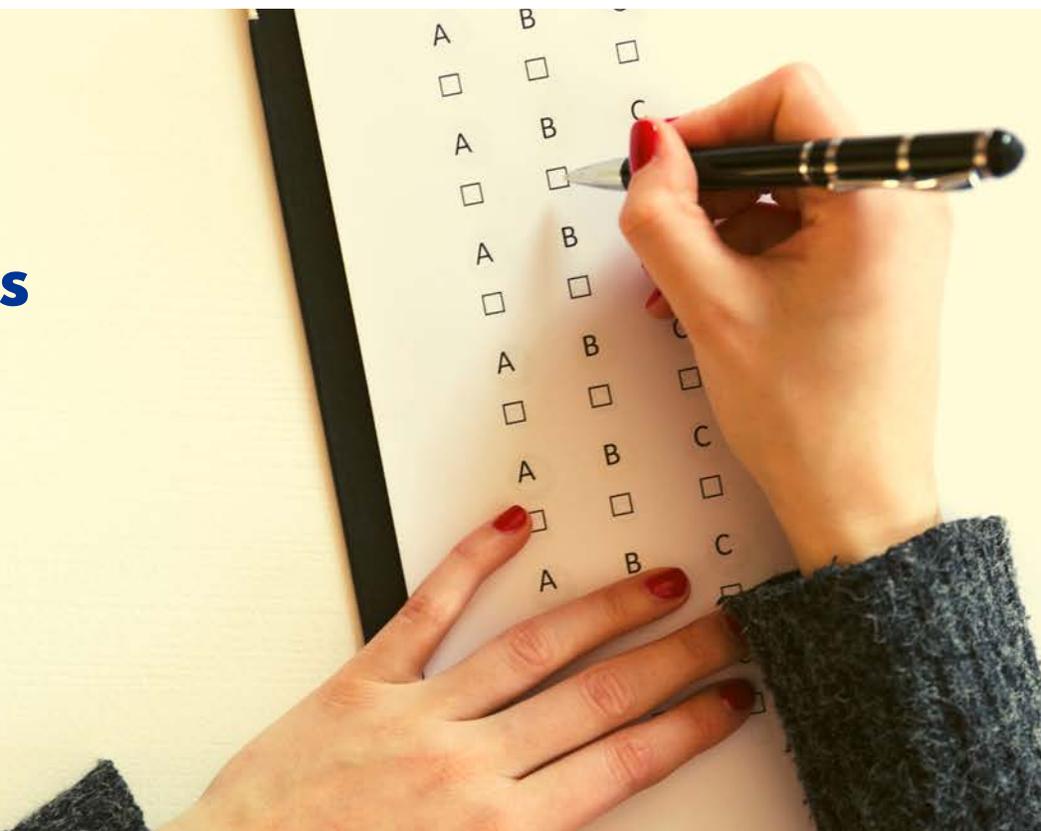
Surveys are not a novel tool for facilitating communication between residents and local officials, but broadband studies have increasingly become a forum of public opinion for residents and their local elected officials.

Oftentimes, municipalities work with broadband experts, who conduct the surveys and help interpret the results. The insights gleaned from broadband surveys enable local government leaders to gauge residents' interest in new connectivity solutions and counter federal data that overstate broadband availability.

During the spring of 2021, the City of **Northampton, Massachusetts** conducted a survey online and via mail that garnered responses from a quarter of residents. 98% of respondents supported the city government's role in facilitating better and more affordable Internet service. Equipped with community support, the City Council voted to approve the creation of a Municipal Light Plant, required by state law. On November 2, 2021, 91% of

Northampton voters approved the ballot measure that will allow the City to establish a public broadband network. The survey results will also be used to identify community needs during the upcoming network feasibility study.

The City of **Philadelphia** conducted a Household Internet Assessment Survey, which it used to better understand the role that connectivity initiatives played in improving broadband access and adoption. Importantly, the survey found that most Philadelphians were either unaware of affordable Internet options or did not have time to apply. The survey results informed recommendations that the city plans to use to improve connectivity programs.

