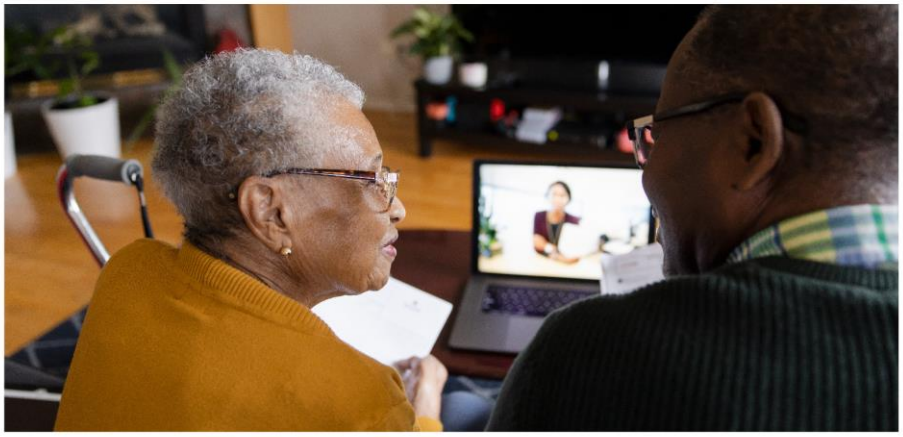

ILLINOIS STATE DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN

Digital Equity Act Programs

Illinois Office of Broadband

November 2023

DRAFT

ILLINOIS BROADBAND LAB

Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
JB Pritzker, Governor

University of Illinois System

Foreword

Who we are

Since 2019, the Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB) has served as a single source for all things broadband. Housed within the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the IOB partners with a range of state agencies and Illinois organizations to oversee a wide variety of broadband-related work, from infrastructure to utilization, public funding to private deployment. The office strives to be a useful resource to consumers, local communities, state agencies, and broadband providers alike.[1]

The Illinois Broadband Lab (IBL) is a collaborative effort among the Illinois Office of Broadband, the University of Illinois System, the Illinois Office of Innovation and Technology, University of Illinois Extension, and the Benton Institute for Broadband and Society. Our aim is to expand and advance broadband data and research, to explore the digital divide, and to provide thoughtful analysis of the Connect Illinois capital investment and related programming.[2]

In close collaboration with partner organizations and digital equity practitioners, the IOB and the IBL have developed the following **State Digital Equity Plan** to ensure equitable internet access for

[1] Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Office of Broadband

[2] Illinois Broadband Lab

all Illinoisians. We cannot execute this plan alone and must work closely and collaboratively with a full set of partners.

Our goals

We envision an Illinois in which all Illinoisans are empowered to use and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society. The state is committed to:

- Ensuring universal access to universal access to high-speed broadband that is affordable, reliable, and fully scalable.
- Leveraging new and existing resources to advance the adoption of internet use.
- Empowering all Illinoisans to use and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society.

Our plan

In the following State Digital Equity Plan, we detail the vision for digital equity, our goals for realizing this vision, and the data used to inform it. We also share the strategy for achieving digital equity, including establishing a digital equity source of truth, leading statewide programing and university partnerships, executing a state-wide digital equity program, conducing ongoing stakeholder outreach and engagement, and supporting and sustaining a digital equity community of practice.

What it means for Illinoisans

We live in an increasingly digital economy in which high-speed internet service in our homes and community institutions is essential for connecting to local and global communities and resources. To take full advantage of available tools, all Illinois residents must have affordable access to high-speed internet and be able to use the internet safely and effectively. This plan details our strategic approach to achieve the vision.

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1 Executive Summary

Illinois is home to over 12.7 million individuals in approximately 4.9 million families who speak over 20 languages. These families live in 102 counties that range from the dense urban areas found in Cook, DuPage, and Lake counties to the rural areas in Pope and Stark counties; from Illinois' manufacturing centers like the Quad Cities, Rockford, and Greater Peoria regions to the farmlands of Gallatin, White, and Sangamon counties.[3,4,5] Common to all of these communities and geographies is the way we stay connected to each other and to the broader global

[3] US Census Bureau: Quick Facts on Illinois
[4] Languages in Illinois, Statistical Atlas
[5] Illinois Defense Manufacturing Consortium, University of Illinois Chicago

community; how we access healthcare, education, and other essential services; and, increasingly, how we sustain our livelihoods within the digital economy: **by using high-speed internet in our homes and community anchor institutions.**

Whether parents are helping their child research topics on the internet for a school assignment, recent immigrants are accessing online government services that have been translated into multiple languages, a sick family is connecting with their healthcare provider remotely, a young person overseas is talking to an aging grandparent on a video call, farmers are using internet-enabled precision agriculture to increase their crop yield, or a worker is taking an online coding class to develop skills for new job opportunities, **all Illinoisans must be enabled to use the internet effectively, confidently, safely, and equitably.**

Today, 2.9 million Illinois residents in 1.3 million households lack a subscription to high-speed internet in their homes.[6] This gap may be caused by one or more inter-related factors (see Section 3.2, Needs Assessment):

- **Availability of broadband infrastructure:** 5% of broadband-serviceable locations (BSLs) in Illinois do not have access to 25/3 Mbps internet service and are categorized as "unserved" by the FCC. Some 4% of BSLs do not have access to 100/20 Mbps internet service and are thus categorized as "underserved."[7]
- **Affordability of internet subscriptions:** 17% of Illinois residents find it difficult to afford their internet bill, and 14% have experienced interruptions in service because they had difficulty paying.[8]
- **Access to devices:** Just 79%, or 3.9 million, of Illinois households have access to either a desktop or a laptop.[9]

[6] American Community Survey 5-Year data, 2021
[7] FCC National Broadband Data Map accessed in July 2023
[8] Based on the state-wide resident internet use survey. More details in Section 3.2 and Appendix
[9] American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates

- Low levels of digital literacy: 11% of Illinoisans report that they have difficulty completing at least one of the surveyed tasks related to the internet.[10]

These gaps are even more stark among Illinoisans who are members of covered populations (Section 3.2.3, Covered Population Needs Assessment):

- Individuals who live in covered households are 7% more likely than the average Illinoisan to believe that having internet service is "not worth the trouble." [11]
- Black or African Americans are 5% more likely than the average Illinoisan to experience service interruptions due to difficulties in paying for service. [12]
- Hispanic Illinoisans are 14% more likely than the average Illinoisan to find it difficult to fit a monthly internet bill into their household budget. [13]
- Aging individuals are 14% more likely than the average Illinoisan to worry about how to use computers and the internet. [14]
- Individuals in rural areas are 4% more likely than the average Illinoisan to have trouble getting internet services installed at their residence. [15]
- Individuals with a language barrier have limited access to digital resources for device troubleshooting and digital literacy training. [16]
- Veterans are 5% less likely to adopt broadband as compared to the average Illinoisan.[17]
- Individuals with disabilities are 15% less likely to adopt broadband and 15% less likely to have access to internet-enabled devices as compared to the average Illinoisan. [18]

[10] Based on the state-wide resident internet use survey. More details in Section 3.2 and Appendix
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Based on conversations with Illinois residents during stakeholder engagement events
[17] American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates
[18] Ibid.

- Justice-impacted individuals have extensive needs for digital learning as part of re-entry into society and to support their efforts to find and acquire jobs. [19]

Illinois' local governments, libraries, community organizations and other non-profits, philanthropies, and some private companies have been working with communities across the state to advance digital equity. Seventeen counties and local governments have published local digital equity plans for which they assessed their baseline, convened stakeholders, established goals, and developed strategies and roadmaps toward digital equity. Many of those local plans have drawn from the expertise of digital equity practitioners who have been working on the ground and in communities for years. In Illinois, over 62 programs across the state focus on broadband expansion and digital equity (see Section 3.1.3, Existing Digital Equity Programs), and 55 broadband adoption programs support topics ranging from basic digital skills training to device-lending programs (see Section 3.1.4, Broadband Adoption Programs). Moreover, 10 broadband affordability programs offer discounted internet services or raise awareness of the federal government's Affordable Connectivity Plan (ACP) (Section 3.1.5, Broadband Affordability Programs). But there is still more work to be done.

We envision an Illinois in which all Illinoisans are empowered to use and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society. To achieve this vision, we must leverage new and existing resources for adoption and use through targeted strategies for digital inclusion and sustainable outcomes in broadband equity. Doing so will help communities identify and address current gaps in broadband equity. We also must continue to push for universal access to high-speed broadband infrastructure, which is essential to realizing our aspirations for digital equity. The details of that push are articulated in the Illinois Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Five-Year Action Plan.

[19] Based on conversations with Illinois residents during stakeholder engagement events and review of existing regional digital equity plans

Suburb of Belvidere, Illinois

To achieve our vision, we have set the following goals. Over the next 10 years, we intend to measure and track our progress toward meeting these goals (Section 2, Introduction and Vision for Digital Equity):

- Ensuring universal access to high-speed broadband that is affordable, reliable, and fully scalable[20] for residences, businesses, and community anchor institutions (CAIs) across Illinois by 2030.
- Leveraging new and existing resources to advance the adoption of internet use through targeted digital-inclusion strategies and sustainable broadband-equity outcomes to help communities identify and address current gaps in broadband equity.

[20] A broadband system is scalable when it has the capacity to accommodate a greater amount of usage than initially designed for without impacting the performance of the service delivery to its subscriber base.

- Empowering all Illinoisans to use and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society.

These goals have been set with Illinois' current state of digital equity in mind (Section 3.2, Needs Assessment). The current state was assessed by analyzing quantitative data from the American Community Survey, National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Indicators of Need, and data from a state-wide telephone and online survey. The goals themselves were inspired and shaped by insights from residents, local governments, digital equity practitioners, non-profits, community anchor institutions, and service providers through a state-wide listening session (Section 4, Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement), as well as the goals and roadmaps defined in local digital equity plans (Section 3.1.2, Existing Digital Equity Plans).

To fuel and sustain efforts to meet these goals and objectives, and in partnership with the digital equity practitioners and other stakeholders in the state, the Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB) plans to (Section 5, Implementation):

- Maintain and make available Illinois' digital equity data sets to serve as a common source of information. To provide a common fact base for the state's digital equity practitioners, the IOB and the Illinois Broadband Lab (IBL) will create and maintain a publicly available dataset and tools for practitioners around the state; a public-facing dashboard to track key metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs); a public-facing asset inventory; and ongoing updates to the IL State Digital Equity Plan (SDEP).
- Lead select state-wide programming and university partnerships. The IOB/IBL will coordinate state-wide programming on high-priority, state-wide and regional projects and establish research partnerships with universities, some of which will be coordinated with other state agencies.
- Execute a state-wide digital equity grant program. The IOB/IBL will facilitate a digital equity grant program to fund and provide resources for digital equity programs around the state.

- **Conduct ongoing stakeholder outreach and engagement.** The IOB/IBL will conduct and support stakeholder engagement across regions and in communities to ensure that the voices of residents and digital equity practitioners continue to be heard and to shape digital equity priorities and approaches.
- **Support and sustain a digital equity community of practice.** The IOB/IBL will foster partnerships and collaboration between new and existing organizations so that they may share their knowledge and resources to expand their impact.

Victorian Houses on a residential street, south side of Chicago

We realize that this vision depends on a wide range of Illinois stakeholders. Most important are the voices of the residents whom we seek to serve and enable. Also deeply important are the digital equity practitioners who have been working in Illinois communities and have established trusted relationships that can foster connection, learning, and growth. The vision further depends on partnerships with other state agencies whose missions will be enabled by ubiquitous broadband access and digital inclusion, and who work with us to accomplish digital equity outcomes in telehealth, access to essential services, and economic mobility through technologies like digital manufacturing and digital agriculture. It depends on the work of universities, private companies, and philanthropic partners who will innovate in this space. And it depends on the digital ecosystems that are growing across the state and across these various partners, each with the Illinoisans in their communities at the center. Together, the state can achieve its vision of universal access, advancement of internet adoption, and empowering all Illinoisans to use and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society.

2 Introduction and Vision for Digital Equity

2.1 Vision

Illinois' vision for broadband deployment and digital equity is as follows:

Connect Illinois seeks to **(A) ensure universal access to high-speed broadband that is affordable, reliable, and fully scalable** for residences, businesses, and community anchor institutions (CAIs) across Illinois. At the same time, Connect Illinois plans to promote digital literacy, adoption, and

inclusion while leveraging investment in new broadband infrastructure to spur advances in economic development, as well as innovation in healthcare delivery, education, and agriculture.

At its core, the push toward universal access to high-speed broadband infrastructure is one of broadband equity: targeting resources to close gaps and expand opportunity for unserved and underserved communities throughout Illinois. The Connect Illinois digital equity programming and collaborations are a comprehensive approach designed to ensure the state **(B) leverages new and existing resources for adoption through targeted digital inclusion strategies and sustainable broadband equity outcomes** to help communities identify and address existing broadband equity gaps, and to **(C) empower all Illinoisans to utilize and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society**.[21]

2.2 Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes

2.2.1 Alignment with other state priorities

Digital equity has long been a priority in Illinois, ranging from the governor-appointed Illinois Broadband Advisory Council to multiple state agencies, county and local leadership, and local non-profits and digital equity practitioners. In this section we describe how the SDEP aligns with other state priorities.

The work of the Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB) and the Illinois Broadband Advisory Council (BAC) seeks to drive the following outcomes to support statewide efforts related to telehealth, education, and economic development[22]:

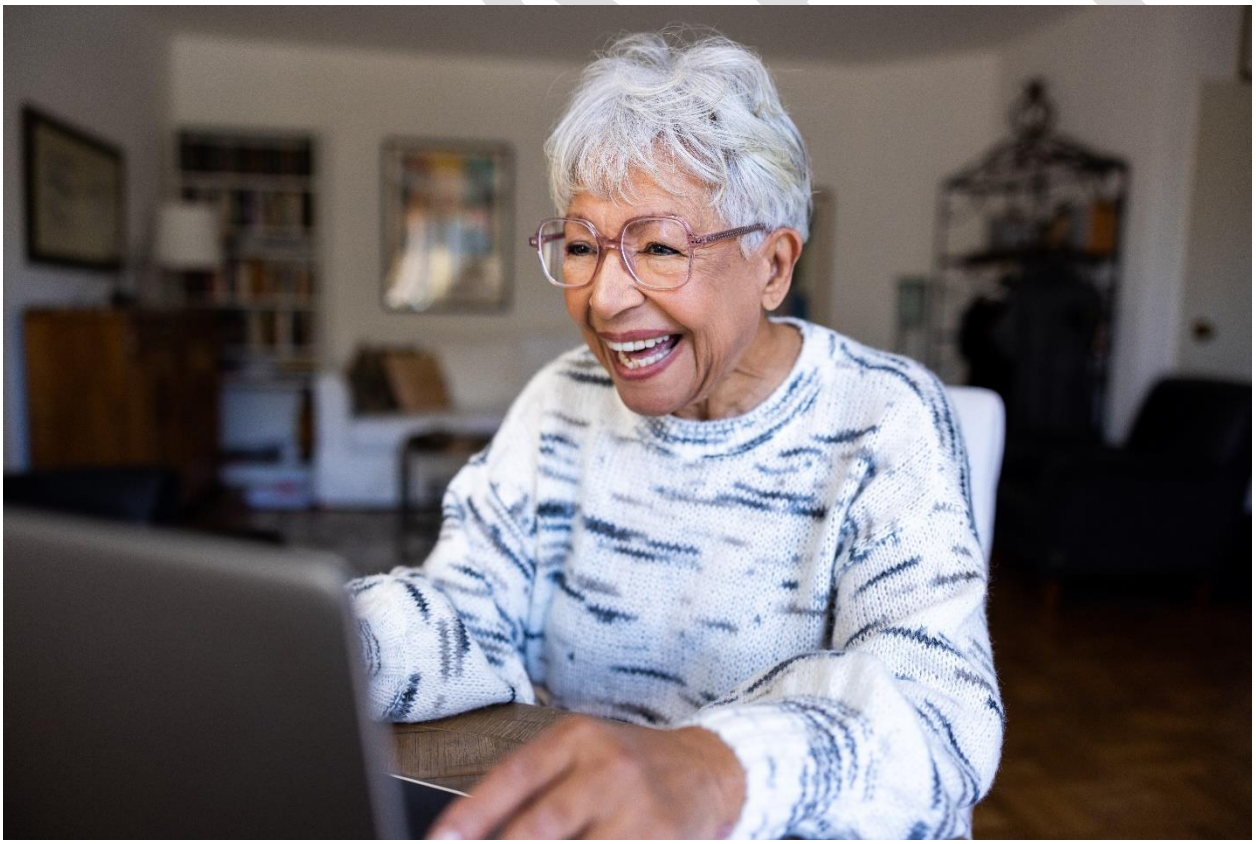
- Expanded access to telehealth across the state of Illinois to provide additional healthcare options to communities in rural and urban Illinois. These options may range from primary

[21] Connect Illinois Broadband Strategic Plan, February 2020; Connect Illinois Digital Equity and Inclusion, October 2021; Illinois BAC Annual Legislative Report, January 2023
[22] Illinois Broadband Advisory Council Annual Legislative Report, January 2023

care to expanded treatment opportunities in areas such as mental health and opioid addiction.

- Increased broadband access—both for in-classroom learning and remote learning at home—throughout Illinois to ensure students have the tools they need to succeed.
- Greater economic development and opportunity in urban and rural communities throughout Illinois. This investment will support the growth of Illinois' agriculture economy and information technology sector, with the aim of modernizing transportation and facilitating the growth of entrepreneurs and small business owners.

In addition to the BAC, multiple agency-level strategic plans and goals rely on or anticipate widespread internet connectivity. Table 1 details the State of Illinois' other broadband-related, broadband-enabled, and digital equity goals.



Senior woman using a laptop computer at home

Table 1: Other state priorities related to broadband

Agency	Plan/Report	Broadband-related, Broadband-enabled, and Digital Equity Priorities
Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity	A Plan to Revitalize the Illinois Economy and Build the Workforce of the Future (October 2019)[23]	Agribusiness and agricultural technology • Expand broadband to unserved and underserved rural areas of the state. Energy • Through investment in broadband, enable utility companies to distribute electricity and lay the foundation for the energy grid of tomorrow more efficiently. Information technology • Provide broadband to people interested in creating and growing information technology companies in currently unserved areas. Life sciences and healthcare • Extend broadband to unserved and underserved areas, resulting in more opportunities to provide healthcare via telehealth technologies. Small businesses • Invest in broadband to expand internet access to entrepreneurs and small business owners across the state so they can expand their reach and customer base
DCEO	State's WIOA Unified State Plan[24]	Foster a statewide workforce development system that supports the needs of individuals and businesses to ensure Illinois has a skilled workforce to effectively compete in the global economy. • *Unite workforce development partners around regional cluster strategies:* Regional cluster strategies focus resources on the industries with the highest potential to add jobs and increase prosperity in regions across Illinois. These strategies bring together the public and private sectors in each region to build on their unique strengths.

[23] A Plan to Revitalize the Illinois Economy and Build the Workforce of the Future, October 2019
[24] State of Illinois WIOA Unified State Plan, 2020 – 2024

Agency	Plan/Report	Broadband-related, Broadband-enabled, and Digital Equity Priorities
		• *Prepare Illinois' workers for a career, not just their next job*: Regardless of background, life circumstances, or education level, Illinois workers can be prepared for high-demand careers by developing core academic, technical, and essential employability skills throughout their lifetimes. • *Connect job seekers with employers:* Assist Illinois businesses in finding the productive workers they need through more efficient training and better services for job seekers and employers.
Department of Aging	State Plan on Aging FY2 2022 – FY 2024 (July 2021)[25]	Promote healthy aging and social integration: • Plan for senior center and adult day services sites and deliver remote and/or virtual activities and services, particularly for marginalized older adults returning to their communities from carceral settings. Expand programming to reduce social isolation and loneliness: • Investigate availability of funding from Illinois Broadband Council for internet, Wi-Fi, and other connectivity devices. Expand caregiver and agency support programs that reduce stress and burnout and promote trauma-informed care: • Expand availability of and increase participation in the Savvy Caregiver program for family caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's who continue to live at home. Consider offering program virtually, based on guidance from "Savvy Caregiver Tips and Guidelines for Online Group Delivery."
Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)	A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth (June 2021)[26]	Support the ongoing learning renewal of students and systemic implementation of evidence-informed student support practices. • Help meet students' basic needs, including housing, food security, mental health/wellness services, and childcare, among others.

[25] State Plan on Aging FY 2022 – FY 2024
[26] A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth, 2021

Agency	Plan/Report	Broadband-related, Broadband-enabled, and Digital Equity Priorities
		Expand equitable access, support, and success in rigorous and strategic early college coursework: • Build the capacity to support Black, Latinx, and rural students' access to early college through flexible, online, and other delivery options. Expand higher-education models of teaching and learning that provide opportunity for students to succeed in the work of the future: • Use of effective online, hybrid, adaptive, and self-paced learning models • High-quality experiential and work-based learning opportunities, internships, and apprenticeships across a variety of sectors. Enhance access to educator preparation programs: • Use technology tools that allow candidates to practice skills in a virtual environment before entering a classroom with students, expand fully online programs, and use virtual (remote) supervision.
Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)	ISBE 2020-2023 Strategic Plan[27]	Every child is expected to make significant academic gains each year and to increase their knowledge, skills, and opportunities so they can graduate equipped to pursue a successful future. With this in mind, the state will pay special attention to addressing historic inequities by: • Supporting best practices and continuous quality improvement—with an emphasis on equity and diversity to support student learning—and addressing remote and blended learning. — By the end of the 2021-22 school year, 80% of school districts are expected to provide one device per student.
Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA)	IDVA Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (February 2023)[28]	Veteran experience • Establish digital access to all IDVA services.

[27] Illinois State Board of Education 2020-2023 Strategic Plan
[28] Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Agency	Plan/Report	Broadband-related, Broadband-enabled, and Digital Equity Priorities
		• Increase virtual access to the services of Veteran Service Officers (VSOs)
Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)	Expanding Career Pathway Opportunities in Adult Education, Strategic Five-Year Plan, 2018-2023[29]	*Guiding principle:* Promote the use of digital literacy in adult education to facilitate stronger transitions to the labor market. *Goal:* Create lifelong career pathways and integrate enabling technologies. Adult learning and education, career and technical training and literacy, and digital literacy are all significant components of the lifelong learning process. Digital literacy and a skilled workforce are key to sustainable economic development and stability in Illinois. This strategic goal includes recommendations for lifelong learning objectives and underscores the need for Illinois Adult Education's continued focus on digital literacy. • Use technology to create "just in time" learning opportunities that give students strategies for addressing lifelong learning needs and building workplace skills. • Develop a comprehensive technology framework for designing adult education programs and instruction that meet the needs of students with varied levels of digital literacy and foundational skills. This framework should address the use of technology in providing greater student access, instruction strategies and methods for using technology, and program design models that provide the flexibility needed to meet the workforce's changing technological landscape. • Integrate the Illinois Essential Employability Skills Framework, agile learning skills, and technology skills into all levels of instruction to help students become adaptable to a changing labor market.
Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	Illinois United for Youth, A Systems of Care Initiative Pathways: A Strategic Plan for Children's Mental Health[30]	*Mission:* To develop a comprehensive strategic plan for integrating the system-of-care philosophy into Illinois' delivery model for providing behavioral health services to youth with serious emotional disturbances.

[29] Expanding Career Pathway Opportunities in Adult Education, Strategic Five-Year Plan 2018 – 2023, January 2018
[30] Illinois United for Youth, A Systems of Care Initiative Pathways: A Strategic Plan for Children's Mental Health, IDHS

Agency	Plan/Report	Broadband-related, Broadband-enabled, and Digital Equity Priorities
		Pathway 5: Developing and implementing strategies to reduce racial, ethnic, and geographic disparities in service delivery across child-serving systems by expanding the SOC approach and improving the cultural and linguistic competence of services. **Pathway 9:** Creating capacity for ongoing training and technical assistance.
Governor's Rural Affair Council (GRAC)	2022 Annual Report[31]	Executive mandate: • Develop and implement strategies for improving the delivery of state services to rural Illinois. • Expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life for rural residents. • Economic development and infrastructure working group. • *Strategy:* Expand access to affordable broadband so rural residents can take advantage of telecommuting opportunities, effectively market businesses, and gain access to healthcare Health and healthcare access working group • Improve access to healthcare by supporting telemedicine and broadband expansion in rural communities through partnerships with local, state, and nongovernmental stakeholders.

[31] 2022 Annual Report, Governor's Rural Affairs Council

In March of 2023, the IOB created the State Government Broadband Working Group, which convenes state agency leaders with shared priorities related to broadband and digital equity. The working group includes leaders from multiple state agencies: the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), the Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL), Illinois Department of employment Security (IDES), Illinois State Police, Illinois Commerce Commission, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS), Illinois Department of Aging (IDoA), and DCEO's Office of Employment and Training. Through this forum, the IOB plans to collaborate on broadband and digital equity priorities and program. One partnership has already developed from this working group: a collaboration with the DCEO Office of Employment and Training, which is leading Illinois' efforts to develop a five-year apprenticeship plan and new four-year WIOA State Plan.

2.2.2 Coordination of use of funds

The IOB plans to coordinate the use of funds for the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program and the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program to ensure deep impact and the advancement of the state's broadband deployment and digital equity vision.

The IOB and state's vision for broadband deployment is rooted in equity. Similarly, Connect Illinois' comprehensive vision of universal access to high-speed broadband infrastructure is based on broadband equity—on targeting resources to close gaps and expand opportunity for unserved and underserved communities throughout Illinois.[32]

The State Digital Equity Plan shares the same focus on covered populations, digital literacy, and access. Much of the IOB's current effort is built upon the Illinois Office of Broadband's Broadband READY program, with its focus on regional engagement and coordinated activity between higher education institutions and local initiatives.[33] The State Digital Equity Plan depends on local coordination and capacity-building to empower local Illinois communities to

[32] Illinois Broadband Advisory Council Annual Legislative Report, January 2023
[33] Digital Inclusion Week: Highlights Across Illinois, Illinois Broadband Connections

expand broadband access. This plan was written in parallel to the state's Five-Year Action Plan to ensure alignment of vision, strategy, objectives, activities, and timeline. One stakeholder engagement process was undertaken to align with both the creation of the IL BEAD Plan and the IL SDEP.

The content in the Vision (2.1), Goals and Objectives (2.2), Existing Programs (3.1), Asset Inventory (3.3), Needs and Gaps Assessment (3.4), and the Stakeholder Engagement Process (5.1) sections of the IL BEAD Plan align with the Vision (2.1), Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes (1.2), Strategy and Objectives (2.2), Asset Inventory (3.1), Needs Assessment (3.2), and the Coordination and Outreach Strategy (4.1) sections of this document, the IL SDEP.

2.2.3 Alignment with local and municipal broadband and digital equity priorities

The State of Illinois reviewed local and municipal digital equity plans that have been published since 2019. Some localities and municipalities have also published broadband strategic plans that were reviewed, as were reports from Broadband READY cohorts.[34] These reports (Section 3.1.2) were used to inform the asset inventory, needs assessment, and strategies developed for this plan. Deliverables from broadband planning cohorts that participated in the Illinois Connected Communities, Accelerate Illinois, and Broadband Breakthrough programs (Section 3.1.3) were reviewed for insights as well. These programs have conducted surveys in their localities and have presented resulting observations of digital equity and broadband deployment barriers and strategies. The program deliverables are referenced throughout this report in the needs assessment—not only to understand the current state of digital equity in the state, but also existing gaps and potential solutions.

[34] The IBL-led Broadband READY Grant Program was launched in 2021 to support qualified regional entities to develop and deliver programs that address broadband inequalities. Grantees convene inclusive and regionally representative Broadband READY Teams. Program focuses on providing eligible residents across the state with affordable computing devices and broadband services, as well as digital skills training.

The state has worked to incorporate as many insights from the local and municipal broadband-related plans and digital equity plans as possible, as many of these proposed solutions have been developed by the residents and key stakeholders who are closest to the digital equity obstacles and barriers. Throughout the IL SDEP drafting process, the state prioritized local voices, as CAIs, non-profit organizations, community-based organizations (CBOs), and local governments are closest to the residents of Illinois and thus understand their digital equity needs best.

2.2.4 Impact and interaction of digital equity with broader efforts and goals

In this section, we discuss how the IOB's digital equity goals impact and interact with other Illinois agencies' efforts related to economic and workforce development, educational outcomes, health outcomes, civic and social engagement, and delivery of other essential services.

2.2.4.1 Economic and workforce development goals, plans, and outcomes

Broadband is increasingly necessary for business attraction and growth in the economy of today and tomorrow. For instance, broadband access has proven to reduce transaction costs and improve access to online resources, boosting sales and reducing input costs. In addition, multiple studies suggest that rural broadband access is positively associated with GDP growth, median household incomes, farm revenues, and non-farm rural business growth—with faster broadband having greater impact.[35]

Residential broadband also attracts businesses by improving quality of life for workers and local customers and providing capacity for telework, flexible schedules, and home-based business start-ups that can generate new jobs or expand the property tax base.[36]

[35] Working Groups, BAC, DCEO
[36] Working Groups, BAC, DCEO

The IOB, which is housed within the DCEO, has identified key industries of focus for Illinois in its economic development plan. These industries include agribusiness and ag tech, energy, information technology, life sciences and healthcare, manufacturing, and transportation and logistics. In addition to supporting the development and advancement of these industries, the state views the investment in broadband as an enabler of job-market growth and capital-building in communities of color.[37] High-quality broadband infrastructure, along with increased adoption and digital skills rates, is foundational to this strategy. In rural economies, companies with high transaction costs or high labor intensity—such as financial services, wholesale trade, health, or tourism—stand to benefit the most from better broadband.[38]

The DCEO's Office of Employment and Training views upskilling and reskilling on digital literacy skills as key to fostering workforce advancement and wealth generation opportunities among Illinois residents. Together the IOB and Office of Employment and Training can strategically deploy funding to optimize the opportunities available for Illinoisans—especially those who are re-entering the workforce or who are marginally employed or disabled.[39]

Aligned objectives:

- All Illinoisans possess the digital skills required to participate in the digital economy.
- Increased implementation of precision agriculture use cases
- Increased agriculture throughput due to improved broadband service
- Increased investment in agriculture technology (e.g., purchase of IoT-enabled technology, automated equipment)
- Scaled education and training programs for skills development in tech-related occupations
- Increased number of Illinoisans who can work from home

[37] Illinois Economy and Build the Workforce of the Future, DCEO, October 2019
[38] Working Groups, BAC, DCEO
[39] Based on conversations with the DCEO Office of Employment and Training

- Scaled education and training programs for skills development in the broadband industry
- Increased job creation in broadband-related roles
- Increased adoption of advanced manufacturing technologies
- Increased adoption of intelligent transportation system technology (ITS).

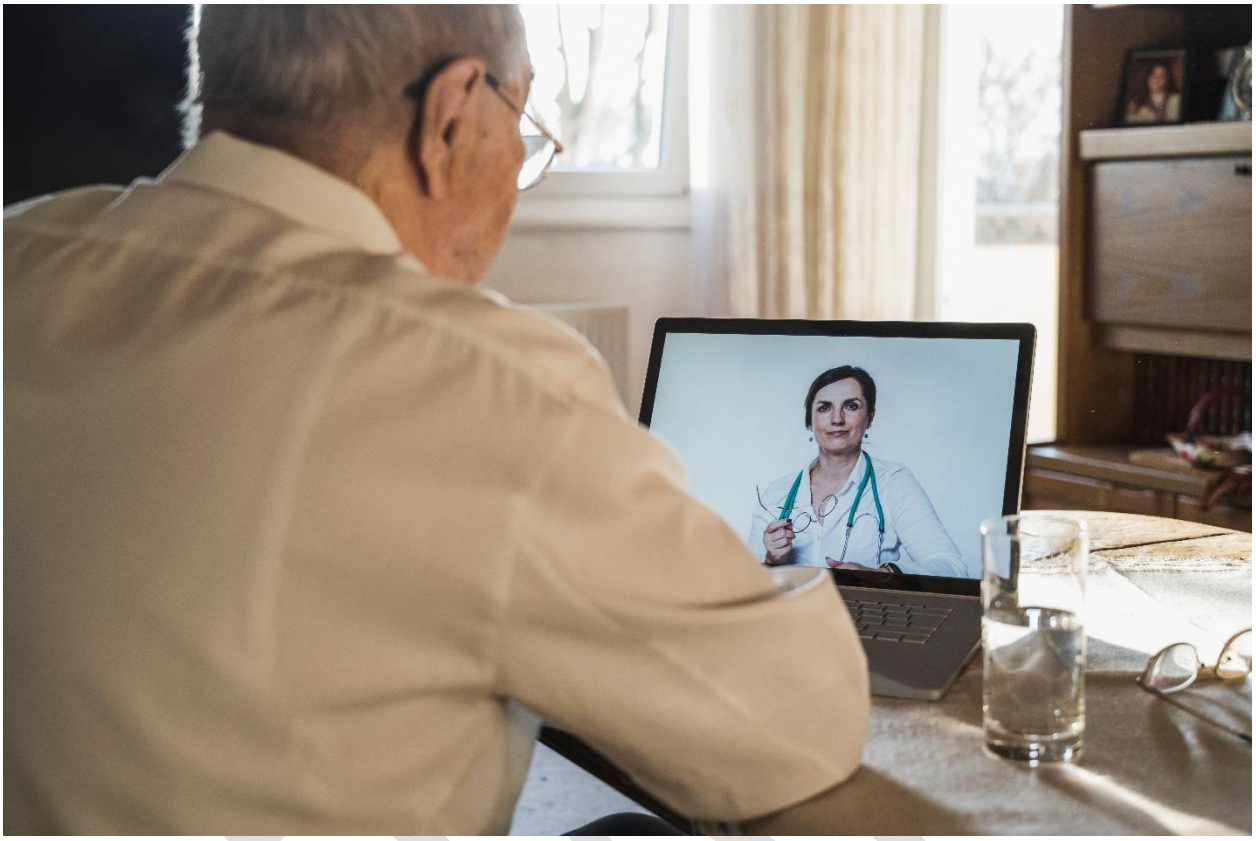
2.2.4.2 Educational outcomes

The ISBE's strategic plan aims to bridge the digital divide in Illinois by increasing equitable access to technology, thereby fostering equitable student outcomes. Technology allows for more personalized learning, more collaboration with peers, development of twenty-first-century workforce skills, and access to resources for student learning at home.[40] The IBHE's strategic plan also seeks to expand future-ready learning models—including online, hybrid, adaptive, and self-paced models—through equitable access to technology that can enhance the learner's experience.[41] The ICCB's Strategic Five-Year Plan emphasizes the importance of investment in technologies and the associated learnings to support demand for digital literacy skills in various career pathways.[42] By providing equitable access to devices—especially computers and laptops—for students, along with skill-building through digital inclusion programs, the activities of the IL SDEP are expected to directly improve educational outcomes that are tied to the digital divide, according to education agencies in Illinois. This work is expected to enhance the state's investment in education technology to ensure that all students have access to the broadband services they need—both in and out of the classroom—for such uses as interactive and multimedia curriculum, flip schedules, and distance learning.[43]

[40] Illinois State Board of Education 2020 – 2023 Strategic Plan
[41] A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth, IBHE, 2021
[42] Expanding Career Pathway Opportunities in Adult Education, Strategic Directions for Illinois, Strategic Five-Year Plan 2018 – 2023, ICCB
[43] Working Groups, BAC, DCEO

Aligned objectives:

- All Illinois schools, libraries, and public health-related facilities have at least 1 Gbps symmetrical broadband service by 2030.
- All IL students and teachers have access to reliable internet service and internet-capable devices.
- Increased percentage of Illinois school districts offering 1 Mbps per student
- Increased percentage of Illinois school districts providing one device per student by 2030
- Increased percentage of Illinois school districts offering parent/caregiver training on technology and remote learning
- Increased access to online courses
- Decreased homework gap among P-20 students.



Senior man taking advice from female doctor through video call on laptop at home

2.2.4.3 Health outcomes

In Illinois, several barriers are standing in the way of expanded health care service and technology through broadband connectivity. These include the need for clear regulation of, and reimbursement for, telehealth services; a lack of necessary equipment for telehealth services and facilities; and a shortage of the bandwidth required for real-time interaction between patients and heath care professionals.[44] The IL BEAD Five-Year Action Plan and IL SDEP prioritize expanding healthcare facilities' access to high-speed broadband. They also promote adoption of advanced technologies in the healthcare industries in Illinois to enable more equitable telehealth services and healthcare access.

[44] Ibid.

Aligned objectives:

- All Illinois schools, libraries, and public health-related facilities have at least 1 Gbps symmetrical broadband service by 2030.
- Higher utilization and satisfaction with remote healthcare among priority populations
- Improved medical record-keeping and documentation.

2.2.4.4 Civic and social engagement

By implementing the IL SDEP and IL BEAD Plan, the state plans to expand access to high-speed service and devices to facilitate community engagement in everyday civic and social activities.

Aligned objectives:

- All Illinois schools, libraries, and public health-related facilities have at least 1 Gbps symmetrical broadband service by 2030.
- Increased numbers of local government entities and communities engaged on digital equity topics
- Increased interaction and communications between local government and covered populations.

2.2.4.5 Delivery of other essential services

Broadband can be leveraged to deploy advanced technologies in communities that need to increase safety and access to essential services. Working through the State Government Broadband Working Group, the IOB plans to ensure that essential services provided by state agencies and their local government equivalents are empowered to provide equitable and accessible services to Illinoisans. And in digital equity funds that are dispersed to partners, IOB will ensure that funded programs enhance the accessibility of essential services to all Illinoisans, with a focus on covered populations.

Aligned objectives:

- Improved safety and efficiency of transportation infrastructure in Illinois
- Increased access to social programs and essential services.

2.3 Strategy and Objectives

This section provides an overview of the overarching goals in accomplishing the vision outlined above. Strategies and measurable objectives are outlined for each goal.

These strategies and objectives align with the three core vision statements:

A. Ensure universal **access** to high-speed broadband that is affordable, reliable, and fully scalable.
B. Leverage new and existing resources for **adoption** through targeted digital inclusion strategies and sustainable broadband equity outcomes.
C. Empower all Illinoisans to **utilize** and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society.

This section aligns with the Goals and Objectives (Section 2.2) of the Illinois State Five-Year Action Plan, also referred to as the "IL BEAD Plan." Table 2 below details the overarching goals and strategies, while Table 3 details the objectives the state hopes to achieve by implementing either the IL BEAD Plan or the IL SDEP. The IL BEAD Plan focuses on broadband deployment and infrastructure, while the IL SDEP focuses on the implementation of digital equity and inclusion programming across Illinois, as well as related activities.

Table 2: Illinois' goals and objectives for broadband deployment and digital equity

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
A1. By 2030, achieve universal access to affordable, reliable, fully scalable high-speed internet service of at least 100/20 Mbps for all Illinois residences and businesses **(Broadband Availability and Affordability)**.	A1a. All Illinoisans have access to at least 100/20 Mbps reliable high-speed internet by 2030.	# unserved IL BSLs **From IL BEAD Plan*	~235K BSLs (6%)[46]	~97k (2.5%)	0 (0%)	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		# underserved IL BSLs **From IL BEAD Plan*	~132K BSLs (3%)[47]	~110 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	Broadband Availability and Affordability
	A1b. All Illinoisans have access to at least 100/20 Mbps fully scalable high-speed internet by 2030.	% IL BSLs with access to fiber **From IL BEAD Plan*	35%[48]	64%	95%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
	A1c. All Illinoisans have access to at least 100/20 Mbps affordable high-speed internet by 2030.[49]	% IL BSLs with access to at least one affordable internet plan (less than $50/month)[50] **From IL BEAD Plan*	77%[51]	89%	100%	Broadband Availability and Affordability

[45] Digital Equity Plan Guidance
[46] Combines the underserved and served BSLs in Illinois; FCC Data Maps accessed June 2023
[47] FCC Data Maps accessed June 2023
[48] FCC Data Maps accessed June 2023
[49] To achieve this objective, two things must be true: (1) a provider with an affordable option is present, and (2) consumers must be able to access the service.
[50] Based on the definition provided in the BAC Affordability Study as either $10/month or $25/month
[51] Provider and speed distribution based on FCC Data Maps, Nov 2022. Internet price based on secondary research.

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
	A1d. All Illinoisans have access to at least 100/100 Mbps fully scalable high-speed internet by 2035.	% IL BSLs with access to 100/100 Mbps **From IL BEAD Plan*	42%[52]	50%	80%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
A2. By 2030, ensure that every CAI has access to at least 1 Gigabit symmetrical broadband service **(Broadband Availability and Affordability)**.[53]	A2a. All Illinois schools, libraries, and public health-related entities have at least 1 Gbps symmetrical broadband service by 2030.	% schools, libraries, and public health-related entities with access to at least 1 Gbps symmetrical+ internet **From IL BEAD Plan*	*To be updated after BEAD Challenge process*	*To be updated after BEAD Challenge process*	100%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		% other CAIs with access to at least 1 Gbps symmetrical+ internet **From IL BEAD Plan*	*To be updated after BEAD Challenge process*	*To be updated after BEAD Challenge process*	100%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		% Illinois Title 1 schools with access to at least 1 Gbps symmetrical internet	*To be updated after BEAD Challenge process*	*To be updated after BEAD Challenge process*	100%	Broadband Availability and Affordability

[52] Combines the underserved and served BSLs in Illinois; FCC Data Maps accessed June 2023

[53] Based on BEAD NOFO, CAI ("community anchor institution") means an entity such as a school, library, health clinic, health center, hospital or other medical provider, public safety entity, institution of higher education, public housing organization, or community support organization that facilitates use of broadband service among vulnerable populations, including but not limited to low-income individuals, unemployed individuals, children, the incarcerated, and aged individuals (including CDFIs).

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
	A2b. Expanded availability of public Wi-Fi throughout the state	# counties that have access to five public Wi-Fi hotspots	31[54]	67	102	Broadband Availability and Affordability
B1. Achieve universal digital literacy—including capabilities to ensure online privacy, cybersecurity—with a focus on accessibility and inclusivity for covered populations **(Digital Literacy; Online Privacy and Cybersecurity; Online Accessibility and Inclusivity)**	B1a. Improved adoption rates both overall and for each covered population	% broadband adoption for individuals in covered households	54%[55]	72%	0%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		% broadband adoption for rural households	57%[56]	74%	90%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		% broadband adoption for Black or African American residents	65%[57]	78%	90%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		% broadband adoption for Hispanic residents	72%[58]	81%	90%	Broadband Availability and Affordability

[54] Data from the Drive Up Wi-Fi Hotspots map maintained by the IOB and IBL
[55] US Census 2021 5-Year ACS. Additional details in Section 3.2
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
		% broadband adoption for Asian residents	84%[59]	87%	90%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		% broadband adoption for residents over 60	64%[60]	77%	90%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		% broadband adoption for veterans	67%[61]	79%	90%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		% broadband adoption for residents in households with income less than 150% FPL	54%[62]	72%	90%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		% broadband adoption for residents with disabilities	57%[63]	74%	90%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
	B1b. Increased # of Illinoisans using internet-ready devices	% Illinoisans using computer, laptop, or tablet device **From IL BEAD Plan*	74% for computer/lapt	82%	90%	Broadband Availability and Affordability

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
			op/computer [64]			
	B1c. All Illinoisans possess the digital skills required to participate in the digital economy.	% Illinoisians with low digital literacy rate statewide	11%[65]	5%	0%	Digital Literacy
		% racial/ethnic minorities with low digital literacy rate	15%[66]	8%	0%	Digital Literacy
		% residents living in rural areas with low digital literacy rate	11%[67]	5%	0%	Digital Literacy
		% residents with income <150% of the FPL with low digital literacy rate	28%[68]	14%	0%	Digital Literacy
	B1d. Increased number of digital navigator programs	# digital navigator programs offered across the state **From IL BEAD Plan*	TBD	51	102	Digital Literacy

[64] Share of Illinoisans over the age of 3 who responded that they use a desktop computer, laptop, or tablet on the NTIA Internet Use Survey 2021
[65] Digital literacy rate estimated using state-wide residential internet use survey, see details in Section 3.2
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
	B1e. Increased local government and communities engaged on digital equity topics	# counties with participants in statewide broadband-related programming **From IL BEAD Plan*	38[69]	70	102	Digital Literacy
	B1f. Decreased broadband hesitancy due to privacy/cybersecurity concerns	% residents who are "very" or "somewhat often" worried about the privacy or security of their personal data **From IL BEAD Plan*	35%[70]	23%	10%	Online Privacy and Cybersecurity
B2. Ensure all Illinoisans, including members of covered populations, have access to affordable subscriptions, devices, and tech support **(Broadband Affordability; Device Availability and Affordability)**	B2a. Increased % of Illinoisan households with access to internet-ready devices	% households with access to desktop or laptop computers **From IL BEAD Plan*	79%[71]	85%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability
	B2b. Decreased % of households without enough devices	% households that need more computing devices so each member can connect to the internet **From IL BEAD Plan*	11%[72]	8%	5%	Device Availability and Affordability

[69] Estimate based on counties with a participating organization in Round 1 or Round 2 of the Illinois Connected Communities or Accelerate Illinois and Broadband Breakthrough
[70] Based on IBL Stakeholder Survey responses to the question, "How often, if at all, have you ever experienced any of the following?"
[71] U.S. Census, ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates
[72] Data collected based on IBL Broadband and Digital Equity Survey question, "Does your household need more computing devices, such as a laptop or tablet computer, to allow each person to connect to the internet as needed?"