States also use broadband surveys to better understand broadband availability. And a number of them have implemented speed tests. Speed tests are frequently accompanied by short surveys about device usage, connection type, and level of satisfaction with the service.

The insights gleaned from broadband surveys enable local government leaders to gauge residents' interest in new connectivity solutions and counter federal data that overstate broadband availability.

Read more about the benefits of broadband surveys and speed tests here.

THERE ARE VARIOUS WAYS FOR LOCAL LEADERS TO GET INVOLVED IN FEDERAL BROADBAND POLICY MAKING

RYAN JOHNSTON

In light of the billions of dollars that are being invested into digital infrastructure programs, it is critical for federal officials to conduct outreach to and solicit input from potentially affected communities.

One of the largest barriers to municipal engagement is that local officials and community leaders often do not know where to begin the outreach process. For example, a rural municipality that is in the midst of planning a network deployment may be interested in applying for federal funding. However, they may not have any experience navigating contacts or protocols at the Federal Communications Commission or the United States Department of Agriculture.

In this summary, municipal officials, local leaders, and community advocates can find information on federal agencies and the right people to obtain funding and programming resources. While this is not an extensive list, it is intended to give communities a starting point into federal outreach efforts.

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Continue reading about federal engagement here.

WHY DOES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MATTER?

GENERATING SUPPORT FOR BROADBAND INITATIVES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Utilize the **COMMUNITY WIDE** Experience

UNDERSTAND your community's needs and assets.

Use **SMART** goals when pitching ideas to your community.

COLLABORATE AND PARTNER: Your Greatest Assets Are Your Community Organizations

CELEBRATE Your Success

Click Here to View the Full Infographic

Next Century Cities

Feedback From Members and Allies Helps Us Grow

For the Next Century Cities team, the end of the year is a time to reflect on all that we have accomplished throughout the year and consider new ways to serve our member municipalities as well as the overall broadband advocacy space.

Getting community feedback is a critical part of that process. Please take 5-10 minutes to complete our **Year-End Survey**.
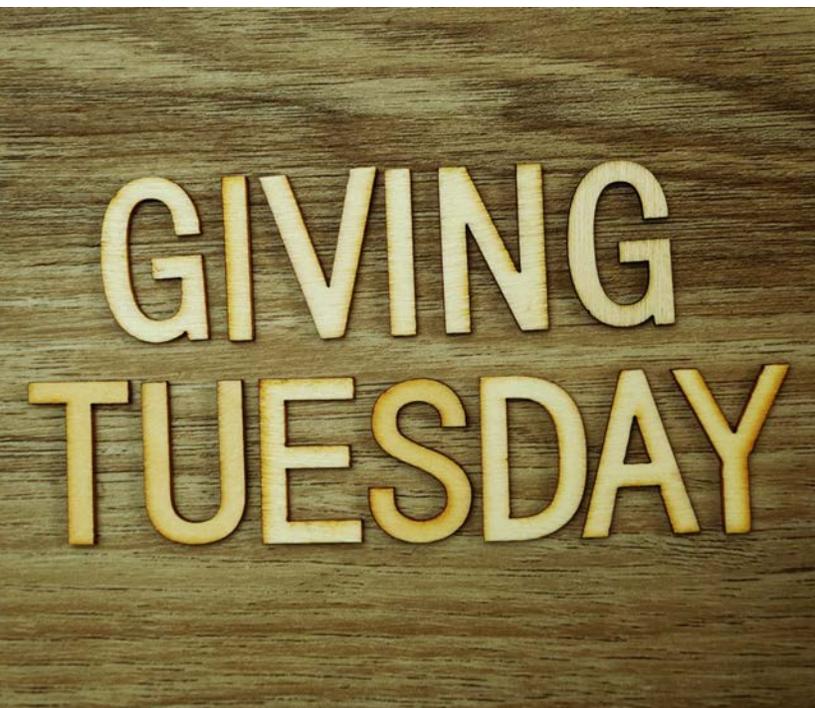
In This Season of Gratitude

Giving back to the communities that we serve is at the core of our mission. Financial support for Next Century Cities enables us to elevate community-level perspectives and create platforms for local leaders to engage with state and federal officials and, most importantly, with each other.