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
	B2c. Increased enrollment in ACP (Affordable Connectivity Program) among Illinois households	APC uptake rate **From IL BEAD Plan*	33%[73]	41%	50%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
	B2d. Increased device (laptop or desktop) access rates	% device access for rural households	69%[74]	80%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability
		% device access for Black or African American residents	68%[75]	79%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability
		% device access for Hispanic residents	78%[76]	84%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability
		% device access for Asian residents	91%[77]	93%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability
		% device access for residents over 60	72%[78]	81%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability

[73] Calculated with data from Estimating participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), September 2023, and USAC ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker, Dec 2022
[74] US Census 2021 5-Year ACS. Additional details in Section 3.2
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
		% device access for veterans	77%[79]	84%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability
		% device access for residents in households with income less than 150% FPL	59%[80]	75%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability
		% device access for residents with disabilities	63%[81]	77%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability
B3. Ensure that every student, school, and district within Illinois participates in a sustainable one-to-one initiative **(Device Availability and Affordability; Digital Literacy)**	B3a. All IL students and teachers have access to reliable internet and internet-capable devices.	% students with access to reliable internet and devices **From IL BEAD Plan*	*To be confirmed with state education partners*	50%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability
		% teachers with access to reliable internet and devices **From IL BEAD Plan*	*To be confirmed with state education partners*	50%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability

[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
	B3b. Increased % of IL school districts offering 1 Mbps/student	% IL school districts at 1 Mbps/student **From IL BEAD Plan*	68%[82]	79%	90%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
	B3c. Increased % of IL school districts providing one device per student by 2030	% IL school districts with 1:1 programs **From IL BEAD Plan*	80%[83]	85%	90%	Device Availability and Affordability
		% IL Title 1 schools offering 1:1 programs	92%[84]	93%	95%	Device Availability and Affordability
	B3d. Increased % of IL school districts offering parent/caregiver training on technology and remote learning	% IL schools offering tech training to parents/caregivers **From IL BEAD Plan*	85%[85]	88%	90%	Digital Literacy
	B3e. Increased access to online courses	% students enrolled exclusively or in some distance education postsecondary courses	60%[86]	TBD	TBD	Digital Literacy

[82] Connect K-12
[83] 2020 Illinois School District Technology Survey, Learning Technology Center of Illinois in collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Trend Generator, National Center for Education Statistics (Student Enrollment: What is the percent of students enrolled in distance education courses in postsecondary institutions in the fall?)

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
	B4f. Decreased homework gap among P-20 students[87]	% K-12 students without internet to support completion of homework at home	13%[88]	7%	0%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
		% P-20 students without internet to support completion of homework at home	*To be confirmed with state education partners*	5%	0%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
B4. Increase the use of broadband services to facilitate aging in place **(Digital Literacy; Online Privacy and Cybersecurity; Online Accessibility and Inclusivity).**	B4a. Increased % of Illinoisans using internet-ready devices	% of Illinoisans over 65 using computer, laptop, or tablet computer **From IL BEAD Plan*	61% computer/tablet[89]	70%	80%	Device Availability and Affordability
	B4b. Increased # of Illinoisans over 65 possessing the digital skills required to participate in society and the digital economy.	% digital literacy rate for the over-65 population **From IL BEAD Plan*	17%[90]	10%	5%	Digital Literacy

[87] Homework gap refers to households in Illinois with children who do not have a high-speed subscription at home to complete homework; A P-20 system represents preschool through education after college (Illinois P-20 Council)

[88] 2020 Illinois School District Technology Survey, Learning Technology Center of Illinois in collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education

[89] Share of Illinoisans over the age of 65 who responded that they use a desktop computer, laptop computer, or a tablet on the NTIA Internet Use Survey 2021

[90] Based on state-wide internet use online survey responses to the question, "If you were asked to complete the following tasks using the internet, how confident would you be that you could successfully complete them?" 17% of respondents over 65 reported not feeling comfortable completing at least one of the tasks provided.

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
	B4c. Increased # of Illinoisans over 60 participating in the Illinois Care Connections (ICC) Program	# of Illinoisans over 60 referred and approved for technology bundles **From IL BEAD Plan*	~1,901[91]	TBD	TBD	Device Availability and Affordability
	B4d. Reduced social isolation and loneliness[92]	% "less lonely" rating among aging participants in the ICC Program **From IL BEAD Plan*	79.8%[93]	85%	90%	Digital Literacy
C1. Accelerate the use of digital agriculture applications across rural Illinois **(Broadband Availability; Digital Literacy).**	C1a. All farms in IL have access to high-speed internet.	% of IL farms with access to internet **From IL BEAD Plan*	90%[94]	95%	100%	Broadband Availability and Affordability
	C1b. Increased implementation of precision agriculture use cases	# of farms implementing precision agriculture applications **From IL BEAD Plan*	*To be confirmed with state partners on agriculture*	+10%	+20%	Digital Literacy
	C1c. Increased agriculture throughput	% change in crop yield from improved broadband service	*To be confirmed with state*	8%	16%	Broadband Availability and Affordability

[91] A Report on the Illinois CARE Connections Program, August 2021
[92] Adapted from the Illinois Department of Aging's State Plan on Aging FY2022-FY2024
[93] Reducing Social Isolation Through Technology: A Report on the Illinois CARE Connections Program, August 2021
[94] Figures for farms with internet access, from USDA Farm Computer Usage and Ownership, 2021. Note: Speed data not available

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
	due to improved broadband service		*partners on agriculture*			
	C1d. Increased investment in agriculture technology (e.g., purchase of IoT-enabled technology, automated equipment)	$ amount of investment in agriculture technology	*To be confirmed with state partners on agriculture*	+10%	+20%	Digital Literacy
C2. Expand broadband-empowered opportunities for inclusive workforce development in communities throughout Illinois, with a focus on covered populations **(Online Accessibility and Inclusivity; Digital Literacy)**.	C2a. Scaled education and training programs for skills development in tech-related occupations	# of participants trained for IT occupations **From IL BEAD Plan*	*To be confirmed with state partners on agriculture*	+10%	+20%	Digital Literacy
	C2b. Increased number of Illinoisans that can work from home	% of Illinoisans working remotely via the Internet **From IL BEAD Plan*	32%[95]	+10%	+20%	Online Accessibility and Inclusivity
	C2c. Scaled education and training programs to develop skills for the broadband industry	# of participants trained for broadband-related occupations **From IL BEAD Plan*	TBD	+10%	+20%	Digital Literacy

[95] Working Remotely via the Internet, Age 15+ Persons Who Use the Internet, November 2021, NTIA Internet Use Survey

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
	C2d. Increased job creation in broadband-related roles	# jobs created from network construction and maintenance	*To be confirmed with state workforce partners*	+10%	+20%	
C3. Expand access to broadband-empowered, health-related services—including but not limited to telehealth, telemetry, and remote surgery—for covered populations to provide additional healthcare options to communities throughout Illinois **(Online Accessibility and Inclusivity; Digital Literacy)**	C3a. Higher utilization of and satisfaction with remote healthcare among prioritized populations	% of population that use telehealth **From IL BEAD Plan*	*To be confirmed with state healthcare partners*	+10%	+20%	Online Accessibility and Inclusivity
		% of population satisfied with telehealth **From IL BEAD Plan*	*To be confirmed with state healthcare partners*	+10%	+20%	Online Accessibility and Inclusivity
		% Medicare users who have received at least one telehealth service	16.4%[96]	25%	40%	Online Accessibility and Inclusivity
	C3b. Improved medical record-keeping and documentation	% increase in hospitals using remote patient monitoring	*To be confirmed with state healthcare partners*	+10%	+20%	Digital Literacy

[96] Medicare Telehealth Trends Data File, Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
C4. Expand the use of digital manufacturing applications by small businesses and/or develop use cases for intelligent transportation and smart logistics in regions with the most need **(Broadband Availability; Online Accessibility and Inclusivity)**	C4a. Increased adoption of advanced manufacturing technologies	% of manufacturers that currently implement adv. manufacturing tech. **From IL BEAD Plan*	36.9%[97]	63%	90%	Digital Literacy
	C4b. Improved safety and efficiency of transportation infrastructure in Illinois	# of intelligent transportation systems (ITS) projects across Illinois[98] **From IL BEAD Plan*	*To be confirmed with state transportation partners*	+10%	+20%	Online Accessibility and Inclusivity
	C4c. Increased adoption of intelligent transportation system technology (ITS)	# of pilot programs or projects out of the Illinois Autonomous and Connected Track (I-ACT) **From IL BEAD Plan*	*To be confirmed with state transportation partners*	+10%	+20%	Digital Literacy
C5. Increase community development among Illinois' covered populations through civic and social engagement empowered by	C5a. Increased interaction and communications between local government and covered populations	% increase in online voter registrations in Illinois	*To be confirmed with state partners*		+20%	Online Accessibility & Inclusivity
		% increase in government website views	*To be confirmed with state partners*		+20%	Online Accessibility & Inclusivity

[97] How Illinois Manufacturers are Adopting Advanced Technologies: An Insight Report on Automation, Workforce, and Productivity, Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center
[98] Intelligent transportation systems can be defined as "the integrated application of sensor, computer, electronics, and communications technologies and management strategies to provide traveler information to increase the safety and efficiency of the surface transportation system," Illinois Statewide ITS Strategic Plan, 2019

Goal	Objective	KPI	Baseline	2027 target	2030 target	Area[45]
broadband access and adoption **(Online Accessibility and Inclusivity; Online Privacy and Cybersecurity)**						
	C5b. Increased access to target social programs and essential services	# online communities for covered populations across Illinois	*To be confirmed with state partners*		+20%	Online Accessibility & Inclusivity

3 Current State of Broadband and Digital Inclusion

3.1 Asset Inventory

This section inventories assets across Illinois that promote digital equity for covered populations. These assets are already engaged in the work of digital equity, with the goal of closing the digital divide in Illinois. These include current, publicly or privately funded resources, programs, and strategies. The State followed the Digital Act of 2021 and DE Planning NOFO definition of

"covered populations" when listing the target population of assets included in this inventory.[99] As shown below, while a sizeable and diverse community of digital equity practitioners is engaged in local communities across Illinois, meaningful work is still to be done to make sure that every community has the support needed to fully participate in the digital world.

3.1.1 Digital inclusion assets by covered population

Below is a list of digital equity asset types that are currently deployed across the state, each of which is described in Table 3:

1. Civic and volunteer organizations that provide volunteer and advocacy assistance for digital equity programs: Organizations that advocate for digital equity or offer volunteer programming related to digital literacy, inclusion, or equity.
2. Technical assistance to support digital inclusion: Programs that provide internet-enabled devices or digital literacy assistance to covered populations.
3. Workforce development training and employment services: Programs that offer training and employment resources to community members.
4. Public Wi-Fi, networks, and access points: Platforms or programs that provide information about or connection to public Wi-Fi, networks, access points, or sub-devices that enable access to networks.

[99] Covered populations are individuals who live in covered households, including aging individuals, veterans, individuals with disabilities, individuals with a language barrier (including those who are English learners and have low levels of literacy), members of racial or ethnic minority groups, and individuals who primarily reside in a rural area. Also included are incarcerated individuals (other than those incarcerated in a federal correctional facility).

Table 3: Digital equity assets in Illinois that can be leveraged to deploy federal BEAD and Digital Equity Act funding

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
1. Civic and volunteer organizations that provide volunteer and advocacy assistance for digital equity programs	Learning Technology Center of Illinois (LTC)	Connectivity and Digital Equity	LTC offers training and consulting support for obtaining state, federal, and grant funding to help districts access and improve broadband connectivity, devices, and digital resources that increase equitable learning opportunities.	All
	LatinX Digital Leaders Now (DLN)	Computer Science 4Latinx (CS4Latinx)	The DLN organization recruits Latinx teachers to participate in professional development opportunities related to computer science (CS) to empower them with CS skills, micro-credentials, and STEM endorsements. The program particularly focuses on showing teachers how to distribute the curriculum in students' native language.	Racial or ethnic minority group (Hispanic/Latinx)
	Community Data Clinic, Technology Services (UIUC)	Dignifying Digital Connection Project	Dignifying Digital Connection aims to expand internet and technology access for low-income families in East and Central Illinois. Based on the community partnership model, the Community Data Clinic (CDC) and PCs for People distribute laptops and hotspots to enable access to basic technology and Internet connection. This project works toward closing the digital connectivity gap with a human-centered approach and sheds light on the socio-technical inequities that prevent diverse, vulnerable populations from accessing stable broadband connectivity in East	Low-income households

[100] Organization that owns or manages the described asset.
[101] Links provide either further information on the asset or a direct link to the asset's website, depending on what is available online.

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			Central Illinois. Dignifying Digital Connection provides insight on other factors related to digital connectivity, including sustained broadband access, tech literacy, trust in technology, and affordability.	
	Chi Hack Night	Chi Hack Night	Chi Hack Night is a free weekly event for individuals who are interested in programming to learn from those in the industry. Hack Nights offer information on topics pertaining to civic tech and open government, presentations on active civic tech/open government applications, and mini "hackathons" where individuals can practice and refine their tech skills. Chi Hack Night strives to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in Chicago's tech sector. The event promotes presenters from underrepresented groups in tech and has spaces for anti-racism discussions and projects.[102]	All
2. Technical assistance to support digital inclusion	Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), Education SuperHighway (ESH)	Illinois Classroom Connectivity Initiative	ISBE and ESH offer technical assistance to school districts across the state. They help to upgrade tools and distribute procurement resources free of charge.	All
	LULAC Illinois Education Council 5238, DLN, Flyer School, Our American Voice®	LULAC Connect	To create LULAC Connect, DLN has partnered with Flyer School to use its mobile content management platform, Flyer Connect. Hundreds of schools and communities use Flyer Connect to communicate with students' families. For instructional content, DLN is working with Our American Voice® to provide	All

[102] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			educational resources via their mobile app, which allows schools to use critical push notifications and announcements, surveys, instructional resources, and calendaring. Also provided are data analytics that indicate whether families are accessing the information and resources.	
	LULAC Illinois Education Council 5238, DLN	LULAC Census 2020	The DLN provides the LULAC Connect Mobile App with Managed Services, which include intensive design and technical support to schools and organizations. The DLN team supports families as they deploy the LULAC Connect innovative mobile technology tool to facilitate communication and remote learning. LULAC Connect will offer resources that students and families can access through their mobile phones. Once it is up and running, the schools and organizations will be able to quickly and efficiently maintain and manage the app on their own.	All
	Housing Authority of Champaign County (HACC)	Virtual Tutoring/Homework Assistance	During COVID-19, HACC partnered with students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to offer free virtual tutoring and homework assistance to students in need. Additionally, technical support was provided to help parents navigate the various online platforms their children needed for virtual learning.	All
	Housing Authority of Champaign County (HACC)	EnVision Center	In October 2020, HACC was designated as an EnVision Center, which is a centralized hub that provides community members with the resources and support needed to excel. Grant funds were used to purchase 10 all-in-one PCs to equip a computer lab.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
	YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago	Computer Support Labs	The YMCA of Metro Chicago's new computer labs add an in-person component to its digital access and literacy efforts. These efforts began with connecting Chicago Public Schools families to no-cost, high-speed internet and operating a bilingual Community IT Help Desk phone line. The Y's computer support labs help to bridge the digital divide by providing free computer training and IT assistance.	All
	Chicago Public Schools (CPS)	Parent Tech Support Center	The Parent Tech Support Center offers support for students' CPS-provided devices and other technology-related issues.	All
	Chicago Public Schools (CPS)	Parent University	Parent Universities provide a hub for parents to access the internet, devices, and classes. They also offer parents, guardians, and community members learning and training programs on a broad array of topics at CPS school sites across the city at no cost. Classes, workshops, and events cover topics such as the Common Core curriculum, the GED, ESL, parenting skills, health and wellness, nutrition, Microsoft Office (Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and other programs), financial literacy, job-searching, and career development strategies. Each Parent University is equipped with a computer lab, a parent resource room, an office area, and an activity room.	All
	Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)	Digital Inclusion Services (DIS)	CHA brings digital inclusion services and resources to participating residents by providing access to low-cost internet services, free or low-cost devices, and digital skills training. In addition, CHA offers digital inclusion services in nine digital resource centers located in	Low-income households

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			CHA's developments and community centers, where residents can receive one-on-one assistance. CHA also uses a mobile technology van to offer onsite services throughout the city for individuals who lack access to devices or training.[103]	
	Quincy Public Library (QPL)	Technology Tutor	Tech tutors assist QPL members in building the skills they need to access the digital resources they want. Sessions are tailored specifically to the individual's skills, experience, and goals.	All
	Education Justice Project (EJP)	Computer Lab	EJP maintains a computer lab at Danville Correctional Center. Students use the lab to produce assignments and notes, watch uploaded content, and gain confidence in using computers. Some instructors hold classes in the lab, and EJP students provide tech support. The lab's main purpose is to serve as a valued, vibrant space that helps to build a sense of community while comfortably and efficiently facilitating the various functions held in the room.	Justice-impacted individuals
	Community Data Clinic, Technology Services (UIUC)	Tech Buddies Program	A trained, 20-member team of UIUC students and local community members assist households in the months after they receive laptops and hotspots.	All
	Illinois State University	Technology Assistance	The Technology Assistance Community Outreach Service (TACOS), a registered student organization (RSO) under the School of Information Technology, serves the Bloomington Normal Community by	All

[103] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
		Community Outreach Service	providing technical assistance to those who need it most. The organization aims to positively impact the local community by sharing members' troubleshooting, programming, and other technology-related skills. Current projects include providing technical help to residents at the Luther Oaks assisted living facility in Bloomington and assisting/teaching technology classes for seniors at Living Well United in LeRoy, the Bloomington Housing Authority in Bloomington, and the Western Avenue Community Center in Bloomington.	
	Chicago State University	Chicago State University (Rise Scholar)	Through its library, instruction, and outreach, CSU teaches digital literacy to its students, who receive laptops from the university in their freshman year. Enabled by the State of Illinois' digital literacy grants, the university is developing a program in which student navigators will assist in community digital equity training. CSU is located in a predominately Black area of the far south side, and its students are predominately Black, female, and older than most undergraduates.[104]	Racial or ethnic minority groups, aging individuals
	City Colleges of Chicago (CCC)	Tech Equity Program	The Tech Equity program facilitates more equitable access to technology and tech skills for City Colleges of Chicago students, preparing them to enroll, complete a college credential (certificate or degree), launch or advance their careers, and contribute to an inclusive	Racial or ethnic minority groups, low-income households

[104] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			Chicago economy. City Colleges offers free Wi-Fi to eligible students through the Chicago Connected program and free laptops through the Learn to Own Laptop program. It is building more digital literacy opportunities through its digital equity strategy. City Colleges of Chicago serves students as diverse as the city itself, and many students are the first in their family to attend college. Three-quarters of students are Black or Latinx, and a pre-pandemic student survey found that 60% of respondents described themselves as recently unhoused or food-insecure.	
	Chicago Public Library	Technology	CPL provides access to desktop computers and Wi-Fi at its 80 locations across the city, some of which are in historically excluded communities. CPL also lends Wi-Fi hotspots and Chromebooks to communities that are most affected by the digital divide. Additionally, CPL has developed courses such as Get a Job with IllinoisWorknet for local residents, along with other courses for computer beginners. In select locations, CPL provides computer tutors to assist patrons. Each of CPL's locations is equipped with an Adesso Luminous keyboard. The library's central location offers the Assistive Resource Center for patrons with limited vision or limited mobility.[105]	All

[105] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
	Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC)	Digital Literacy	Every month CBCAC offer a digital literacy class for CPS parents and the general public. Materials and recordings for all courses are shared publicly following each session. CBCAC also offers bilingual service and assistance in finding more resources, and it helps community members to learn digital skills when looking for employment.[106]	All
	Humboldt Park Community As a Campus	Family Outreach and Support and Parent Digital Training	This program gives parents in Humboldt Park schools an opportunity to participate in digital training both in-person and remotely. Training topics range from setting up and managing an e-mail account and navigating computer applications to earning certificates and credentials that help parents make a livable salary. This program serves Spanish speakers and low-income families.	Individuals with a language barrier, low-income households
	Northwest Center	Northwest Center	Northwest Center provides one-on-one coaching in a beginner's computer basics course. As supplies allow, the center provides participants with a device upon completion of the course. Northwest Center also supports families who are eligible for Chicago Connected and the ACP to obtain internet service for free or at a lower cost. Northwest Center also has additional workshops for personal, career, professional, and digital advancement.[107]	Racial or ethnic minority groups

[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
	Southwest Organizing Project's (SWOP)	SWOP	SWOP connects families to the internet through the Chicago Connected program and provides digital learning courses in English and Spanish through NorthStar Digital Literacy.[108]	Individuals with a language barrier
	Preservation of Affordable Housing – Chicago (POAH)	Digital Technology	POAH's onsite computer lab has 10 computer stations and is managed by the Digital Literacy Instructor (funded by LISC AmeriCorps) who: (1) administers digital literacy classes (now offered remotely) and other adult learning technology resources and (2) provides technology instruction and guidance for employers and financial clients, as well as assistance to independent users.	Low-income households
	Teamwork Englewood	Team Englewood	Teamwork Englewood provides resources that help Chicago Connected to offer good-quality internet services to the community, to advocate for community acquisition of devices, and to organize digital literacy classes. Englewood community residents are mostly low-income families who lack needed resources like affordable, high-quality internet and digital technology devices.	Low-income households
	AT&T	Connected Learning Centers (Chicagoland; West Side)	In Chicago, AT&T opened two AT&T Connected Learning Centers where the organization provides free high-speed internet, devices, and educational resources. In June 2022, AT&T opened one of these centers on the west side of Chicago at Marillac St. Vincent Family Services, and in September 2022, the	Low-income households

[108] Ibid.

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			company opened another center at New Life Centers on the south side. In addition, AT&T has deployed AT&T fiber to numerous predominantly Black neighborhoods on the south and west sides.[109]	
3. Workforce development training and employment services	DCEO	Office of Employment and Training	The Office of Employment and Training supports innovative workforce programs and career, training, and employment services that connect employers to a highly skilled workforce. Providing assistance and resources for job-seekers is central to Illinois' commitment to ensuring that businesses thrive in our state.	All
	DCEO	CEJA Workforce Programs	DCEO's role in CEJA is to help Illinois' workforce prepare and train for jobs in the clean energy industry, and to provide support to workers and communities facing plant closures. These programs promote a diverse workforce in the clean energy industry by prioritizing Illinoisians who live in communities that have historically faced economic barriers and environmental damage.	All
	DCEO	Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE)	The OMEE is committed to providing entrepreneurs and small businesses owned by minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and veterans across the state with equitable access to opportunities and resources. Through dynamic partnerships, targeted outreach, and tailored programs and initiatives, OMEE aims to create an inclusive business ecosystem for communities that	Individuals with disabilities, racial or ethnic minority groups, veterans

[109] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			have traditionally faced systemic barriers to entry and growth. This investment spurs local economic development in underserved areas, resulting in a revitalized and thriving Illinois economy.	
	DCEO	Illinois workNet® Portal and Program	To expand economic opportunity, the Illinois WorkNet® portal and program uses partnerships and technology to expand seamless, real-time access to workforce development resources aimed at individuals, employers, and workforce/education partners.	All
	DCEO	WIOA Works Illinois	WIOA Works Illinois is an online resource to assist business and industry leaders, policy makers, community organizations, and workforce professionals in achieving success through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).	All
	Illinois Green Economy Network (IGEN)	Illinois Green Economy Network (IGEN)	IGEN is a consortium of all Illinois community colleges working together to grow the clean energy economy and green workforce. This unique approach leverages the power of a sustainability network and the deep community connections of individual colleges. IGEN provides a platform to expand the deployment of clean energy technologies, to increase employment opportunities, to improve environmental and human health, to foster community engagement, and to accelerate market competitiveness.	All
	Discovery Partners Institute (DPI),	Chicago Tech Fellows	Chicago Tech Fellows is a network of programs and support systems from high school to adulthood. Its holistic approach is designed to bring more people of	Racial or ethnic minority groups

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
	University Illinois System		color and women into the city's vibrant and recession-proof tech economy. Among the offerings: In high school, fellows learn an enriching curriculum in computing, computer science, and data science. In college, students engage in immersive, hands-on experiences. In the workforce, adults navigate various pathways into the tech ecosystem through programs like the network's one-year software apprenticeship. Throughout this process, DPI helps to demystify the tech field and to identify those who are best suited for it by creating opportunities for communities that have historically been left out.	
	DPI, University of Illinois System; UIC's CHANCE program; UIUC's Grainger College of Engineering, and UIUC's College of Liberal Arts & Sciences	Digital Scholars Program	In the summer of 2020, DPI launched the Digital Scholars program to build a deeper and more diverse pool of homegrown students pursuing computer science and tech-related degrees. The program is a partnership between UIC's CHANCE program, UIUC's Grainger College of Engineering, and UIUC's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. To date, the program has reached over 200 students and involved more than 100 representatives from Chicago's tech community. The program focuses on serving Black and Latinx, CPS, and Chicago-area young women and first-generation students at no cost.	Racial or ethnic minority groups, low-income households
	DPI, University of Illinois System	PTTL's Software Development Program	DPI's Pritzker Tech Talent Labs Software Development Program aims to develop and build skills among adults who are rethinking their careers. The program's end-goal is to increase Chicago's digital talent supply and to drive representative economic growth in the region	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			through innovative mastery programs designed to match students' skills and career aspirations with company needs.	
	DPI, University of Illinois System; Google Chicago; Wright College	Discover Computing	This two-part program is a partnership with Google Chicago and Wright College aimed at helping early high school students learn about computer science and build interest in and awareness of potential careers in the field. Students work with DPI staff, Google mentors, and Wright College near-peer mentors to develop skills in problem-solving and team-building through human-centered design thinking. This program intentionally serves Chicago-area students, first-generation students, and students of color at no cost.	Racial or ethnic minority groups, low-income households
	DPI, University of Illinois System	Community College Pathways	Community College Pathways focuses on developing strategic partnerships and relationships with educational organizations and aligned entities (particularly those focused on computing and data)—such as community colleges and universities, non-profit organizations and service providers, K-12 administrators, corporations, foundations, and others in the community—to collaboratively advance DPI's goal of increasing the number of Black, Latinx, female, and other minority populations in computer science, data science, and related fields of study at Illinois institutions.	Racial or ethnic minority groups
	Illinois Manufacturer's Association	Makers on the Move	The Makers on the Move bus visits manufacturing facilities, colleges, and high schools across the state to highlight available job opportunities in the innovative	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			manufacturing sector. The program is designed to showcase modern manufacturing, which is high-tech, clean, diverse, and sustainable.	
	Illinois Manufacturers' Association, EdSystem	Scaling Transformative Advanced Manufacturing Pathways (STAMP)	By serving as a community of practice and offering technical assistance to regional teams, STAMP serves secondary students enrolled in manufacturing programs by providing information about pertinent community college programs and employment opportunities, with a particular focus on under-represented students with one or more barriers to education, training, and employment. The structure and support provided through STAMP accelerate and expand manufacturing career paths in state numerous population centers and establish a foundation for further scaling in the future.	Racial or ethnic minority groups
	Education Justice Project (EJP)	Prison-to-Gown Pathway	The Prison-to-Gown Pathway will offer services and support for University of Illinois students who have interacted with the criminal justice system. The EJP hopes the program will develop into a useful model for other universities that want to support systems-involved students. EJP is currently in the learning and research phase of this initiative. In the future, EJP plans to pilot services and recruit Pathway members as resources allow.	Justice-impacted individuals
	Chicago Public Schools	Chicago Connected Initiative	Chicago Connected participants can now access free content taught by instructors from over 190 of the world's leading universities and organizations through Coursera. Chicago Connected is a first-of-its-kind broadband program that has connected over 64,000	Low-income households

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students to at-home, high-speed internet and has made free digital learning resources available to families.	
	Chicago Public Schools	Chicago Connected Initiative – Northstar Digital Learning	Northstar Digital Learning sites support Chicago Connected families as parents and guardians earn certificates related to computer skills, software skills, and daily technology, like social media. The sites' services include proctoring assessments, among others.	Low-income households
	Chicago Jobs Council (CJC)	Capacity-Building	CJC works with non-profit leaders, funders, service providers, and government agencies to build the tools and resources needed to help marginalized workers change their economic conditions. Through public and customized training, learning cohorts, and communities of practice, CJC cultivates an environment where workforce development professionals can learn and share their best practices in the field.	All
	County of Vermilion	Vermilion County Works	Vermilion County Works offers workforce training to youth, adults, and displaced workers across industries.	All
	Latinx Digital Leaders Now (DLN)	Tech Diverse Workforce	The Latinx DLN organization has partnered with two high schools in Illinois to increase tech career pathways by offering bilingual cybersecurity workshops and other workforce training.	All
	Housing Authority of Champaign County	Workforce Development Center at Oakwood Trace	The Housing Authority created a workforce development center at its Oakwood Trace property where residents can access 20 Chromebooks,	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			chargers, and a projector for workforce development training, financial literacy classes, and educational workshops.	
	Chicago Urban League	Workforce Development Center	Chicago Urban League's Workforce Development Center programs work to raise Black employment and income levels through job training and placement services, career exposure, career advancement support, seminars, coaching, and long-term retention strategies.	Racial/ethnic minority group (Black/African American)
	The Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC)	Education	The education initiative supports youth in becoming lifelong learners and provides wrap-around services to get students from Pre-K to higher education. The PRCC's programs consider the social/emotional needs of youth and their support systems and offer bilingual and culturally informed programming, affordable childcare, counseling, work readiness development, and employment opportunities. Offerings include digital literacy classes and workshops to Spanish speakers.[110]	Racial/ethnic minority group (Hispanic/Latinx), individuals with a language barrier
	Women Employed (WE)	Career Pathways	WE is a trusted expert on career pathways programs. Their career pathways work is based on three key activities: (1) creating daily lesson plans for two types of career pathways programs in partnership with the City of Chicago, (2) meeting regularly with directors of multiple state agencies to discuss career pathways policies and to provide state-level guidance to	All

[110] City of Chicago Listening Sessions on 4/19

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			educational institutions and community organizations that provide career pathways programs, and (3) overseeing the implementation of the statewide career pathways definition that WE worked to develop.	
	Women Employed (WE)	Bridge Programs and Career Foundations	WE champions three types of career pathway programs: bridge programs, integrated education and training, and Career Foundations, an innovative course that helps non-traditional students explore their options, identify a future career, and learn what academic programs they will need to get there. WE provides colleges and community organizations with resources to seek policy improvements that will bring these programs to scale. Its work includes three key activities: (1) partnering with City Colleges of Chicago to create daily lesson plans for bridge and integrated education and training programs in high-demand industries like healthcare, information technology, and early childhood education; (2) working with community organizations and community colleges outside Chicago to design and deliver bridge programs that help adults transition into higher education and further job training; and (3) making lesson plans for Career Foundations available to colleges and community organizations so that they can easily implement the course.	All
	Preservation of Affordable Housing – Chicago (POAH	Employment Services	The WRC has an employment specialist on staff who: (1) offers job training and career placement, re-employment, and/or career advancement; (2) assesses	Low-income households

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			clients' education, employment experience, skills and interests; (3) connects clients to jobs and long-term professional development workshops; and (4) provides long-term counseling to clients at every step of the job-search process and supports them in furthering their career.	
	North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN)	NLEN	The North Lawndale Employment Network serves under- and unemployed residents of the North Lawndale neighborhood and surrounding communities. The NLEN offers job readiness training, digital learning workshops, financial workshops, resumé assistance, and resources.[111]	All
	Cisco Systems	Cisco Networking Academy	The Cisco Networking Academy is a comprehensive curriculum developed by Cisco Systems that provides students with essential skills and information on internet and communication technology (ICT). The Cisco Academy courses deliver content and assessment, student performance tracking, hands-on labs, and activities to prepare students for industry-standard certifications. Southwestern Illinois College offers Cisco Academy courses at the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus.	All
	Hughes Who Technologies Studio	Hughes Who Technologies Studio	The Hughes Who Technologies Studio is a not-for-profit organization that uses art, technology, and gaming to enhance the academic, social, and creative skills of at-risk youth. It also prepares young adults for	Low-income households

[111] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			future employment in the gaming and interactive industries (film, video, and online). Hughes Who Technologies Studio works with underserved individuals—from middle-schoolers to young adults—in low-income areas and offers programs for students in third grade and up.[112]	
	Phalanx Family Services	Phalanx Family Services	Phalanx Family Services is a premier, Southside, one-stop social service agency that provides a wide array of services to the community. Phalanx Family Services offers industry-specific training, workforce development solutions, and youth reconnection services. In-person and virtual digital literacy opportunities are also provided. The on-site, walk-in agency allows community members to ask and receive answers to questions about available services.[113]	All
	UCAN	UCAN Connect, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)	UCAN provides a year-round employment program to "opportunity youth" aged 18-24 who are disconnected from school or work. The program's comprehensive services help these youths to achieve academic and employment success. Serving approximately 40 participants, UCAN Connects places them in permanent employment, post-secondary education, and/or certification and apprenticeship programs.[114]	Low-income households, racial or ethnic minority groups

[112] Ibid.
[113] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition
[114] Ibid.

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
	UCAN	Career Services	UCAN's Career Services is a component of the organization's FamilyWorks program, which helps Chicago Housing Authority residents achieve economic and social self-sufficiency. Career Services' goal is to offer participants the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed in the workplace by inspiring, motivating, and educating clients to pursue a career path, whether or not they are currently in school. Using career interest inventories and workforce assessments, staff assist participants in identifying their strengths and goals so they can make informed decisions while pursuing employment opportunities. After participating in training, UCAN's employment assistance service matches participants with a variety of employers in various communities that work in partnership with UCAN. Once participants are placed, UCAN's employment retention services help clients maintain their jobs. Ongoing activities and workshops continue to build participants' skills and knowledge so that they not only remain on the job but also increase their opportunities for growth and promotion.	Low-income households; racial or ethnic minority groups
	Verizon; Code Nation	Code Nation	Code Nation is a STEM organization with school-based programming that teaches coding skills to high-school students on the South and West sides of Chicago. The students not only learn coding but also apply their skills to building websites in a "Hackathon."	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
	Women's Business Development Center (WBDC)	Digital Learning	WBDC's online library includes on-demand courses for virtually all business stages.[115]	Racial or ethnic minority groups, veterans
	Project Exploration (PE)	PE	PE is a Chicago-based, nationally recognized nonprofit specializing in science education and youth development. The organization was launched in 1999 to address inequities in access to high-quality STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) opportunities outside of school. PE strives to ensure that every Chicago student becomes STEM-literate, to promote a diversified STEM workforce in Chicago, and to serve students who are traditionally underrepresented in STEM.	All
	Center for Changing Lives	Employment Coaching and Digital Literary	The Employment Team at the Center for Changing Lives trains its industry-specific members to become Microsoft Office specialists in Word and Excel. Participants earn this globally recognized certificate in six months as they build computer skills and technical expertise in preparation for a new career. Participants enrolled in the Office Career Training program and Black and Latinx In Tech (BLIT) program are primarily from underrepresented communities (BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and endure significant financial hardships.[116]	Racial or ethnic minority groups, low-income households

[115] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition
[116] Ibid.

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
	Microsoft, various corporate and community partners	Accelerate Chicago	Created in 2021, Accelerate Chicago is a workforce development program focused on training and connecting people with diverse and equitable hiring and re-employment opportunities. Microsoft relies on community partners to mobilize the community and identify those who most need program support, while learning partners deliver the curriculum and provide credentials.	All
Public Wi-Fi, networks, and access points	Illinois Office of Broadband, Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois DCEO, Illinois Department of Innovation and Tech, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois State Library	Drive-Up Wi-Fi Map	This interactive map shows the geographic locations of public drive-up Wi-Fi hotspots in Illinois. The hotspots are intended for remote learning, so the map includes log-in instructions for educators and students (pre-K-12 and higher education). Residents may use these hotspots for other purposes, but the state has requested that remote learning be the primary function.	All
	Illinois State Board of Education, EducationSuperHighway	Illinois Classroom Connectivity Initiative	The program aims to place high-speed internet access in every classroom free of charge with the support of EducationSuperHighway. Technical assistance includes: research on technology and provider options; development of strategies and business cases for Form 470/RFPs,-assistance with bid responses and procurement, and implementation of upgrades.	All
	DCEO; Illinois Century Network	Illinois K-12 Broadband Network	State of Illinois funding has been allocated for a secure, K-12 broadband network that is available at no cost to all Illinois K-12 public school districts. This	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			program removes barriers limiting access to the secure internet bandwidth that is essential in today's digital learning environment. The key objective is to ensure that every Illinois public K-12 school district has sufficient and fully funded bandwidth to meet the needs of their students, faculty, and administration. The Century Network received $20 million from Rebuild Illinois to repair, upgrade, and expand broadband networks in schools. The funds are intended to prioritize K-12 students, but ICN also serves higher education institutions, public libraries/museums, local governments, and ISPs.	
	City of Chicago	Chicago Connected	Launched in June 2020, Chicago Connected provides free broadband access to pre-K-12 students and digital learning support to families. In its first two years, the program connected 60,000 households (about 100,000 students). The program is intended to narrow the digital divide and prioritizes low-income families; approximately 70% of participants have an income below $35,000, and 40% were unserved prior to the program.	Low-income households
	City of Chicago	ChicagoWiFi	ChicagoWiFi is a free, public wireless network available at facilities across the city. Wireless internet zones are available at all Chicago public libraries and other public landmarks (e.g., the Cultural Center and Millennium Park). The city has stated that the security of the network may vary.	All
	City of Chicago	Chicago Park District	The Chicago Park District is installing public Wi-Fi at 60 parks. This includes upgrades to interior Wi-Fi at field	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			houses as well as new exterior public Wi-Fi that is accessible from outdoor features in the park such as playgrounds, turf fields, and tennis courts. The initiative aims to transform local parks into Wi-Fi hubs for local communities by providing free, high-speed wireless internet access to the public.	
	Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband (UC2B)	Library Hot Spots	The UC2B Community Benefit Fund enabled the Champaign Public Library to add 45 hotspots, bringing the total number to 80. These hotspots give community members free access to the internet.	All
	Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband (UC2B), City of Champaign	Shadowwood	The City of Champaign coordinated the installation of new equipment to provide wireless Internet connectivity to Champaign Unit 4 students living in the Shadowwood Mobile Home Park. The project was executed with the cooperation of Unit 4 Schools, i3 Broadband, Mesh++, Ameren Illinois, and Shadowwood Mobile Home Park.	All
	Town of Normal	Normal Wi-Fi	The Town of Normal provides free outdoor, wireless networks at several municipal facilities and in Uptown Normal. Facilities include the Uptown Station (train station), local museums, and four parks/facilities (Anderson, Champion Felds, Community Activity Center, Fairview). The town has stated that service may be inconsistent indoors and in cases of inclement weather.	All
	IDES	American Job Centers (AJCs)	IDES provides unemployment insurance and reemployment services through the state's network of American Job Centers (AJCs), where multiple state and	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[100]	Asset name with link to asset[101]	Description	Covered population served
			local partners deliver workforce services. All the AJCs have resource rooms with computer labs where job seekers, UI claimants, and others can access the internet.	
	Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES)	IDES	As a partner in Illinois' public workforce system, IDES delivers a range of workforce and education services to workers and businesses across the state. Its services are provided at American Job Centers and through a range of training and education partners (such as community colleges, trade schools, and community-based training organizations). The state entities involved in the workforce system include IDES, DCEO, ICCB, IDHS, and IBHE. IDOT and IDOC regularly work with these systems as well.	All
	Comcast	Lift Zones	Lift Zones are Wi-Fi-enabled safe spaces in community organizations where students and families can go online for remote learning and to build digital skills, access government and other services, and search for employment. Comcast's Lift Zones provide service, resources, and support in Chicago's under-resourced neighborhoods.	All

3.1.2 Existing digital equity plans

As detailed in Section 2.2.3, municipal, local, and state digital equity plans were a key input into the drafting of this Illinois SDEP and the development of the state's vision for broadband and digital equity. Multiple communities in Illinois have published formal reports on local broadband deployment and digital equity efforts. These plans have helped to set a baseline for digital equity within their communities, provide a summary of community aspirations and visions, and, in many cases, outline local strategies to achieve their visions. Digital equity plans released by agencies, municipalities, and regional governments are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Digital equity plans in Illinois that have been released by agencies, municipalities, or regional governments

Organization name(s)[117]	Asset name with link to asset[118]	Description	Covered population served
Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)	Computer Literacy: Knowledge and Skill Development Continuum	This resource is for districts in their efforts to ensure that all students receive developmentally appropriate instruction in computer literacy at each grade level. A working group convened by ISBE created the continuum of computer literacy skills for K-12.	All
Broadband READY; University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)	East Central Illinois Preliminary Report – August 2022	This report presents findings and recommendations from the research coordinated by a team from the Community Data Clinic (CDC) at the School of Information Sciences (iSchool) and the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) and Research IT at UIUC. The report covers the East Central Illinois (EC-IL) region, one of 10 state "zones" for which $50,000 in "pilot" Broadband READY funds for regional research initiatives were distributed from the DCEO. Supported by this 2021-22 DCEO grant and in-kind funds matched by UIUC, as well as an additional $100,000 grant from UIUC's Chancellor's Office's Call to Action for Racial and Social Justice grant, the EC-IL team's initiative centered on a cross-entity partnership among the CDC, the national non-profit PCs for People (PC4P), and five local civic organizations that focus on services to EC-IL's most vulnerable populations. These civic organizations include Project Success of Vermilion County, the Housing Authority of Champaign County (HACC), Cunningham Township Supervisor's Office (CTSO), Champaign-Urbana Public Health District (CUPHD), and Champaign-Urbana Trauma & Resilience Initiative (CUTRI).	All

Organization name(s)[117]	Asset name with link to asset[118]	Description	Covered population served
Broadband READY, Western Illinois University	West Central Illinois Report	This report documents the outreach and research activities of the Broadband READY team for the West Central Illinois region, led by Western Illinois University (WIU). As part of its efforts, WIU expanded broadband adoption by working with the Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS) and the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) and local public libraries in West Central Illinois to establish long-term evolution (LTE)/5G-enabled Chromebook lending programs. Prior to this initiative, six of the nine counties in the region had public libraries with a laptop and/or Wi-Fi hotspot-lending program. This initiative started two new Chromebook lending programs and expanded two other equipment-lending programs in the region.	All
Broadband READY, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE)	Southwest Illinois Report	In partnership with a Broadband READY team of community and non-profit organizations, including PCs for People and Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois (SWIL), SIUE has led a planning exercise to improve broadband access and equity in the cities of East St. Louis, Venice, Brooklyn, Madison, Cahokia Heights, and Washington Park, all of which are characterized by severe poverty and limited broadband access.	All

[117] Organization that owns or manages the described asset.
[118] Links provide either further information on the asset or link directly to organization providing access, depending on what is available online.

Organization name(s)[117]	Asset name with link to asset[118]	Description	Covered population served
Broadband READY, Eastern Illinois University (EIU)	Southeast Region Report	This report presents an on-the-ground perspective on current conditions in the Southeast region, as well as an analysis of current best use practices and implementable suggestions for future broadband-focused endeavors. In addition to discussing the technical aspects of the digital divide in the region, the report includes a brief description of the region's demographics, drawing comparisons with state averages and emphasizing areas that pertain to challenges in providing and accessing broadband.	All
Broadband READY, Region 1 Planning Council (RPC)	Northern Stateline Report	RPC and Rockford Public Library (RPL) received the DCEO Broadband Regional Engagement for Adoption and Digital Equity (READY) grant, which is designed to address the digital divide across the state of Illinois. RPC and RPL were awarded the grant to support digital equity efforts in the Northern Stateline region of Illinois. This project has two primary deliverables, 1) a capital initiative to purchase Chromebooks and Wi-Fi hotspots and 2) a proposed plan to eliminate the digital divide. It outlines how RPC and RPL staff can support these aims along with a steering committee made up of stakeholders from throughout the Northern Stateline region, including but not limited to education institutions, economic development agencies, housing authorities, and municipalities.	All
Broadband READY, Bloomington Normal EDC	Broadband Ready Report, North Central Region	A pilot program has been proposed to purchase and distribute connected devices working in tandem with local library branches. These stopgaps can allow borrowers to temporarily bridge the digital divide and provide access to resources that offer more permanent solutions. If successful, this program will be replicated throughout the North Central region, assuming future funding and resources.	All

Organization name(s)[117]	Asset name with link to asset[118]	Description	Covered population served
Cook County	Cook County Digital Equity Action Plan	The Cook County Digital Equity Action Plan offers a strategic framework to ensure all Cook County residents have equitable access to the digital infrastructure, devices, and tools to thrive in today's economy and society. The plan comprises four digital equity cornerstones: access, confidence, safety, and infrastructure, based on feedback from Cook County residents in the summer 2023 engagement process. For each of these cornerstones, the plan proposes a set of IMPACT solutions designed to be effective now and in the long term. The plan specifically focuses on Cook County's suburban and regional areas.	All
Hancock County	Hancock County Broadband Breakthrough	This presentation features the county's broadband vision statement: "High speed internet access will build upon and support the county's educational, health, and economic development and will [directly improve] crop yields and farm efficiency." The document details the rural digital divide, the current state of the county's broadband access, and the future of agriculture in the county.	All
Connect Lake County[119]	Digital Equity Strategic Plan	This digital equity strategic plan prepared for Connect Lake County makes clear that the predominant broadband issues in Waukegan stem not from a lack of infrastructure (as ubiquitous Comcast cable service exists, at least within the city) but from barriers to connectivity—particularly difficulties in enrolling in available low-cost and subsidy programs, as well as substantial device and skills gaps.	All

[119] Formerly known as ConnectWaukegan.

Organization name(s)[117]	Asset name with link to asset[118]	Description	Covered population served
Connect Lake County	Connect Lake County - Fixed Wireless Proof of Concept	Connect Lake County conducted a CBRS Fixed Wireless prototype with assistance from Kajeet and Baicells during the summer of 2022. This whitepaper presents the findings and recommendations for potentially leveraging CBRS fixed-wireless capabilities to increase access to broadband by underserved residents in Waukegan, Illinois.	All
Connect Lake County	2020 Waukegan Community Assessment	This report was produced by two community agencies, Beacon Place and Heart of the City, with financial support from the Julian Grace Foundation. Foresite Group, LLC, was engaged to complete an initial community assessment of the broadband environment in Waukegan. The report details the findings and observations from that initial study and specifically investigates the lack of broadband availability for the city's 16,000 school children.	All
Champaign County	Broadband Infrastructure Engineering Assessment Report	This report presents a sustainable broadband master plan for the entire county to address existing digital inequities and barriers to access, adoption, and use of robust broadband by all residents, businesses, and institutions. The report includes a practical plan for seeking the funding to solve the identified broadband shortfalls.	All
Housing Authority of Champaign	Housing Authority of Champaign County Broadband Access	The Housing Authority of Champaign County's report on broadband access details the authority's current activities and plans related to digital equity, including the measures already taken to ensure sustainable programming.	All

Organization name(s)[117]	Asset name with link to asset[118]	Description	Covered population served
City of Aurora, IT Division	Technology Strategic Plan	The Technology Strategic Plan provides a roadmap of short- and long-term technology initiatives that can help the City of Aurora's people, processes, and businesses to thrive. The plan outlines 58 initiatives in four Aurora-focused thematic categories: infrastructure, innovation projects, governance and security, and IT management.	All
City of Chicago, City of Chicago Digital Equity Council	Chicago Digital Equity Plan	The Chicago Digital Equity Plan summarizes the City of Chicago Digital Equity Council's approach, findings, and recommendations for achieving digital equity in Chicago. The community-led plan was informed by the experiences of nearly 400 Chicagoans from 44 city zip codes during community conversations and solution workshops.	All
City of Harvey	City of Harvey Broadband Strategic Plan	The City of Harvey developed its Broadband Strategic Plan to align various efforts to bridge the digital divide. The plan serves as the city's "road map" to digital equity by listing various community-based strategies and detailing a comprehensive approach that factors in all aspects of closing the digital divide, including internet access, adoption, and use (particularly technology use in the home).	All

Detailed summaries of digital equity plans released by agencies, municipalities, and regional governments in Illinois are provided below.