During this giving season, please consider **contributing to our cause**. Your gift enables NCC's work to bring high-speed digital opportunities within reach for every community.

NCC is Hiring a Deputy Director

Do you know of a public interest advocate with great leadership and communication skills? NCC is searching for a Deputy Director who will be responsible for managing organizational development, running day-to-day operations, and supporting local and state programs aimed at expanding digital opportunities. Find out more about the position **here**.

NCC IS WORKING TO CONNECT MEMBERS NATIONWIDE

Next Century Cities Urges Local Officials and Community Leaders to Identify Broadband Ambitions and Obstacles | Next Century Cities was invited to speak at the Moonshot Broadband Summit in **Traverse City, Michigan**. On November 9, 2021, NCC's Executive Director, Francella Ochillo, and Policy Counsel for State and Local Initiatives, Corian Zacher, provided opening remarks on overcoming connectivity challenges. They shared ways in which local officials could help to improve broadband data collections, access new federal funding opportunities, and the importance of evaluating community assets.

Students Struggling With the Homework Gap Need Reliable Service, Educational Devices, and Safe Digital Spaces That Preserve Their Privacy | Next Century Cities Executive Director, Francella Ochillo, joined the CDT Tech Talk podcast to discuss privacy concerns for students using devices on loan from their schools or municipalities. In her twelve-minute conversation with Jamal Murphy, Ochillo emphasized issues that were also highlighted in two CDT reports, *Online and Observed: Student Privacy Implications of School-Issued Devices* and *Student Activity Monitoring Software*.

NCC Joins NDIA and Allies: Loans, Investments, Or Services That Support Digital Access For Low- And Moderate-Income Households Are Necessary Community Investments | Investments that expand broadband access or eliminate barriers to adoption strengthen communities. That is why NCC joined allies in urging the OCC to recommit to its position that "loans, investments or services that support digital access for low- and moderate-income individuals or communities" should be treated as qualifying community development activities for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

NCC Emphasizes the Importance of Digital Inclusion Among Hispanic and Latinx Households | On November 4th, Next Century Cities Executive Director, Francella Ochillo, spoke at LULAC's National Innovation, Technology, and Education Summit to discuss the importance of digital inclusion. Ochillo highlighted that when **35%** of Latinx households do not have a broadband connection at home and **33%** do not have a computing device, there is a ripple effect that impacts their communities, states, and national productivity.

NCC IS WORKING TO CONNECT MEMBERS NATIONWIDE

NCC Joins New Mexico Leaders and Fellow Broadband Advocates for United Nations Day | Lukas Pietrzak, Next Century Cities' Program Manager joined the Albuquerque chapter of the United Nations Foundation and an international panel of broadband advocates to recognize UN Day, an annual celebration of the creation of the United Nations. The October 21st panel discussion included Ida Jallow, Rebecca Dilg, Ed Mills, and Gar Clarke & Rand Tilton. Pietrzak emphasized the importance of including residents in broadband program strategies. Read more about the event <ins>here</ins>.

Next Century Cities Emphasizes the Value of Partnering with Local Governments in Designing California's Broadband Grant Program | On October 29th, NCC submitted comments to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) on its proposed broadband grant program aimed at expanding broadband access and adoption statewide. NCC's comments highlighted the need for collaborating with local leaders during the program planning process, including digital equity and economic development in funding criteria, and adopting a robust definition of affordability.

Next Century Cities Submits FCC Comments Highlighting Anti-Competitive Nature of Exclusive Revenue Sharing and Wiring Agreements in MTEs | In September 2021, the FCC released a <ins>Public Notice</ins> seeking to refresh the record on how exclusive agreements between Multiple Tenant Environment, also called Multiple Dwelling Unit, owners and Internet providers affect competition and consumer choice. On October 20th, Next Century Cities filed comments highlighting how ISPs utilize these permissible agreements to avoid restrictions that apply to exclusive service agreements.