Plan: Computer Literacy: Knowledge and Skill Development Continuum[120]

Author: Illinois State Board of Education

Release date: May 2022

Summary: This plan serves as a guide for educators to incorporate computer literacy skills into their teaching and provides a framework for the progressive development of these skills throughout a student's K-12 education.

- The resource aims to support school districts in providing developmentally appropriate opportunities for students to gain computer literacy skills at each grade level.
- Starting from the 2022-23 school year, all districts must ensure students receive computer literacy instruction, and students entering ninth grade and beyond must complete a one-year course focused on computer literacy.
- The continuum covers different areas of computer literacy, including basic operations, concepts, and keyboarding; data management and security; internet searching and online databases; multimedia software applications; and collaboration tools.
- It describes each skill level: the introduction of concepts, developing and applying skills with minimal support, and the independent application of skills.
- The continuum also includes examples showing how computer literacy can be integrated into various subjects, such as social studies, science, ELA (English language arts), and mathematics.

[120] Computer Literacy: Knowledge and Skill Development Continuum

- For each subject and grade level, specific content standards are provided, along with corresponding computer knowledge and skills.

This document demonstrates how computer literacy can be incorporated into learning activities and projects using digital tools, multimedia presentations, online research, collaboration, and more to improve overall digital literacy.

Plan: Broadband READY East Central Preliminary Report[121]

Author: University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Release date: August 2022

Summary: This report presents the findings and recommendations from collaborative research coordinated by a team from the Community Data Clinic (CDC) at the School of Information Sciences (iSchool) and the National Center for Supercomputing Applications and Research IT at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). The team represents the East Central Illinois (EC-IL) region, one of 10 state zones for which $50,000 in "pilot" Broadband READY funds for regional research initiatives were distributed from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Program overview and regional demographics

- The EC-IL team's initiative centered on a cross-entity partnership developed via the CDC with the national non-profit PCs for People and five local civic organizations that serve EC-IL's most vulnerable populations:
  - Project Success of Vermilion County
  - The Housing Authority of Champaign County
  - Cunningham Township Supervisor's Office

[121] East Central Illinois Preliminary Report – August 2022

  - Champaign-Urbana Public Health District
  - Champaign-Urbana Trauma and Resilience Initiative
- The EC-IL partnership network's efforts focused on developing a multi-phased infrastructure to enable:
  - Distribution of refurbished computers and new hotspot hardware to 500 vulnerable households.
  - Outreach and support for individual households via a new "Tech Buddies" program that addresses ongoing connectivity needs in the months after households receive their hardware.
  - Collection of ongoing feedback from heads of households to record their continued needs and concerns about digital connectivity in the months after they receive their hardware.
  - Collaborative data review and collection with partner organizations to incorporate their guidance and participation in the research process.

Current conditions summary

- The EC-IL team's research found that the following are the most common barriers to broadband adoption and use among vulnerable households in the region:
  - Cost
  - Lack of digital literacy
  - Lack of reliable internet service
  - Lack of awareness about available resources.
- The team also uncovered the most common technology challenges faced by vulnerable households in the region:
  - Slow internet speeds
  - Unreliable internet service
  - Lack of compatible devices

- Lack of technical support.

Digital divide elimination plan

- The EC-IL team's research resulted in the following recommendations for eliminating the digital divide in the region:
  - Provide financial assistance to help vulnerable households afford broadband services.
  - Offer digital literacy training to help vulnerable households learn how to use technology.
  - Expand the availability of reliable internet service in underserved areas.
  - Increase awareness of available resources to help vulnerable households connect to the internet.
  - Partner with local organizations to provide technical support to vulnerable households.

This program is a first-of-its-kind state initiative for extending an equity-driven infrastructure aiming to "address disparities in broadband access and adoption in rural regions and black and brown communities across the state…. while leveraging fully scalable broadband infrastructure."

Plan: Broadband Breakthrough[122]

Author: Hancock County

Release date: 2023

Summary: High-speed internet access will expand and support the education, health, and economic development of Hancock County and will directly impact agriculture via improved crop yields and higher farm efficiency.

- Fiber is the county's central focus because of its speed, durability, low maintenance costs, and longevity.

[122] Hancock County Broadband Breakthrough

- Hancock County ranks sixty-second out of 102 counties for access to 100/20 Mbps internet speeds.
- According to IBL, 61% of Hancock County households have access to broadband internet speeds of 100/20 Mbps or greater, but many regions remain unserved, including farming areas.
- Hancock County conducted a survey to identify three priority areas for future development:
  - Support the development and implementation of precision agriculture by providing Hancock County farmers with broadband access.
  - Support education, healthcare, business development, and telework options by bringing broadband access to every home in Hancock County.
  - Better serve Nauvoo, where many residents lack fast and reliable internet.
- Hancock County, in partnership with Illinois State University, identified vertical assets that can be connected to fiber to enable use of fixed wireless as a last-mile option in areas where fiber is hard to deploy.
- Sixty-five percent of farmers and agribusinesses surveyed reported a willingness to host fixed-wireless equipment on vertical assets on their farms.
- Hancock County also generated maps that show service areas by internet service-provider.
- Broadband access will enable precision agriculture in Hancock County to:
  - Use data to improve operations with tractors, combines, fields, and livestock.
  - Use moisture sensors, yield monitors, and see-and-spray technology to reduce herbicide use and Bluetooth livestock biosensors.
- A research study (Katherine LoPiccalo, 2021) found that doubling the number of homes in a county with 25/3 Mbps internet access led to a 3.6% increase in corn yields, a 3.8% increase in soybean yields, and decreases in fertilizer use and seed expenses.
- In Hancock County, it is estimated that employing precision farming technology could lead to increased agricultural productivity of approximately $8.2 million per annum in direct benefits

($4.98 million from corn and $3.30 million from soy) and a total of $12.1 million when indirect and induced impacts are taken into account.

- The McDonough Telephone Cooperative received an $18 million grant from the USDA in February 2023 to deploy fiber in four Illinois Counties, including Hancock County. This network will serve approximately 600 currently unserved Hancock County households.

Approximately 2500 homes will still remain unserved after McDonough Telephone Cooperative completes its work. Grow Hancock Broadband will address these gaps by:

- Encouraging support for local matching funds that are required for most grants.
- Working with current and interested ISPs to help them develop grant applications and funding proposals.
- Advocating for state and local funding for broadband expansion.
- Meeting with community groups to provide education and answer questions.

Plan: Digital Equity Strategic Plan[123]

Authors: Connect Lake County

Release date: April 2022

Summary: This digital equity strategic plan makes clear that the dominant issues related to broadband in Waukegan do not stem from lack of infrastructure but from barriers to connectivity—particularly difficulties in enrolling in available low-cost and subsidy programs, as well as substantial gaps in device access and digital skills.

- **Recommendations**

[123] Digital Equity Strategic Plan

  - Formalize Connect Lake County as a digital inclusion coalition with leadership from stakeholder groups.
  - Maximize residents' enrollment in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) through digital navigators.
  - Engage with local and state partners to design a community connection center for adoption and utilization support.
  - Consider the feasibility of deploying fixed-wireless services for households that cannot subscribe to existing services.
  - Explore partnerships with Comcast and AT&T for “Internet Essentials” subscriptions and bulk-purchase agreements.

- Local market research
  - Assessed high-speed broadband service availability in Waukegan and found no gaps in infrastructure.
  - Confirmed that barriers to connectivity in Waukegan relate to enrollment, device access, and skills gaps.
- Data on broadband gaps
  - A statistically valid bilingual mail survey was conducted to gather data on broadband gaps (availability, affordability, device access, and skills) in Waukegan.
  - The resulting data repository informs initiatives, grant applications, and policy suggestions to the Illinois Office of Broadband.
- Programmatic efforts
  - Data was gathered on existing programmatic efforts related to enrollment assistance, skills training, and device programs in Waukegan.
  - The magnitude of remaining programmatic gaps was assessed.
- Outreach to broadband providers

  - Broadband providers were engaged to explore partnership opportunities for enrollment assistance, bulk-buy programs, and connecting residents to devices and skills programs.

- Federal funding landscape
  - The evolving federal funding landscape was documented, and opportunities that apply to Waukegan were identified.
- Urban broadband infrastructure models
  - Urban broadband infrastructure models in other cities were examined to provide guidance to Connect Lake County in their decision-making.
- Fixed-wireless design and cost estimate
  - Three models for a high-level fixed-wireless design were developed, as was a cost estimate for filling broadband service gaps.
  - WCUSD #60 buildings and other structures were leveraged to address connectivity issues.

Each section above sheds light on the broadband environment in Waukegan and provides recommendations and insights to address the identified gaps.

Plan: Fixed-Wireless Proof of Concept[124]

Author: Connect Lake County

Release date: October 15, 2022

Summary: Connect Lake County aims to provide equitable and sustainable internet access to all residents, businesses, and institutions in Waukegan, Illinois.

- **Waukegan fixed-wireless opportunities:** The Waukegan Community Broadband Taskforce (WCBT) identified challenges in accessing broadband, particularly for low-income and

[124] ConnectWaukegan - Fixed Wireless Proof of Concept

undocumented residents. They used T-Mobile MiFi devices to provide internet access to students during the pandemic.

- CBRS fixed-wireless background: CBRS's fixed-wireless service uses broadcast towers to transmit and receive signals in the 3.5 GHz band. It is a shared spectrum and relies on a central spectrum access system (SAS) administrator for coordination.
- Connect Lake County fixed-wireless proof of concept: Connect Lake County conducted a proof of concept with fixed-wireless CBRS, testing range, bandwidth, and customer premises equipment (CPE) devices.
- Goals of the CBRS Fixed Wireless Proof of Concept: The goals of the proof of concept were to understand the cost, configuration, and capabilities of CBRS fixed wireless solutions and CPE devices, as well as to test the range and bandwidth capabilities.
- Connect Lake County Fixed Wireless Proof of Concept Results: The proof of concept was successful, with a range of approximately 1.2 to 1.5 miles achieved in certain directions. Tree interference affected coverage, and bandwidth issues were resolved. Installation time was around 2 days, and the total cost of components was approximately $20,000.
- CPE Device Testing and Future Rollout: Different CPE devices were tested, and the Baicells MiFi and Inseego Gateway were considered the most viable solutions. Public access Wi-Fi locations were not included in the testing but are part of the planned rollout.
- Cost Benefit Analysis and Broadband Alternatives: This section discusses the cost benefit analysis of CBRS fixed wireless compared to other solutions and emphasizes Connect Lake County's approach of providing a variety of broadband alternatives in collaboration with commercial providers and public options.
- Selective Use of CBRS Fixed Wireless: This section suggests using CBRS fixed wireless to fill bandwidth access gaps in low-income neighborhoods or areas where traditional wired or wireless options are unavailable or not cost-effective. It mentions deploying CBRS antennas on strategic buildings or locations with access to high-speed internet and loaning CPE devices to residents.

- **Targeted Roll-Out Plan:** Instead of a comprehensive CBRS access point deployment, Connect Lake County recommends a gradual and cost-effective roll-out plan on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis, based on demand and access to cost-effective back-end broadband. Public locations like schools, libraries, and town facilities are considered as potential deployment sites.
- **CBRS Plan and Partnership with Commercial Providers:** The CBRS plan aims to fill gaps in different neighborhoods without replacing commercial partners' offerings. Connect Lake County aims to provide open and unrestricted bandwidth access to compete with other options. Coordination of free public Wi-Fi access with operating hours is discussed.
- **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and Funding:** The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), an FCC benefit program, is mentioned as a way to ensure affordability of broadband for eligible households. Connect Lake County has been working with eligible residents to sign them up for commercial broadband and receive the ACP benefit, which would help fund the CBRS solution.
- **Payback - Return on Investment Model:** This section presents a payback model for the CBRS solution, considering equipment and service costs. The number of households subscribing to the service over a five-year period determines the payback period and surplus generated.
- **Technical Detail - Configuration and Installation:** This section provides hardware and software details of the proof of concept, including the equipment used, mounting options, and configuration process for Baicells radios and Cloudcore. It discusses the installation steps and the use of Google Network Planner to assess location suitability.
- **Range and Bandwidth Testing:** The team conducted tests to assess the range and bandwidth of the CBRS solution using different devices. Initial tests, adjustments, and subsequent testing results are described, along with the advantages of using Baicells MiFi devices for individual users.

Connect Lake County in Waukegan, Illinois, is successfully working towards providing equitable and sustainable internet access. Through their proof of concept using CBRS fixed wireless technology, they achieved positive results and identified viable CPE devices. With a

neighborhood-focused roll-out plan and emphasis on collaboration with commercial providers, Connect Lake County aims to bridge the digital divide and ensure affordable connectivity for underserved areas.

Plan: Community Assessment[125]

Authors: Connect Lake County

Release date: August 28, 2020

Summary: The Foresite Group conducted a Community Assessment in Waukegan, focusing on broadband availability for the city's school children. Despite existing coverage, socio-economic issues and remote learning challenges have impacted participation. This summary highlights the identified gaps and recommendations to improve broadband access in Waukegan.

- Foresite Group engaged to conduct a Community Assessment in Waukegan
- Emphasis on broadband availability for the city's 16,000 school children
- Waukegan has good broadband and cellular coverage but lacks participation due to socio-economic issues
- COVID-19 remote learning requirements worsen the situation
- Waukegan School District has a plan to address equipment needs and provide temporary high-speed connectivity
- Multiple options for permanent solutions exist, including federal and state funding programs
- Large municipal fiber network may not be the best solution due to cost
- Targeted spending of public or private funds can be more effective
- Broadband infrastructure planning is absent in Waukegan's city planning documents

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[125] 2020 Waukegan Community Assessment

- Foresite Group identified eight gaps that can be improved through broadband solutions:
- Demographics Gap:
  - Limited broadband adoption due to socio-economic issues
  - Recommendation: Implement targeted programs to increase broadband adoption among at-risk families
- Access Gap:
  - Lack of broadband access for low-income households
  - Recommendation: Utilize federal and state funding programs to expand access to affordable broadband options
- Digital Literacy Gap:
  - Lack of digital literacy skills among certain populations
  - Recommendation: Develop community outreach programs to provide digital literacy training
- Educational Gap:
  - Remote learning challenges for students without broadband access
  - Recommendation: Provide Chromebook computers and Wi-Fi hotspots to all school children
- Community Outreach Gap:
  - Limited outreach to promote broadband adoption and other initiatives
  - Recommendation: Utilize community outreach programs to raise awareness and encourage participation
- Equity Gap:
  - Unequal access to educational resources due to lack of broadband
  - Recommendation: Ensure equitable access to broadband for all students and their families
- Infrastructure Gap:

  - Absence of broadband infrastructure planning in city documents
  - Recommendation: Include broadband infrastructure planning in city's long-term plans

- Technology Innovation Gap:
  - Lack of guidance on broadband infrastructure to support technological advancements
  - Recommendation: Incorporate broadband infrastructure requirements into city's technology planning

The Community Assessment identified key gaps in broadband access, including adoption, affordability, digital literacy, and infrastructure planning. Recommendations such as targeted programs, funding utilization, and community outreach can address these gaps and ensure equitable access for students and families. Incorporating broadband planning into the city's long-term vision will foster technological innovation and bridge the digital divide in Waukegan.

Plan: Broadband Infrastructure Engineering Assessment Report[126]

Authors: Champaign County

Release date: March 24, 2022

Summary: Finley Engineering and CCG Consulting were hired to create a broadband master plan for Champaign County. The plan aims to address existing digital inequities and barriers to access, adoption, and utilization of robust broadband by all residents, businesses, and institutions. However, the scope of work changed during the course of the project to leverage the broadband grant monies that will become available at the federal and state levels.

[126] Broadband Infrastructure Engineering Assessment Report

Findings

- Broadband speeds in the county's towns and cities differ sharply from speeds in rural areas.
- Broadband upload speeds are problematic throughout the county.
- Financial analysis shows a need for significant grant funding to build the networks necessary to bring broadband to the county's rural areas.
- The FCC offered subsidies to ISPs to serve a significant portion of rural areas with the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF)'s reverse auction in December 2020.
- Any broadband solution must be built for the future and not for today.

Recommendations

- Finley recommends building a fiber network using XGS-PON technology that can deliver 10-gigabit, symmetrical broadband to every home and business in the study area.
- The cost of the needed investments for a fiber network is estimated to be $164.4 million for the whole study area, $71.8 million for the entire rural area, and $54.4 million for the rural areas that are not already covered by tentative RDOF funding.
- The county may identify the staffing needed this year to pursue a broadband solution, find and partner with ISPs to pursue grants, gather more facts such as conducting statistically valid surveys, educate elected officials and the public on broadband issues, review local policies that might pose obstacles to constructing a broadband network, and tackle other broadband issues, like digital literacy.

Finley Engineering and CCG Consulting's broadband master plan for Champaign County aims to address digital inequities. Disparities in broadband speeds, especially in rural areas, were identified. The recommended solution is to build a future-proof fiber network using XGS-PON technology, requiring substantial grant funding. To move forward, the county may secure staffing, partner with ISPs for grants, conduct surveys, educate stakeholders, review policies, and address digital literacy concerns.

Plan: Broadband Access[127]

Authors: Housing Authority of Champaign

Release date: N/A

Summary: The Housing Authority of Champaign County (HACC) is a public housing agency that provides affordable housing to low-income families and individuals in Champaign County, Illinois. HACC's mission is to provide a quality living environment that will help individuals to achieve their full potential. HACC's vision is to develop sound, affordable housing communities that offer opportunities and support that will maximize individuals' potential and enable their successful transition to self-sufficiency.

A clear need for MTW agencies

- A national report co-released by Housing Action Illinois and the National Low-Income Coalition found that, to afford a modest, two-bedroom apartment in Illinois, renters must earn $20.34 per hour. To afford a two-bedroom home without paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs, a person earning the state minimum wage of $8.25 per hour must work 99 hours per week to make ends meet.

Broadband access

- Communities without reliable high-speed internet service cite a growing gap between the resources and opportunities available to their residents and those in communities that have a robust network. Broadband access can increase household income by an average of 3%.

[127] Housing Authority of Champaign County Broadband Access

Current plans

- HACC is strategically planning for the future of broadband access with the goal of expanding access to senior and disabled properties, building workforce readiness through broadband access, and providing basic education and career training.

DCEO Connected Communities Grant

- In June 2020, HACC was the recipient of a $12,000 broadband grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. The grant allowed HACC to improve broadband access and utilization in the community.

Notable accomplishments

- HACC purchased 20 Chromebooks, a charging cart, projector, and pull-down screen to equip the community room at Oakwood Trace. The space will be used for workforce development training, financial literacy classes, educational workshops, and career development.
- HACC received the EnVision Center designation in October 2020. An EnVision Center is a centralized hub that provides community members with the resources and support needed to excel. Grand funds were used to purchase 10 all-in-one PCs to equip a computer lab.
- HACC partnered with students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign during the pandemic to provide virtual tutoring and homework assistance to students in need.

Needs assessment

- HACC conducted a broadband survey to assess the needs of the community. Based on the information obtained, HACC will continue to:
  - Provide training in technology use (particularly with seniors)
  - Provide access to affordable broadband by partnering with providers to enroll individuals and families in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Fund
  - Help individuals and families gain access to low-cost devices
  - Provide workforce development and educational opportunities.

Partnerships

- The Steering Committee was an integral part of winning the broadband grant. The committee helped HACC to strengthen existing community partnerships and establish new ones that assisted in efforts to lessen the digital divide. Partners included:
  - UIUC Chancellor's Task Force: Accessible Technology
  - UIUC School of Information Technology: Broadband READY Grant
  - UIUC School of Social Work
  - Champaign Public Library
  - Volo
  - PCs for People

HACC is committed to providing high-quality, affordable housing and supporting its residents' success. The agency is working to expand broadband access in the community, to provide training in technology use, and to connect residents with workforce development and educational opportunities. HACC is also striving to strengthen partnerships with other organizations in the community to address the needs of low-income families and individuals.

Plan: Cook County Digital Equity Action Plan[128]

Authors: Cook County

Release date: Oct 2023

Summary: The Cook County Digital Equity Action Plan offers a strategic framework for ensuring that all Cook County residents have equitable access to the digital infrastructure, devices, and tools to thrive in today's economy and society. The plan comprises four digital equity cornerstones: access, confidence, safety, and infrastructure, based on Cook County residents' feedback in the summer 2023 engagement process. For each of these cornerstones, the plan

[128] Cook County Digital Equity Action Plan

proposes a set of "IMPACT" solutions designed to be effective now and in the long term. The plan specifically focuses on Cook County's suburban and regional areas.

Cornerstone 1: Accessibility

- The accessibility vision is for everyone to have the digital tools and resources they need to fully participate in our twenty-first-century digital society.
- To realize this vision, quality internet services and devices must be available and priced affordably for everyone.
- Three solutions are proposed:
  - Supporting enrollment in low-cost and subsidized internet plans
  - Expanding public Wi-Fi
  - Expanding access to high-quality devices.

Cornerstone 2: Confidence

- The county's vision for digital confidence is for everyone to feel comfortable and confident while using technology and the internet.
- Digital confidence means different things to different people and the community. Using technology to find better job opportunities, learning online, finding services, shopping, banking, and staying connected to family and friends can all be considered facets of digital confidence.
- Three solutions are proposed:
  - Supporting Digital Navigator corps partnership
  - Supporting the workforce of the future by offering opportunities to build digital skills and forming partnerships that provide pathways to good tech-related jobs.
  - Building the learning ecosystem using a community-by-community approach.

Cornerstone 3: Safety

- The county's public engagement process showed that many community members are concerned about the safety and security of technology use—for themselves, their families, and their communities.
- Cook County's vision is to build a collective culture of consent and safety in technological interactions by instilling knowledge and power in its residents.
- Three solutions are proposed:
  - Supporting a digital safety help line operated by community helpdesks
  - Building awareness of safety and security
  - Increasing communication about digital safety and specific threats to residents (e.g., phishing schemes and online scams).

Cornerstone 4: Infrastructure

- The county's vision for its digital infrastructure is to work with partners to provide internet services that meet the community's needs by making fast, reliable internet service available to all.
- Three solutions are proposed:
  - Creating a plan to improve and strategically expand infrastructure
  - Mapping assets to resolve any inconsistencies between the FCC's broadband map and people's real-life experience.
  - Advocating for accountability among service providers on price and performance.

Plan: Technology Strategic Plan[129]

Authors: City of Aurora

Release date: FY 2018-2019

Summary: The City of Aurora's Technology Strategic Plan outlines the city's vision, mission, guiding principles, and business drivers for technology. The plan also includes a list of 58 short- and long-term initiatives that the city plans to implement to achieve its technology goals.

Vision and mission

- The City of Aurora's vision for technology is to become a strategic IT business partner not only for the city but also the region. Its mission is to deliver innovative, smart solutions and services and to provide first-class customer service.

Guiding principles

The City of Aurora's guiding principles for technology are:

- "One IT": Sharing IT products, processes, people, and partners throughout the city and region.
- Customer experience: Providing effective solutions and services that build customers' confidence and satisfaction.
- Agility/smart sourcing: Through public-private partnerships, using the most efficient and effective blend of resources to meet ever-changing business demands.
- Foundational principles: Achieving excellence in project management, cyber-security, and data security.

[129] Technology Strategic Plan

Current-state assessment

Until 2017, the City of Aurora's IT structure was decentralized, with separate IT teams supporting the police department and City Hall. In 2017, the city began to reorganize its IT division to centralize all operations and to improve processes and work streams. As part of these improvements, the City also added the following operational assets:

- A project management office (PMO) to manage projects citywide
- Business analysts and project managers
- A cyber-security strategy
- A dedicated chief information security officer.

Accomplishments to date

Within a short period, the City of Aurora's IT reorganization has made several noteworthy accomplishments and received a number of accolades, including:

- The Smart Cities Council selected the City of Aurora as a finalist for the Readiness Challenge Grant.
- The City has continued to implement its Public Safety Systems modernization by launching a new, computer-aided dispatch system and web-based record management system for the police and fire departments.
- The city has implemented a new, web-based platform to manage, track, and streamline all public information requests.
- The city has brought cyber-security to the forefront by creating a new chief information security officer role.
- The city has set a foundation for increasing its use of data analytics by creating a new data analytics director position.
- The city has saved $2.3 million through contract renegotiations and other substantial changes.

- The city has re-established and strengthened its partnership with Kane County and OnLight Aurora in a mutual effort to align resources and promote economic development throughout the region.

The City of Aurora has adopted a Technology Strategic Plan to improve the lives of its residents and businesses. The plan includes a list of 58 short- and long-term initiatives, and the city has already made significant progress in implementing it.

Plan: Chicago Digital Equity Plan[130]

Authors: Chicago Digital Equity Council

Release date: January 2023

Summary: The Chicago Digital Equity Plan is a community-led plan to achieve digital equity in Chicago. The plan was developed by the Chicago Digital Equity Council, a cross-sector, community-driven effort to understand and overcome barriers to digital equity by engaging those most burdened by them.

Challenge

- Nearly 172,000 Chicago households (over 15%) do not have internet service at home, and nearly 92,000 (roughly 8%) do not have any device, such as a computer, laptop, tablet, or smart mobile device.
- These disparities became more evident than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools, workplaces, and many aspects of daily life shifted from in-person to remote, leading to an unprecedented reliance on technology and connectivity.

[130] Chicago Digital Equity Plan

- The pandemic accelerated what was already taking shape in a rapidly evolving, tech-centered world: families need reliable, affordable, high-speed home internet access—as well as related support and skills—to fully participate in Chicago's modern economy and civic life.

Progress since 2020

- Chicago has made historic progress in tackling digital disparities in recent years.
- In June 2020, the city launched Chicago Connected, a first-of-its-kind broadband program that provides no-cost internet service to qualifying Chicago Public Schools families for four years.
- In its first two years, the program has connected more than 60,000 households—equivalent to roughly 100,000 students—to at-home broadband.
- In 2021, the program expanded to City Colleges of Chicago.
- Chicago Connected has also made digital learning lessons and resources available to families free of charge through partnerships with more than 20 community-based organizations.

Funding sources

- The Chicago Digital Equity Plan is funded by a variety of sources, including:
  - Federal grants
  - State grants
  - City funds
  - Private donations

Approach

- The Chicago Digital Equity Plan takes a comprehensive approach to addressing the digital divide.
- The plan includes a variety of strategies, including:
  - Expanding access to affordable, high-speed internet
  - Providing digital devices and training to underserved communities

  - Building partnerships with community-based organizations
  - Promoting digital literacy and digital skills.

Findings

- The Chicago Digital Equity Council found that the digital divide is a complex issue with multiple causes, including:
  - Income inequality
  - Racial disparities
  - Disability
  - Language barriers
  - Geographic isolation

Existing assets

- The Chicago Digital Equity Council found that several existing assets can be leveraged to address the digital divide, including:
  - Public libraries
  - Community-based organizations
  - Nonprofit organizations
  - Government agencies.

Recommendations

- The Chicago Digital Equity Council makes a number of recommendations to address the digital divide, including:
  - Expanding access to affordable, high-speed internet
  - Providing digital devices and training to underserved communities
  - Building partnerships with community-based organizations
  - Promoting digital literacy and digital skills

- Tracking progress and measuring impact.

The Chicago Digital Equity Plan is a comprehensive and ambitious plan to address the digital divide in Chicago. The plan could potentially have a significant impact on Chicagoans' lives and is a model for other cities across the country.

Plan: Broadband Strategic Plan[131]

Author: City of Harvey

Release date: September 2021

Summary: The City of Harvey's Broadband Strategic Plan is built on facts about the needs and gaps city residents face, including obstacles related to access, adoption, and use. The plan aspires to provide residents with access to affordable, high-speed broadband so that they can participate fully in the digital age, especially after the changes wrought by COVID-19.

The plan outlines the following needs and gaps for the City of Harvey:

- Only 72% of households in Harvey have a broadband subscription.
- 17% of Harvey households do not have access to a computer.
- 25% of households in Harvey have no internet access.

The plan lays out nine specific goals and applicable strategies for improving broadband access, adoption, and use in the city. The plan also emphasizes the need to measure success through metrics. Key components of each goal include:

- **Access**—building the infrastructure necessary to deliver affordable, high-speed internet to residents, businesses, and anchor institutions.
  - Goals:

[131] City of Harvey Broadband Strategic Plan

1. Expanding the reach of the Chicago Southland Fiber Network within Harvey
2. Ensuring that Harvey's residential areas have access to broadband services by 2026
3. Establishing a city-wide network of free Wi-Fi hotspots, with a minimum of one hotspot in each ward.

– Strategies:

1. Working with local and regional partners to expand the fiber-optic network in Harvey and the broader Southland region
2. Encouraging and offering incentives to ISPs and wireless carriers to provide affordable, high-speed internet to Harvey's residents, businesses, and institutions
3. Establishing an array of programs, hotspots, and public computer centers for residents to access broadband.

- Adoption—ensuring equitable distribution and delivery of broadband infrastructure and services
  – Goals:
    1. Decreasing the digital divide between the city and the greater Chicago region by 50% by 2026
    2. Increasing the percentage of households with a computer by 10% by 2026
    3. Increasing the percentage of households with a broadband subscription by 10% by 2026.
  – Strategies:
    1. Securing and leveraging governmental, private-sector, and civic-sector resources to increase residents' access to discounted computers and laptops
    2. Continuing to participate in regional initiatives and collaboratives that focus on improving digital literacy, expanding broadband access, and addressing the digital divide
    3. Prioritizing and advancing policies, programs, projects, and public-private partnerships that support the equitable distribution of broadband infrastructure and services to end-users.

- Utilization—increasing digital literacy by maximizing the benefits and value generated by the use of broadband
  - Goals:
    1. Supporting the expansion of programs that provide digital literacy education and training to Harvey residents
    2. Increasing residents' participation in tech-focused workforce development programs
    3. Establishing a grant program that expands access to high-tech careers for Harvey's youth and students.
  - Strategies:
    1. Supporting the expansion of digital literacy education and training at Thornton Township High School, Harvey Public Library, South Suburban College, and other educational institutions
    2. Ensuring that youth and other residents are well-equipped for careers in the twenty-first century through partnerships with workforce development organizations
    3. Promoting and cultivating a high-tech industry cluster in Harvey by leveraging the city's economic development efforts and infrastructure investments.

To implement the plan, the City of Harvey is prioritizing:

- Partnerships and community engagement in implementing this plan
- Collaboration with local and regional partners from the public and private sector, which is essential to leveraging necessary resources and expertise
- Mechanisms to measure success through metrics such as increased broadband subscriptions, distribution of computers and routers, and an increase in digital literacy among residents.

3.1.3 Existing digital equity programs

Illinois has many state-wide programs (Table 5) that focus on broadband expansion and digital equity. These programs work to build the capacity for broadband deployment and to advance digital equity in their localities. In addition, many municipalities and local organizations have started their own digital equity programming.

Small business owner with digital tablet

Table 5: Existing digital equity programs instituted by municipalities, regions, and local organizations across Illinois

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
IOB	Connect Illinois Digital Equity Package	The State of Illinois has launched a three-pronged digital equity package to help regions identify and address broadband equity gaps and use new resources for urgent broadband access and longer-term broadband competitiveness. The three prongs include: (1) Broadband READY, (2) the Illinois Connected Communities program, and (3) the Digital Navigator program.	All
IOB, IBL	Broadband READY	The Broadband READY program aims to provide a roadmap to eliminating the digital divide by using regional coalitions to assess broadband access, adoption, and utilization. Qualified regional entities include community and economic development organizations, regional planning councils, and institutions of higher education.	All
IBL, Benton Institute	Illinois Connected Communities (ICC)	Illinois Connected Communities is a program designed to engage a first-year cohort of communities through best practice curriculum, expert consultation, and a state grant of up to $15,000. By the end of the 12-month program, each Illinois Connected Community plans to complete a community-driven, broadband strategic plan. The plan will articulate the community's broadband vision and define an action plan for improving broadband access in the areas of community and economic development, education, civic engagement, healthcare, agriculture, and more. The Benton Institute is a funder of this program.	All

[132] Organization that owns or manages the described asset.
[133] Links provide either further information on an asset or link directly to the organization providing access, depending on what is available online.

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
DCEO, IBL	Illinois Digital Equity Capacity Kickstarter program	The Illinois Digital Equity Capacity Kickstarter program supports the expansion of broadband access, adoption, and use initiatives among broadband and digital equity stakeholders. The program will fund proposals that promote local outreach and engagement, expanded digital navigator capacity, greater public access, or a feasibility study. The subgrantees must commit to measuring progress and to identify, refine, and/or apply approaches that are scalable or replicable to meet broader needs.	All
IOB, IBL	Illinois Digital Equity Coalition	The Illinois Digital Equity Coalition holds monthly meetings to obtain updates on Illinois digital equity work and to share best practices in the state. The meetings allow individuals across Illinois to discuss best practices and community trends. The workshop-style gathering enables organizations across Illinois to come together to share resources and help each other.	All
IBL, Benton Institute, Connecting the Heartland, Illinois Extension	Accelerate Illinois	Accelerate Illinois boosts community engagement in broadband planning and capacity-building by offering 30+ hours of free expert consultation and best practices for community-driven broadband planning. The Benton Institute is a main funding source for this program. As of March 2023, two cohorts have completed Accelerate Illinois. Round three is accepting applications, and future rounds are planned.	All
IBL; Benton Institute; United Soybean Board; Illinois Soybean Association, Illinois Extension; IIN, ISU, Center for Rural Strategies, Wireless Research Center	Broadband Breakthrough	Broadband Breakthrough is a collaborative effort to help rural farming communities in Illinois build the broadband infrastructure needed to modernize farming operations and support broader community goals. The program is funded by the Benton Institute and United Soybean Board. As of March 2023, Broadband Breakthrough is conducting a five-county pilot program.	All

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois (SWIL)	Leadership Council of SWIL Education Committee	The Leadership Council of SWIL is part of the first cohort of the ICC program. The Leadership Council Education Committee seeks to build long-term reliability and consistency in internet connectivity and broadband access for remote workers and e-learning for students in the SWIL region, thus enabling further economic development and educational enhancement activities.	All
LULUC Illinois Education Council 5238	LatinX DLN	The purpose of DLN is to launch digital initiatives in diverse institutions to increase and prepare potential Latinx technology workers for the global marketplace and to advocate for equity and diversity in STEM-related fields. The vision of DLN is for Latinx Illinoisans to be equitably represented in technology spaces while making a positive impact on society. The mission of DLN is to engage in computer science-related initiatives that intentionally draw Latinx to STEM pathways following a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) model. DLN was part of ICC's second cohort.	Racial or ethnic minority group (Hispanic/Latinx)
Illinois Broadband and Cable Association	Illinois Broadband for All	Illinois Broadband for All is a coalition representing individuals and organizations that advocate for investment in reliable broadband Internet service to enhance quality of life and create economic opportunity in Illinois.	All
Partnership for a Connected Illinois (PCI)	PCI	PCI seeks to advance the deployment and adoption of high-speed internet services and information technology. Their efforts have enhanced economic development and public safety in Illinois' communities, improved healthcare and educational opportunities, and fostered a better quality of life for the state's residents.	All

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Black Churches 4 Digital Equity (BC4DE)	BC4DE	Black Churches 4 Digital Equity (BC4DE) is building a collaborative movement across the nation to make sure that Black communities—communities with the least digital access—obtain digital equity. The coalition works to educate community members about broadband internet assistance programs, to encourage unconnected households to go online, to train and organize leaders as advocates to get their communities connected, and to advance digital equity through the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). There are currently three BC4DE Fellows in Illinois who represent the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc.	All
Ogle County, Lee County, Putnam County, Growth Dimensions Inc. Economic Development (Boone County)	Broadband for All in North Central Illinois	Ogle, Lee, Boone, and Putnam counties participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 2. The initial scope of work for the partnership involved identifying (1) existing broadband networks, (2) underserved areas, (3) funding opportunities, and (4) physical, policy-related, and other barriers to network deployment.[134]	All
Kaskaskia College	Kaskaskia College Region Accelerate Team	The Kaskaskia College Region Accelerate Team, which includes representatives from Clinton, Marion, Fayette, and Washington counties, participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 2. The team's strategies focus on underserved areas and formulating a plan. The team is now engaging with potential internet service providers and pursuing funding opportunities.[135]	All

[134] Broadband for All – Plan for Ogle, Lee, Boone, and Putnam Counties; Accelerate Illinois, Round 2.
[135] Accelerate College Region Accelerate Team Presentation; Accelerate Illinois Brakes...for Now, Illinois Broadband Connections.

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Peoria County; Woodford County	Peoria-Woodford Broadband Planning Team	Peoria and Woodford counties participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 2. The committee met with the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council (EDC) to plan and implement a countywide household survey and to interview local and regional internet service providers. The final strategy involved (1) creating an advisory committee, (2) gaining better understanding of infrastructure needs, (3) developing strategies to garner local government support, (4) developing communication and collaboration approaches, and (5) striving to address access, adoption, and utilization.[136]	All
Bond County	Bond County Broadband Initiative	Bond County participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 2. The resulting strategy of the Bond County Broadband Initiative was (1) to address middle-mile access, (2) expand public access locations, (3) focus on underserved/unserved areas, and (4) encourage a competitive market to promote affordability. The initiative will continue to write grant applications, to narrow the field of potential middle-mile partners, and to discuss with ISPs ways to extend service to homes.	All
Kankakee County	Kankakee County Broadband Plan team	Various stakeholders in Kankakee—including the PHP CDC, Economic Alliance of Kankakee County, the Kankakee County Planning Department, and the Kankakee County Board—were involved in the team that participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 2. They now plan to meet with county decision-makers, gather additional information on the current system and gaps, and create a broadband deployment strategy.[137]	All

[136] Peoria-Woodford Broadband Planning, Accelerate Illinois, Round 2.
[137] Kankakee County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois, Round 2.

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Hancock County	Grow Hancock	Hancock County is putting together a plan to distribute high-speed, reliable internet service throughout the county. The current initiative focuses on collecting survey data and conducting speed tests to inform grant applications. The county participates in the Broadband Breakthrough five-county pilot program.	All
Edgar County	Edgar County Broadband Initiative	The county participates in the Broadband Breakthrough five-county pilot program. The Edgar County Broadband Initiative is being led by High Speed for Edgar County.	All
McLean County, McLean County Regional Planning Commission	McLean County	The county participates in the Broadband Breakthrough five-county pilot program. Through the program, McLean County Government has been awarded technical assistance from the United Soybean Board to develop a strategic action plan in conjunction with our community partners to tackle internet connectivity challenges in the county.[138]	All
Ogle County	Ogle County	The county participates in the Broadband Breakthrough five-county pilot program.	All
Schuyler County	Schuyler County	The county participates in the Broadband Breakthrough five-county pilot program.	All
Lake County	Connect Lake County	The Connect Lake County (formerly ConnectWaukegan) effort conducts broadband planning, including reviewing funding sources for broadband expansion, alternative infrastructure deployments, and three fixed-wireless deployment models. The organization created a CBRS fixed-wireless prototype-with-assistance, or a proof of concept, to: (1) understand the current cost, configuration, and capabilities of a roof-mounted CBRS fixed-wireless radio, antenna, and SAS-connected solution; (2) determine the cost, configuration, and capabilities of the different CBRS customer premises equipment (CPE) devices; and (3) test the range and bandwidth of the CBRS prototype and the performance of the different CPE devices.[139]	All

[138] McLean County High-Speed Internet Quality Survey, open through March 31, 2023.
[139] ConnectWaukegan – Fixed Wireless Proof of Concept, Waukegan Broadband Community Taskforce, October 2022

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Champaign County Farm Bureau	Connect Champaign County	Connect Champaign County is an organization dedicated to bringing fast, reliable, and affordable broadband internet to rural Champaign County. Spearheaded by the Champaign County Farm Bureau and funded by ARPA funds, Connect Champaign County works with internet providers, community stakeholders, and landowners to support broadband projects in rural Champaign County. Connect Champaign County is committed to making sure that rural Champaign County residents obtain the benefits of fast, reliable, and affordable broadband internet. The Champaign County Broadband Task Force selected two internet providers, Nextlink Internet and Volo Internet, as “preferred providers" to lead the broadband infrastructure build-out in rural Champaign County.	All
Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband (UC2B)	UC2B	UC2B strives to be a community-based voice in Champaign-Urbana that advocates for making modern, dependable, high-speed connectivity available to all residents. UC2B seeks to unite people, organizations, and technology to build an advanced, inclusive future with a focus on equity, collaboration, economic development, and Smart City innovation.	All
State of Illinois, Community Data Clinic	Broadband and Civic Empowerment	This study aims to boost civic connection and lessen digital inequity via an expanded civic curriculum that addresses the broadband gaps that most acutely affect the state's marginalized and infrastructurally isolated populations.	All
Housing Authority of Champaign County (HCAA)	HACC	HACC was part of the first cohort of the ICC program. The organization plans to expand access to senior and disabled persons, expand workforce readiness, and launch community access centers.	All
McKinley Park Development Council	Mercer County Better Together	Mercer County Better Together was part of the first cohort of the ICC program.	All
Region 1 Planning Council	Region 1 Planning Council	The Region 1 Planning Council was part of the first cohort of the ICC program on behalf of the Winnebago County and City of Rockford.	All

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
McHenry County	Internet Freedom for McHenry County (IFMC)	A non-profit (501(c)(4)) organization of community volunteers from McHenry County, the IFMC is dedicated to providing better broadband access and internet services in McHenry County to promote freedom of information, the right to privacy, and net neutrality. IFMC was part of the second ICC cohort.	All
Tazewell County	Tazewell County ICC Planning Team	The Tazewell County ICC was part of the second ICC cohort. It plans to host a local government summit to discuss strategies for broadband access. The county has performed surveys and conducted interviews to understand the current provider landscape and the needs of residents.	All
City of Carrollton, the Greene County Economic Development Group	Greene County Committee	The Greene County Committee was part of the second ICC cohort. The committee plans to conduct a broadband design study and to explore low-capital solutions that can provide service while the county seeks a provider that is willing to partner on future infrastructure grants.[140]	All
Cook County	Council on Digital Equity (CODE)	President Preckwinkle's Council on Digital Equity (CODE) comprises local members and senior advisors from around the U.S. Council members provide expertise and guidance as Cook County acts to address digital inequities. CODE has a special focus on the county's south suburbs and other communities with significant need. CODE engages numerous, diverse groups to advance digital inclusivity and equity in the areas of digital infrastructure, digital proficiency, and digital well-being.[141]	All

[140] Greene County ICC Update, June 2022
[141] Gov. Pritzker and President Preckwinkle Announce New Statewide Network to Deploy Computer Devices for Low-Income Residents Across the State, December 2020

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Livingston County	Livingston County Broadband Team	The Livingston County Broadband Team participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 2. The team developed a vision and mission statement aimed at ensuring that all residents have access to affordable connectivity with speeds of at least 100/100 Mbps. The team is now seeking financial commitments from the county board to continue its work. The team hopes to host town halls with community anchor institutions to map assets and with local internet service providers to identify potential partners.[142]	All
Knox County	Knox County Broadband Team	Members from the Knox County Board and local organizations participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 1. The Knox County Broadband Plan includes four strategies (1) identifying and prioritizing unserved and underserved areas, (2) inviting internet service providers to share proposals, (3) using ARPA funds to offer incentives for high-priority projects, and (4) working with providers to promote ACP.[143]	All
Mercer County	Mercer County Broadband Team	Representatives from the Mercer County Board and local schools, municipalities, and organizations participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 1. The team has outlined a three-phase approach to planning and building out a hybrid fiber/fixed-wireless model.[144]	All
Whiteside County	Connect Whiteside Committee	Members from Whiteside County Board and local organizations, CAIs, and providers participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 1. The committee plans to address reliability and speed issues and to raise awareness of affordability assistance programs.[145]	All

[142] Connect Livingston Broadband Plan, Accelerate Round 2; Accelerate Illinois Brakes...for Now, Illinois Broadband Connections
[143] Knox County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois, Round 1
[144] Mercer County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois, Round 1
[145] Whiteside County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois, Round 1

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Jackson County	Jackson County Broadband Team	Jackson County stakeholders formed a team to participate in Accelerate Illinois, Round 1. Prioritized strategies identified in the Jackson County Broadband Plan include serving unserved and underserved locations with an equity strategy, identifying provider partners, conducting community meetings, and finding funding.[146]	All
City of Chicago	Chicago Digital Equity Council	In May 2022, the city announced the launch of the Chicago Digital Equity Council, a coalition born out of Chicago Connected and built on the program's progress in the K-12 space. The council's purpose is to identify and mitigate barriers to digital equity. Since its formation, the DEC has hosted about 20 community conversations and solution- design workshops in the city's least connected neighborhoods and has connected some 400 residents. Via on-the-groundwork, the DEC uncovered barriers to digital equity, learned about initiatives already underway, and developed recommendations with the community. The Chicago Digital Equity Plan is the product of this work and outlines next steps for the city.	All
City of Harvey	City of Harvey Steering Committee	The City of Harvey was part of the first cohort of the ICC program. Through ICC, the city convened a steering committee and engaged other experts to help develop a community-driven strategic plan that articulates Harvey's broadband vision and describes an action plan for improving broadband access, adoption, and utilization.	All
City of Waukegan	Waukegan Community Broadband Taskforce	The Waukegan Community Broadband Taskforce (WCBT) was formed to create a vision and solution for recovery and resurgence in this community. This public-private collaboration of city staff, anchor institutions, and community partners recognizes the obstacles preventing access, adoption, and full utilization of broadband, which is not available to all.	All

[146] Jackson County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois, Round 1