Next Century Cities Pressures the FTC to Prioritize Consumer Data Protection | NCC submitted an October 28th letter to the Federal Trade Commission requesting that the agency to take action on protecting consumers' privacy rights and providing more oversight related to online data collection and management. The letter highlighted the reality that In an increasingly digital society, users need assurance and transparency about how their personal information will be used online.

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

The Deadline for the Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program is Quickly Approaching | The Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program is a first-of-its-kind grant that provides $268 million in funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) to purchase broadband internet access service and eligible equipment or to hire and train information technology personnel. The application deadline is **December 1, 2021**.

Connect Humanity Launches the 'Build Better Broadband' Initiative. Apply Today. | Build Better Broadband will provide fully-funded broadband master plans for up to five communities. Work includes a complete to every address feasibility level design in 3D software (ESRI and Google Earth compatible), market analysis, resident and business surveys, business model analysis, risk analysis, and pro forma financial modeling. Access the application **here**. For full consideration, communities should submit completed application materials by **January 14th, 2022**.

West Virginia announced program procedures for the state's ARPA-funded GigReady Incentive Program. | County and municipal governments and affiliated organizations, as well as regional consortia of local governments, may participate. Applications are due through the Department of Economic Development's On-line Grant Application by **January 31, 2022, at 3:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time**.
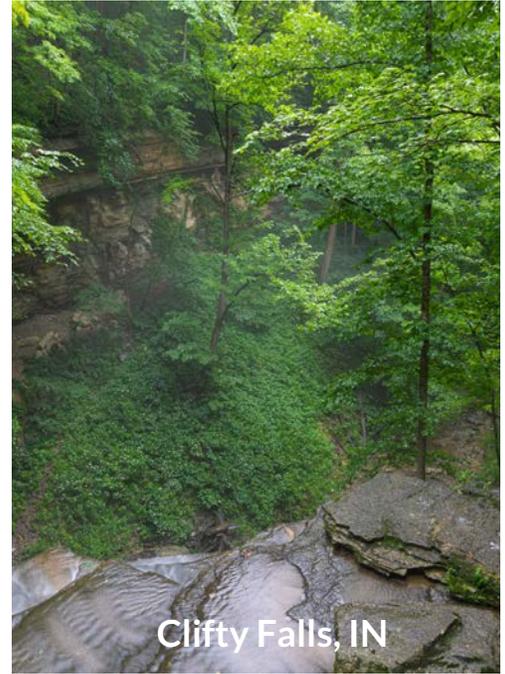
New River Gorge Bridge, West Virginia

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Augusta, ME

Los Angeles, CA

Clifty Falls, IN

NEW YORK

New York City announced a $156 million investment in publicly owned, open-access broadband infrastructure that will reach up to 1.6 million New Yorkers in the next three years. The City is also working to provide fast, reliable, and affordable connectivity options to an additional 70,000 New York City Housing Authority residents and 150,000 residents in the surrounding communities by early 2022.

The New York State Library is launching two opportunities to foster statewide conversations about digital equity, an email listserv and series of three roundtable discussions on Digital Equity taking place on December 17, 2021; February 18, 2022; and April 15, 2022.

CALIFORNIA

The Los Angeles Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to pass the motion for Investments to Accelerate Digital Equity.

NEVADA

The Western Nevada Development District is partnering with local governments to launch the Nevada Speed Test, a project designed to bring reliable broadband service to the region's most unserved and underserved homes and businesses. Nevada residents can share feedback about their broadband connection at www.nevadaspeedtest.org.

INDIANA

The Indiana Broadband Office announced that two additional communities, the City of Greensburg and Dekalb County, were certified Broadband Ready.

MAINE

Andrew Butcher, director of the Maine Broadband Coalition, will be nominated to head a new state agency tasked with rapidly accelerating Maine's effort to make broadband internet service available to all residents of the state.