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Waukegan Public Library	Northstar Digital Literacy Certificates	The Waukegan Public Library is an official testing location for the Northstar Digital Literacy program, an industry-wide, national program that certifies adults' ability to use computers/software. Adults who complete an assessment at the library are eligible to earn Northstar certificates.	All
City of Chicago	Chicago Digital Equity Coalition (formerly Council)	As described above, in May 2022 the city launched the Chicago Digital Equity Council, a coalition born out of Chicago Connected and built on the program's progress in the K-12 space. The council works to identify and mitigate barriers to digital equity. The Chicago Digital Equity Plan is the product of their work and outlines next steps for the city. Now, the city is formally launching the Chicago Digital Equity Coalition, an inclusive community for digital equity advocacy, resources, sharing of best practices, and program development.	All
City of Springfield	Springfield Broadband Cohort	The Broadband Cohort participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 1. The cohort has identified three zip codes to focus on and plans to assess individual providers, host community meetings, create subcommittees, and create an RFP.[147]	All
Bloomington-Normal Innovation Alliance (BN Innovation Alliance)	BN Innovation Alliance	The Alliance's mission is to empower the Bloomington-Normal region to embrace innovation and to bolster local economies with smart development and policies rooted in connectivity, mobility, equity, and sustainability. They have planned eight projects to address the digital divide, digital transformation, enhanced digital services, and cybersecurity summit.	All
Village of Fairmont City	Village of Fairmont City	Village of Fairmont City focuses on adoption through education, tech classes, small business classes, technology giveaways, and free Wi-Fi in green spaces. The organization was part of the second ICC cohort.	All

[147] City of Broadband, Illinois Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois, Round 1

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Village of Flanagan	Connect Flanagan	The Village of Flanagan steering committee was part of the first cohort of the ICC program. Connect Flanagan members have communicated with providers and applied for a grant to spur the construction of fiber infrastructure in their community.	All
Village of Elsah	Connect Elsah	Connect Elsah participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 1. Connect Elsah is on a mission to provide reliable and affordable high-speed internet as an essential utility for the community in and around the Village of Elsah.[148]	All
scaleLIT	scaleLIT	The Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition (CCLC) was created by adult literacy programs 20 years ago to network, share resources, and raise awareness. Under the new name, scaleLIT continues to assist its members in advancing work in its core program areas of career pathways, digital literacy, and health literacy. ScaleLIT also offers direct services in career pathway navigation and digital literacy.	All
Chi Commons Cooperative	BlockShare	BlockShare is a communications platform built by stakeholders and run by neighbors to empower and connect each other. Owned, operated, and trusted by its stakeholders. The platform fosters solidarity and enables shared benefits and digital equity. The server hosts applications that neighborhoods can use to share their assets and organize themselves with modern digital tools. The Internet gateway connects the neighborhood to the external world. The platform is currently deployed in South Shore, Greater Grand Crossing, and other under-served communities.	All

[148] The Historic Village of Elsah, Accelerate Illinois, Round 1

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
The Digital Excellence Consortium, Inc.	The Chicago Digital Access Alliance, Inc.	In 2007, the Chicago Digital Access Alliance, Inc., set its vision for digital excellence in Chicago and described how the city can become digitally empowered. The vision became the framework for "The City That Networks," a groundbreaking report and evocation of the city that Chicago could be if all 77 Chicago neighborhoods were connected as digitally-driven communities. That vision also attracted $21 million in federal investment in 2009 into concepts and training pilot programs of digital demonstration communities that became the Smart Chicago Collaborative. Thirteen years later, many parts of that vision remain unrealized, and one of the missions of this consortium is to meet these unrealized goals as they work toward #endingthedigitaldivideby2030.	All
Smart Chicago Collaborative	Smart Chicago	Smart Chicago is a civic organization devoted to improving lives in Chicago through technology. The organization works on increasing access to the internet, improving internet skills, and developing products from data that measurably contribute to the quality of life of residents in the region and beyond.	All
Neighborhood Network Alliance	Neighborhood Network Alliance	The Neighborhood Network Alliance was part of the first cohort of the ICC program. The South Shore neighborhood-based organization created a digital inclusion alliance after the program. [149]	All
I AM ABLE	I AM ABLE	I AM ABLE has worked in the North Lawndale community to assist and develop technological literacy with its citizens. I AM ABLE connects residents with related resources and advocates for support that can close the digital divide.[150]	Racial or ethnic minority group (Black/African American)

[149] Illinois Connected Communities: Leveraging the Power of Local Communities, Benton Institute, June 2021
[150] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Community Development Corporation (CDC) of Pembroke-Hopkins Park (PHP)	PHP BroadbandNOW!	The CDC of PHP participated in Accelerate Illinois, Round 2. Its BroadbandNOW! Plan has six main objectives for internet service: (1) a low monthly cost (less than $40), (2) environmentally friendly, (3) a minimum high speed of 100/20 Mbps, (4) immediate deployment, (5) community ownership, and (6) cellular upgrades.[151]	All
The Community Builder's Oakwood Shores	The Community Builder's Oakwood Shores Resident Steering Committee	The Community Builder's Oakwood Shores have formed a steering committee with community members as well as other stakeholders such as libraries, schools, and internet providers.[152] The Community Builder's Oakwood Shores was part of the second ICC cohort. The committee plans to continue holding monthly meetings, teaching residents technology use skills, offering programming through library partners, and hiring youths to teach digital skills.[153]	Low-income households
Mattoon School District 2	Mattoon School District 2	The Mattoon School District 2 was part of the first cohort of the ICC program.	All
North Chicago CUSD 187	North Chicago CUSD 187	North Chicago CUSD 187 was part of the second cohort of ICC. North Chicago CUSD 187 has focused on expanding internet access throughout the district, device access, and training. The group plans to host regular meetings and to continue device giveaways, access initiatives, and training programs.[154]	All
Palatine School District 15	Palatine School District 15	The Palatine School District 15 was part of the first cohort of the ICC program. Palatine and its school district plan to leverage the resources of its local libraries to build a sustainable model of digital inclusion with digital navigators.[155]	All

[151] Pembroke-Hopkins Park Broadband NOW! Plan, Accelerate Illinois, Round 2
[152] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition
[153] Illinois Connected Communities Final Report, The Community Builder's Oakwood Shores
[154] Illinois Connected Communities Final Report, North Chicago CUSD 187
[155] Illinois Connected Communities: Leveraging the Power of Local Communities, Benton Institute, June 2021

Organization name(s)[132]	Asset name with link to asset[133]	Description	Covered population served
Park Forest-Chicago Heights School District 163	Park Forest-Chicago Heights School District 163	The Park Forest-Chicago Heights School District 163 was part of the first cohort of the ICC program.	All
Brown County School District 1	Brown County School District 1	The Brown County School District 1 was part of the first cohort of the ICC program.	All
The QUILT Corporation	Chicago-Area Broadband Initiative (CABI)	CABI is a digital socio-economic transformation project seeking to provide residents of Chicago's economically challenged areas with "Gigabit Opportunities" that enable them to participate in the digital economy. The initiative also raises awareness of the time value of broadband adoption ("the longer we wait, the further behind we leave the unconnected") and collaborates with communities as well as public, private, and philanthropic partners.[156]	All

[156] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition

3.1.4 Broadband adoption

The National Digital Inclusion Alliance defines broadband adoption as "residential subscriptions to high-speed internet access and the digital capacity of communities."[157] Illinois used this definition when conducting its inventory of broadband adoption assets. The following types of broadband adoption assets are currently deployed across the state:

1. Computer refurbishing programs are device-reuse or recycling programs.
2. Digital Navigator programs offer technical assistance to support broadband adoption and the use of devices.
3. P-20 school system one-to-one computer programs are run by individual schools or school districts that offer one internet-enabled device to each student so that everyone has his/her own computing device for learning.
4. Loaner computer/hotspot programs offer device or hotspot loans on a temporary basis.
5. Data tracking programs tracks broadband adoption statistics.
6. Programs that conduct awareness and outreach activities related to digital inclusion programming and resources, including research, marketing, and awareness campaigns intended to encourage broadband adoption.
7. Programs that provide digital literacy and digital skills training and/or training in using internet-enabled devices.
8. Programs that provide subsidized or low-cost internet-enabled devices to eligible individuals at little or no cost.
9. Public computing labs are public spaces offering open use of internet-enabled devices.

See Table 6 below for details on broadband adoption assets in Illinois.

[157] Definitions, National Digital Inclusion Alliance

Table 6. Broadband adoption assets in Illinois that can be leveraged to deploy federal BEAD and Digital Equity Act funding

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
Computer refurbishing programs	Illinois Assistive Technology Program	Reuse Program	IATP provides services that allow assistive technology in good working condition to be reused by an individual in need. The types of equipment available include computers and related hardware and software. IATP's Reuse Program provides assistive technology and durable medical equipment to people of all ages with disabilities who cannot afford to purchase new.	Individuals with disabilities
	PCs for People; Cook County, IL	Electronic Recycling Center	PCs for People's Illinois chapter has created an electronic recycling/refurbishing center in Cook County, where about 40% of Illinois' unserved population reside. Businesses are encouraged to donate their devices, which PCs for People refurbishes for free and sells for discounted rates in-store.	Low-income households

[158] Organization that owns or manages the described asset.
[159] Links provide either further information on the asset or connect directly to the organization providing access, depending on what is available online.

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	Computer Banc	Computer Banc	Computer Banc is a non-profit that has provided high-quality refurbished computers throughout the community for over 20 years. To ensure that they are serving those with the most need, Computer Banc asks that certain qualifications be met to be eligible to purchase one of their computers. Computer Banc serves community members such as people with disabilities, people with low income, nonprofits, schools, and military veterans.	All
Digital Navigator programs	DCEO; the IOB	Digital Navigator Grant Program (part of Connect Illinois Digital Equity Package)	Digital Navigators (volunteers or cross-trained staff) serve as community "experts" to assist local residents who need stronger digital literacy skills and knowledge. They also work with the Illinois Office of Broadband and program partners through a train-the-trainer model in which Digital Navigators assess community digital literacy gaps and provide guidance toward resources and program development that is suitable for the community and its residents.	All
	Elevate, Inc. in partnership with LISC Rural Digital Navigator (DN) Midwest	Digital Navigator Program	Elevate, a non-profit dedicated to innovation and entrepreneurship in East Central Illinois, partnered with LISC Rural DN Midwest to provide individualized/small-group assistance in five states in the Midwest. The non-profit aspires to create an ongoing/sustainable model of DN support so it can equip individuals with the digital skills necessary for future innovation.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	Connect Lake County (formerly known as ConnectWaukegan)	Community Digital Navigator	Connect Lake County has designed a digital navigator role to advocate for the community and offer small-group training to Waukegan residents/community groups. The navigator is expected to report to Connect Lake County and the community digital navigation coordinator, who guides the navigator to specific community locations. The community digital navigator also works with organizations and directly with residents to help them enroll in ACP and apply the benefits to their home internet bill.	All
	College of Lake County	Tutoring Center at CLC	CLC tutoring centers offer tutoring support to students who need help with basic computer skills or a refresher on technology use. Tutors across all three campuses can assist with various tasks, including navigating the computer, managing computer files, using a flash drive, creating a simple presentation, and creating a spreadsheet.	All
	Comcast	Digital Navigators w/ YMCA of Metro Chicago	Comcast recently announced a major investment and partnership to support the launch and scale of a Digital Navigator program spanning six YMCA locations in the city. Digital navigators are affiliated with trusted community organizations—like the YMCA—that are trained to help people connect to the Internet.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	LatinX DLN; Village of Summit	NeighborSquad Techies	Digital navigators or "NeighborSquad Techies" provide digital literacy training.[160]	All
P-20 school system one-to-one computer programs	Illinois State Board of Education	FY23 Elementary and Secondary Relief - Digital Equity Grant	This program assists school districts in closing the digital divide and enabling digital-age teaching and learning. School districts may use funds to provide students with the technology tools necessary for technology-rich learning experiences. All purchases must be prioritized first to ensure a one-to-one ratio of devices to students.	All
	Special Education District of Lake County	Student Mobile Device Initiative	The SEDOL has implemented a one-to-one model for students to learn how to use Chromebooks as their main mobile device. The Chromebooks are connected to student accounts and teacher classroom workspaces, so students benefit from tablet and app-driven instruction while strengthening digital skills.	All
Loaner computer/ hotspot programs	PCs for People, State of Illinois, IOB	Connect Illinois Computer Equity Network	A statewide network to receive, refurbish, and redistribute used computers across the state (with priority given to households without computers). Illinois is the first state to develop a statewide computer equity network that collects computers from the public and private sectors in a multiyear commitment to distribute upgraded devices annually.	Low-income households

[160] Broadband Adoption in Illinois, Panel presentation for Illinois Association of County Board Members, October 2022

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	Compudopt	Computer Drive-Thru	Compudopt, a national organization active in Illinois, operates a computer drive-through where individuals can "adopt" a free computer. To qualify, they must not already own a computer at home and must have a child in grades K-12 in the Chicago, Northern Illinois, or St. Clair area.	All
	T-Mobile	Project 10 Million	T-Mobile's Project 10 Million program provides eligible households a free hotspot and 100GB of free internet access each year for five years. Assurance Wireless, T-Mobile's primary Lifelife Assistance brand, participates in the ACP, which gives customers free phones with unlimited data, texts, and minutes, along with 10GB of hotspot data, to use on T-Mobile's nationwide network.	Low-income households
	Community Data Clinic, PCs for People	Dignifying Digital Connection	CDC and PCs for People distribute laptops and hotspots to low-income families in East Central Illinois. Dignifying Digital Connection gathers insights on other objectives of digital connectivity, including sustained broadband access, tech literacy, trust in technology, and affordability.	Low-income households
	Waukegan Public Library	Free digital literacy and computer class series	To support adults interested in the Northstar assessment and the general public, the Waukegan Public Library offers a five-course Digital Literacy program in English and Spanish. The classes introduce individuals to Word, searching the internet, and job readiness/financial management. Adults who complete the class are entered into a raffle to win a free computer.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	Waukegan Public Library	Mobile Hot Spot	The Waukegan Public Library offers portable mobile hotspots for rent (for up to one week). Rental instructions are available in English and Spanish.	All
	Geneva Public Library District	Tech To Go	The Geneva Public Library District offers iPads and portable hotspots for rent.	All
	Batavia Public Library	Mobile Hot Spot	The Batavia Public Library offers portable mobile hotspots for rent (for up to two weeks).	All
	Chicago Public Library	Computer reservation system and Go Wi-Fi Lending	For in-library device access, CPL cardholders can reserve a computer for an hour at any CPL location and may make up to two reservations a day. Wi-Fi access is available through the mobile lending program at 17 of the CPL locations. Cardholders may reserve a Chromebook kit, which includes a Wi-Fi hotspot and Chromebook at ten of the CPL locations.	All
	Rockford Public Library	Borrow a Chromebook Program	The Rockford Public Library allows adults who are aged 18 years and older to borrow a Google Chromebook laptop (for up to three months) and/or a Wi-Fi hot spot (for up to three weeks). When the device is checked out, library staff perform a visual inventory to help the borrower understand how to use the device and its components (case, cord, etc.)	All
Data tracking programs	University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, the IOB, IBL, Benton Institute	IBL Mapping Initiative	IBL has partnered with the University of Illinois to create static, county-level broadband maps on broadband adoption and service speeds.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	The University of Chicago, Data Science Institute	Internet Equity Initiative	University of Chicago's Data Science Institute has created a national heat map that pulls together census, FCC 477, and Ookla data at the census tract (CT). Data on all CTs can be gathered by hovering over the map, and users can select major cities (such as Chicago) for a zoomed-in view. Census variables are broadband access, device access, graduation rates, Black and Hispanic demographics, and income levels. FCC 477 variables are the number of ISPs, ISPs by speed, fiber ISPs, fiber availability, and downstream/upstream speeds. Ookla variables involve speed: download rate, upload rate, latency, and tests/devices per capita.	All
	Purdue Center for Regional Development	Digital Distress Metric and Digital Divide Index	These two metrics developed by the Purdue Center for Regional Development offer census tract- and county-level views of digital distress and the digital divide using various data points as indicators. These can be used by Illinois to track progress in digital equity and inclusion over time.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	Broadband READY; Purdue Center for Regional Development	Illinois READY Regional 2020 Digital Inclusion Profiles[161]	The Illinois Digital Inclusion Profiles is a set of data for each of the state's counties. It is organized by region to align with the Broadband READY structure. The profiles include data visualization tools such as regional maps, demographic data in charts, and bar graphs that illustrate gaps in broadband access for student and senior populations, among other analyses.	All
	Broadband READY	Digital Indicator Dashboard	This statewide digital indicator dashboard can be customized by region. Metrics on the dashboard relate to digital demographics, access and availability, adoption and affordability, uses, and the served population in the state/region.	All
Programs that conduct aware-ness and outreach activities related to digital inclusion programming and re-sources	Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband (UC2B); Housing Authority of Champaign County	Hip Hop Xpress Bus Wi-Fi	The Hip Hop Xpress Bus (HHX) is a mobile sound studio and classroom providing Wi-Fi access for learning, teaching, and connecting in Champaign County communities. The HHX spends 12 hours a week traveling to underserved areas and partnering with the Housing Authority of Champaign County to inform families about creative opportunities and financial goals avail-able via the internet. The UC2B Community Benefit Fund provided $10,000 to support the operation of the Hip Hop Xpress Bus.	All

[161] Links to profiles for each region: Northwest, Northern Stateline, Northeast, East Central, North Central, West Central, Central, Southwest, Southeast, Southern

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	Chi Commons Cooperative	BlockShare	A communications platform run by neighbors to empower and connect each other. BlockShare is a neighborhood-scale communications platform built, owned, operated, and trusted by its stakeholders. It fosters solidarity, shared benefits, and digital equity. The server hosts applications that neighborhoods can use to share their assets and organize themselves with modern digital tools. The platform is currently deployed in South Shore, Greater Grand Crossing, and other underserved communities.	All
Programs that provide digital literacy and	Learning Technology Center of Illinois (LTC)	Digital Literacy and Citizenship	LTC offers resources, professional learning, and support for building the next generation of engaged knowledgeable, and responsible digital citizens.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
Digital skills training	University of Illinois Extension, Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit	4-H Tech Changemakers	4-H teen leaders in the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit are engaging with a broad range of community organizations to learn about community issues. The teens have created community action plans that in-corporate technology into solving community issues and have implemented technology training with several diverse groups, such as Common Place adult learners, University of Illinois Extension staff, and senior residents at Courtyard Estates. Since the pro-gram's launch in July 2019, 4-H Tech Changemaker teens have trained over 40 adults. The Tech Change-makers work with adult volunteers to teach digital literacy and internet safety and security to adult learners. The topics that are most often requested include online safety and security, using social media, and learning about different types of devices (smartphones, tablets, etc.).	All
	Southeast READY, Booth Library, Eastern Illinois University	Digital Literacy "Train the Trainer" Program	The program team designed digital literacy curriculum and educational experiences that would last long after the grant that funded them expired. The team's primary goal was to establish a repeatable, successful model for future programs in a "train the trainer" format. By partnering with rural libraries, K-12 educators, local GED instructors, and university professionals, the program aimed to demonstrate accessible, effective digital literacy education for the Southeast region, with a primary focus on the areas immediately surrounding Coles County. Guides are now available with resources about digital literacy/citizenship and digital literacy education for students, educators, and community members.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	West Central READY	Data analytics and cybersecurity training program	The West Central READY team has hosted data analytics and cyber security workshops in person at Spoon River College, John Woods Community College, and McDonough Telephone Cooperative. It has also delivered workshops online.	All
	East Central READY	Financial literacy series	In Spring 2023, the East Central READY team offered a financial literacy series.	All
	Central READY	Community Health Workers Digital Literacy Curriculum	Offered in Spring 2023, the Central READY team, led by the University of Illinois-Springfield, developed a curriculum for community health workers.	All
	YWCA Champaign County	Strive	Strive is a partnership program between YWCA USA and Google.org. Its aim is to help close the "digital divide"—the gap between individuals with access to technology and those without. Through this program, the YWCA provides free education on using computers and internet tools, as well as additional training on essential workplace skills. The program's goal is to provide women with training that helps them access education and employment opportunities.	All
	Champaign District Park	Tech Talk	The Tech Talk course is offered through Champaign District Park and teaches computer basics—how to use mobile devices, apps, the internet, and more—to individuals 50 and older. It is free for members and $4.00 for nonmembers. The East Central READY team is also working with the Champaign Park District to offer digital skills training.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	The Education Justice Project	Computer Workshops	These not-for-credit workshops, which are held in the EJP's computer lab at Danville Correctional Center, allow EJP students to gain confidence in diverse aspects of computing, from foundational skills like keyboarding to advanced programming skills. Some workshops are one-time events, while others are part of a series that lasts a few weeks or an entire semester, depending on the subject and the instructor's pedagogical goals.	Justice impacted individuals
	Chicago Public Schools	Chicago Connected Initiative	Chicago Connected offers online training led by experts from local organizations on topics like Google Sheets, Excel 101, and computer literacy.	All
	Rockford Public Library	Chromebook + Hot Spot Tutorial Drop-In Classes	The Rockford Public Library offers drop-in classes where individuals can learn how to use their computer, Microsoft Suite programs, Google Suite programs, Zoom, and other skills.	All
	Waukegan Public Library	Computer classes and appointments	The Waukegan Public Library has a drop-in lab that offers support in both English and Spanish. The library has a "Get that Job" lab where patrons can get help with their resumé or take a "Learn Microsoft Word at Home" class in English. The library also provides free online Northstar accounts and enrollment in "TypingClub."	All
	Literacy Chicago	ACE the Workforce and ACE the Computer programs	Literacy Chicago's ACE programs offer training in computer basics and in using a computer for work. Participants learn how to search the internet, write emails, use social media, consider online communication etiquette, and fill out online job applications.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	Urban Muslim Minority Alliance (UMMA)	Education Empowerment	UMMA is a case management organization that guides participants toward financial security through education classes, a food pantry, job readiness training, and help with self-sufficiency. Of UMMA's seven Educational Empowerment programs, two focus on digital skill-building: one teaches how to use Microsoft Office programs, and the other is an Introduction to computer basics, such as how to use a keyboard, the internet, and email, as well as computer social skills and "netiquette."	All
	Access Living	The Disability Inclusion Institute	The Disability Inclusion Institute is Access Living's consulting and training service. Access Living is conducting a pilot program aimed at improving digital access and literacy among people with disabilities.[162]	Individuals with disabilities
	Claretian Associates	Claretian Associates	Claretian Associates provides digital literacy training and education in digital literacy to South Chicago.[163]	All
	Governors State University (GSU)	College courses on Intensive English, digital literacy, and math interventions	With GEER funding from the Illinois Board of Higher Education, GSU is creating courses in English, math, and digital literacy. The courses support about 200 students via two-semester training.	All

[162] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition
[163] Digital Equity Asset Map Survey Responses, City of Chicago Digital Equity Coalition

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	Association House of Chicago	Tech#Ready	Tech#Ready helps people develop the digital skills they need for future jobs. Participants learn essential computer skills from experienced instructors. Both beginner and advanced courses are available, as are certifications in Microsoft Office programs. This eight-week course features a self-paced, online curriculum that is designed to boost digital literacy and confidence in working with computers. With group and one-on-one instruction, this training course fits any-one's learning style.	All
	LatinX DLN; Village of Summit	Cybersecurity courses	Bilingual cybersecurity virtual courses are offered to diverse stakeholders.[164]	All
	LULAC Illinois Education Council 5238	Grow with Google	LULAC 5238 has partnered with LULAC National to be a part of a pilot program with Google aimed at improving digital skills in the community. Through this partnership, the council has also partnered with the Summit School District 104 in Summit, Illinois to help the local community increase their digital skills. The program has engaged teachers and parents through a fun and educational workshop that teaches the fundamentals of using Google digital products. Participants have learned how to use Google's wide variety of digital products in their personal and professional lives.	All

[164] Broadband Adoption in Illinois, Panel presentation for Illinois Association of County Board Members, October 2022

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
Programs that provide subsidized or low-cost devices	Illinois Department of Aging, Illinois Assistive Technology Program	Illinois CARE Connections (ICC) Program	The program serves individuals who are most likely to be socially isolated due to the pandemic and provides them with technology solutions to help alleviate loneliness. Participants receive an Apple iPad or Android tablet with a case, keyboard, and headphones. If needed, they are also provided internet access through a hot spot. Priority is given to those who live alone, do not normally receive in-home services, and who live in rural areas. The devices have applications that support different communication options so individuals can connect with family, friends, and providers and attend telehealth appointments with doctors.	Aging individuals
	ISBE	School Technology Revolving Loan Program	The School Technology Revolving Loan Program (STRLP) is a three-year loan with a 1.685 percent interest rate. The district must allocate the loan expenditures based on the percent of enrollment in grades K-8. Loans can be used for equipment and wiring for installing and upgrading networks, computer hardware used for classroom instruction and/or staff development, computer furniture, other technology hardware investments, and staff development related to the integration of technology into the learning environment.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	Learning Technology Center of Illinois (LTC)	Illinois Learning Technology Purchase Program (ILTPP)	ILTPP is an Illinois cooperative whose mission is to provide accessible, high-quality, affordable technology, digital learning resources, and opportunities to K-12 educational communities. The cooperative aggregates the buying power of hundreds of districts to help them procure products and services from high-quality vendors. The cooperative also partners with vendors to help districts reach the appropriate audience.	All
Public computing labs	YMCA Chicago	Tech Hubs	YMCA Chicago's locations have created in-person computer labs, called Tech Hubs, for free use by community members. The Tech Hubs are equipped with computers and digital navigators. The initiative is supported by Chicago Connected's internet provision and Comcast's $500 million investment into YMCA facilities. The Y hopes to expand Tech Hubs across six different locations within the next three years	All
	Southern Illinois University	Community Technology Center	Southern Illinois University Carbondale has opened a Community Technology Center at its Eurma C. Hayes Community Center. The center is a three-room suite where area residents can access free broadband, rent tablet computers, print documents, and learn various digital skills.	All

Asset type	Organization name(s)[158]	Asset name with link to asset[159]	Description	Covered population served
	Richard J. Daley College, City Colleges of Chicago (CCC)	Computer Labs	Daley College provides computer lab access for both City Colleges of Chicago students and to the public via the Connect Chicago initiative. The Daley College computing lab houses the latest in PC system technology. All PCs host a standard Office software suite as well as department-sponsored academic applications.	All
	Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation (GAGDC)	Digital Community Center, Auburn Gresham Healthy Lifestyle Building	The Auburn-Gresham Healthy Lifestyle Technology Hub plans to directly respond to the community's quality-of-life plan. The hub's plans include workforce development—with a goal to create 100 living-wage jobs within the community—providing access to a hub for health and wellness services, making technology and education enhancements, and offering community development services that support youth, seniors, families, and the disenfranchised in the greater South side.	Racial/ethnic minority (Hispanic/Latinx)

3.1.5 Broadband affordability

This section inventories the programming that supports Illinois families in accessing monthly broadband services that they can sustainably afford as part of their monthly budgets.[165] These assets and programs are categorized into two types:

1. Discount or subsidized broadband service and equipment programs—programs that offer subsidies or discounts for broadband services or internet-enabled devices.
2. Efforts to increase enrollment in the ACP—programs that focus on boosting ACP enrollment by eligible families and individuals.

[165] Affordability Connectivity Program, Federal Communications Commission

Table 7: Broadband affordability assets in Illinois that can be leveraged to deploy federal BEAD and Digital Equity Act funding

Asset type	Organization name(s)[166]	Asset name with link to asset[167]	Description	Covered population served
Discount or subsidized broadband service and equipment programs	Illinois Commerce Commission	The Illinois High-Cost Universal Service Program	Through this program, customers of telecommunications carriers contribute to a fund that provides cost support to certain incumbent, rural, local-exchange telecommunications carriers in Illinois to keep rural telephone rates affordable.	Rural areas
	Illinois Commerce Commission	The Illinois Universal Telephone Assistance Program	Through this program, customers of telecommunications carriers in Illinois may submit voluntary contributions that can be used to offset the cost of connecting to the telephone network for eligible, low-income customers. This program has also provided funding to the PCs for People program.	Low-income households
	Illinois Commerce Commission	The Illinois Telecommunications Access Corporation Program	Through this program, customers of telecommunications carriers and voice-over internet protocol providers contribute to a fund that is used to support services for the deaf, hard-of-hearing, late-deafened, deaf-blind, and speech-disabled communities.	Individuals with disabilities
	Comcast/Xfinity	Comcast Internet Essentials	Comcast Internet Essentials provides high-speed internet service at a discounted price for individuals/households who are eligible for various public assistance programs. Recipients can purchase a computer at a discounted rate, receive free internet training online and/or a free wireless gateway, and gain access to Xfinity hotspots.	Low-income households

[166] Organization who owns or manages the described asset
[167] Links provide either further information on asset or direct to organization providing access depending on what is available online

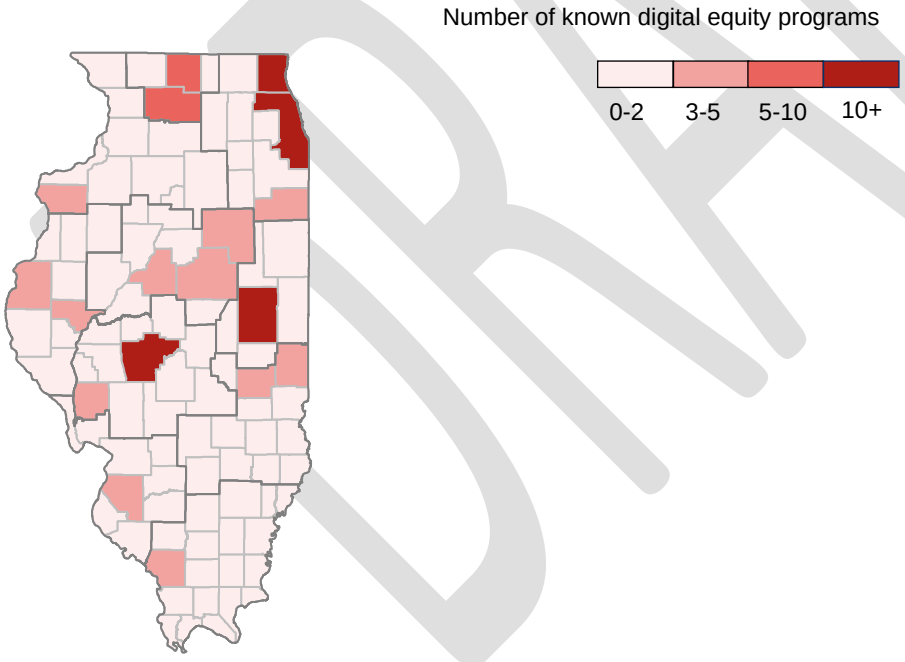
Asset type	Organization name(s)[166]	Asset name with link to asset[167]	Description	Covered population served
	AT&T	AT&T Access	AT&T's Access program provides discounted high-speed internet, Wi-Fi service to participants' existing devices, a free wireless gateway, access to Wi-Fi hotspots, and unlimited monthly data. Lower-cost plans are available to households with a monthly speed of 10 Mbps or less.	Low-income households
	Spectrum	Spectrum Internet Assist	Spectrum Internet Assist is an affordable, reliable Internet option for low-income households. The program includes high-speed internet at 30 megabits per second (with wireless speeds varying by location), a free internet modem, no data caps or contracts, and an optional in-home Wi-Fi service with a router for an additional $5 per month and no activation fee.	Low-income households
	Chicago Public Schools (CPS)	Chicago Connected	Chicago Connected provides no-cost, high-speed internet service to eligible CPS students and their families.	Low-income households
Efforts to increase enrollment in the ACP	IOB	Illinois Broadband Affordability Study	This multi-faceted research study looks at affordability and device access among Illinois residents. One proposed recommendation is to raise public awareness of assistance programs, such as ACP.	All
	IOB, IBL	ACP Outreach Calls	State-wide ACP Outreach Calls were launched in December 2022 to support digital navigator programs throughout the state. The calls share best practices in ACP outreach and enrollment, as well as strategies for program development.	Low-income households
	LatinX Digital Leaders Now (DLN)	Digital Equity	This initiative focuses on making affordable internet available to families experiencing financial hardships by connecting them to federal subsidies.	Low-income households

3.1.6 Gaps in asset inventory

The State of Illinois recognizes that a sizable number of digital equity practitioners and partners are working in local communities across Illinois. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done to ensure that every municipality, region, and local government or community has sufficient digital equity or a broadband plan or program providing residents with needed support.

The figure below shows the geographic distribution of these existing assets. As may be expected, assets are currently clustered in counties with large population centers. In areas of the state with low population density, most counties have only a limited number (fewer than two) of known digital equity programs.

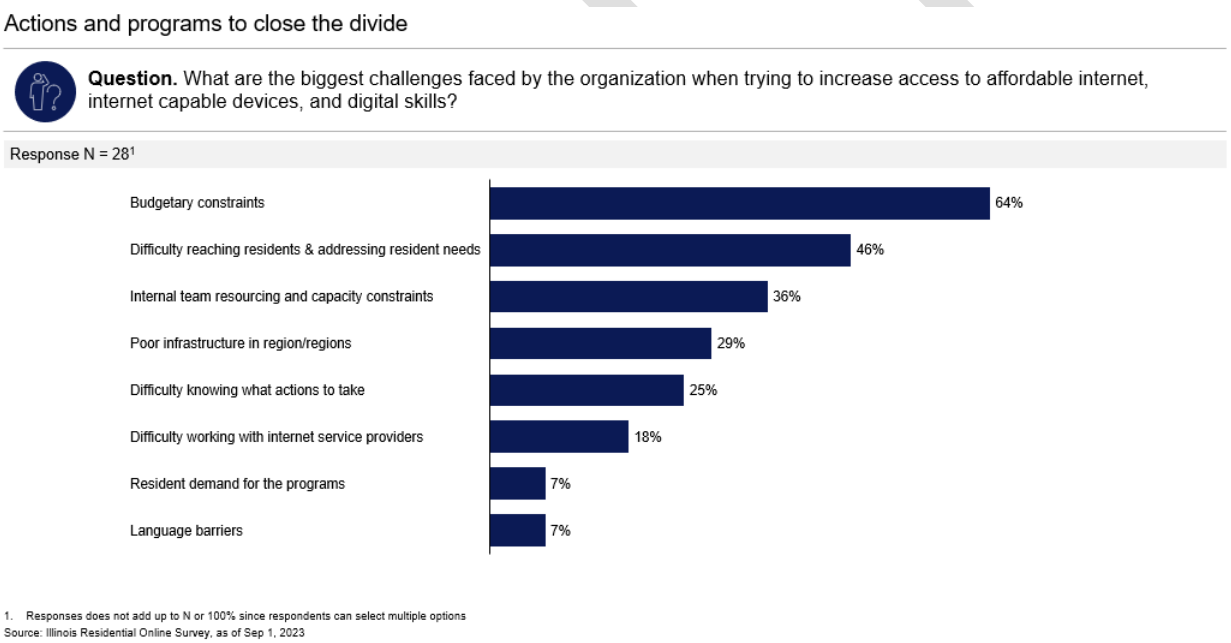
Figure 1. Distribution of digital equity assets by county: Visualization of coverage for all known Digital Equity programs (from Section 3.1) per county in Illinois.[168]



[168] This figure represents a preliminary accounting of digital equity programs, which are approximately localized to counties where they may be based, targeted, or assumed to be targeted.

In the IBL's survey of non-profits and community organizations, respondents said that their biggest challenge in efforts to increase access to affordable internet, internet-capable devices, and digital skills is **budgetary constraints**, which affect 64% of surveyed organizations (Figure 2.)[169] Participating organizations indicated that they would like to receive support from the state in the form of **grant funding** (88% of surveyed organizations) and **device donation** (62%).[170] The survey showed that closing gaps in funding and support is essential to the success of many existing programs (Figure 2.)

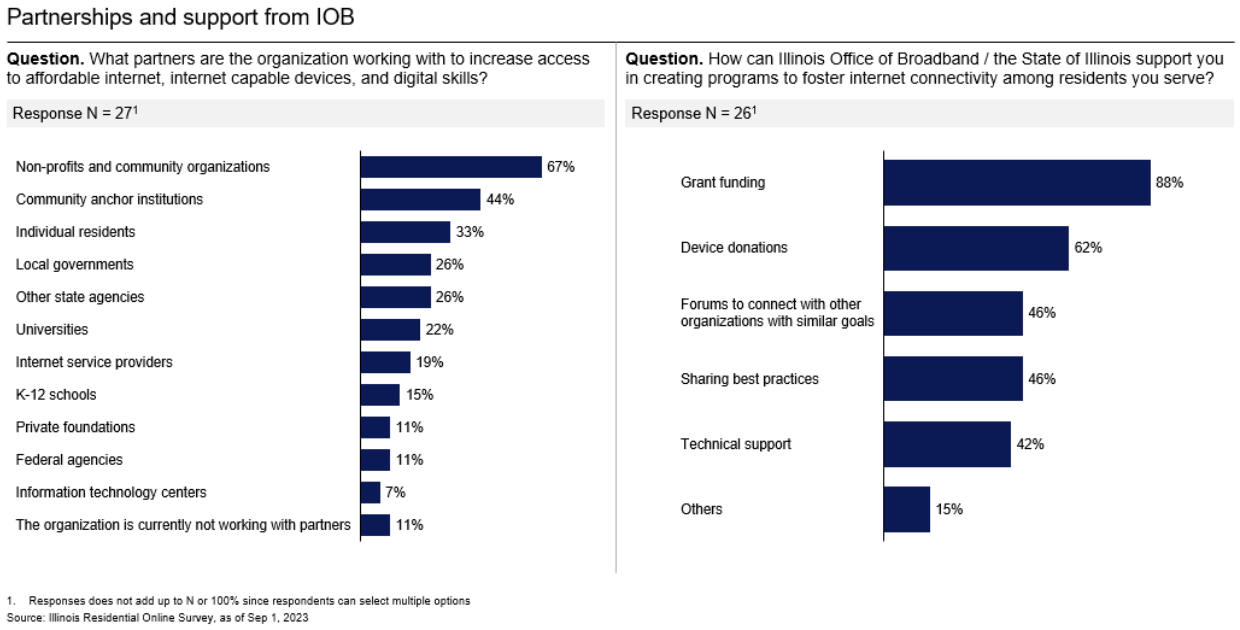
Figure 2. Challenge faced by organization, based on Illinois non-profit and community organizations web survey as of September 1, 2023



[169] In response to the question, "What are the biggest challenges faced by the organization when trying to increase access to affordable internet, internet-capable devices, and digital skills?" in the IBL online survey of non-profits and community organizations, analyzed on 09/01/2023, with N = 28.

[170] In response to the question, "How can the Illinois Office of Broadband or the State of Illinois support you in creating programs to foster internet connectivity among the residents you serve?" in the IBL online survey of non-profits and community organizations, analyzed on 09/01/2023, with N = 26.

Figure 3: Partnership and support form IOB, based on Illinois non-profit and community organizations web survey as of September 1, 2023



In addition to gaps in geographic coverage, capacity gaps persist, even in large population centers with a high number of programs. Community program leaders have reported that they lack sufficient capacity to serve all community members in need. In the City of Chicago Listening Sessions, participants maintained that the Chicago Public Library did not have enough staff to support the device-loan and digital learning program. Similarly, respondents in the Aurora Listening Session noted that, while their local public library lends out hotspots, community members need to request these loans nearly a month and a half in advance. These examples indicate that closing gaps in coverage and program availability will be insufficient if capacity gaps remain unaddressed.

3.2 Needs assessment

- At the state level, 2.9 million Illinoisians in 1.3 million households do not have home access to high-speed internet (See **Availability of broadband infrastructure:** 5% of broadband-serviceable locations (BSLs) in Illinois do not have access to 25/3 Mbps internet service and are categorized as "unserved" by the FCC. Some 4% of BSLs do not have access to 100/20 Mbps internet service and are thus categorized as "underserved."

- **Affordability of internet subscriptions:** 17% of Illinois residents find it difficult to afford their internet bill, and 14% have experienced interruptions in service because they had difficulty paying.

- **Access to devices:** Just 79%, or 3.9 million, of Illinoisans have access to either a desktop or a laptop.

- **Low levels of digital literacy:** 11% of Illinoisans report that they have difficulty completing at least one of the surveyed tasks related to the internet.

Figure 4 for more details.)[171] This gap in adoption may be caused by a lack of:

- **Availability of broadband infrastructure:** 5% of broadband-serviceable locations (BSLs) in Illinois do not have access to 25/3 Mbps internet service and are categorized as "unserved" by the FCC. Some 4% of BSLs do not have access to 100/20 Mbps internet service and are thus categorized as "underserved."[172]

[171] American Community Survey 5-Year data, 2021

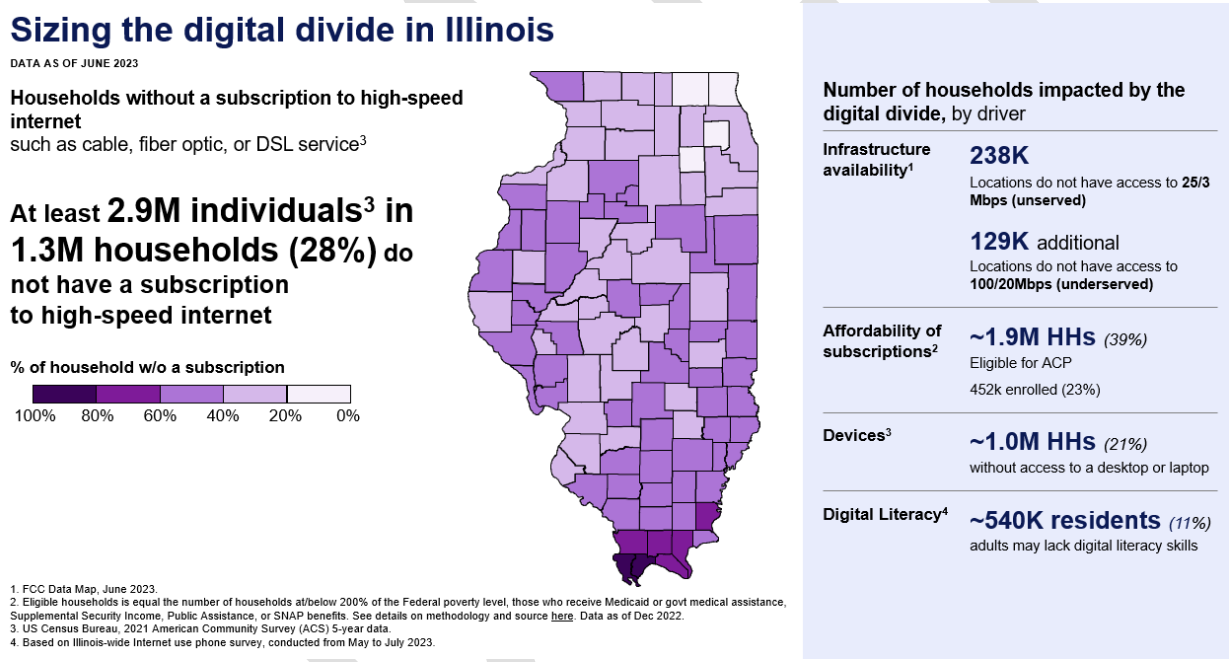
[172] FCC National Broadband Data Map accessed in July 2023

- **Affordability of internet subscriptions:** 17% of Illinois residents find it difficult to afford their internet bill, and 14% have experienced interruptions in service because they had difficulty paying.[173]

- **Access to devices:** Just 79%, or 3.9 million, of Illinoisans have access to either a desktop or a laptop.[174]

- **Low levels of digital literacy:** 11% of Illinoisans report that they have difficulty completing at least one of the surveyed tasks related to the internet.[175]

Figure 4. Overview of the digital divide in Illinois



[173] Based on the state-wide resident internet use survey. More details in Section 3.2 and Appendix
[174] American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates
[175] Based on the state-wide resident internet use survey. More details in Section 3.2 and Appendix

In this section, we further detail the baseline from which Illinois is working to address broadband adoption, affordability, device access and digital literacy, as well as the information that residents have communicated about their underlying needs and the barriers they face to becoming fully digitally enabled. This information was shared in both listening sessions and surveys. Later in this section, we provide details on each of these topics as they specifically pertain to Illinois' covered populations: individuals who live in covered households, aging individuals, incarcerated individuals, veterans, individuals with disabilities, individuals with a language barrier, Black or African Americans, Hispanic individuals, and individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.[176]

3.2.1 Broadband adoption

This section describes the current state of Illinoisans' broadband adoption, device access, and digital literacy rates, as well as the feedback gathered from residents and non-profits on the barriers they face. We also discuss multi-sector strategies for increasing broadband adoption in the agriculture, education, and healthcare sectors.

3.2.1.1 Improved household broadband subscriptions

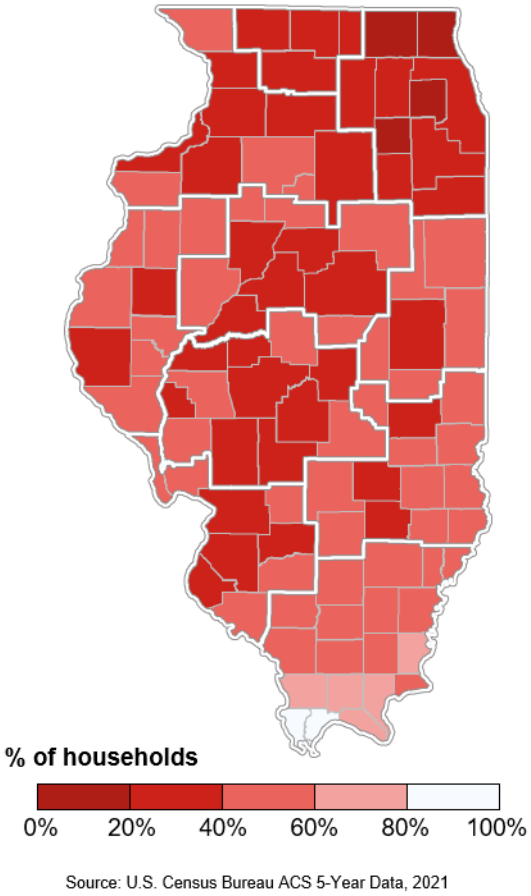
Current state of broadband subscription rates in Illinois

According to the **American Community Survey 5-Year Data** (2021) estimates, **3.5 million households** (72% of all households in Illinois) **subscribe to fixed broadband services** such as cable, fiber-optic, or DSL services. The rate is lowest in Illinois' Southern region, where only 49% of households subscribe to broadband. The Southern region is followed by the Southeast region at 58%, the West Central region at 60%, and the Central region at 63%. Among counties, the five with the lowest subscription rates are all in the Southern region: Alexander County (15%), Pulaski

[176] Covered population as defined by the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity, NTIA

County (19%), Pope County (31%), Union County (32%), and Johnson County (33%). **Figure 5** below plots broadband subscription rates by county.

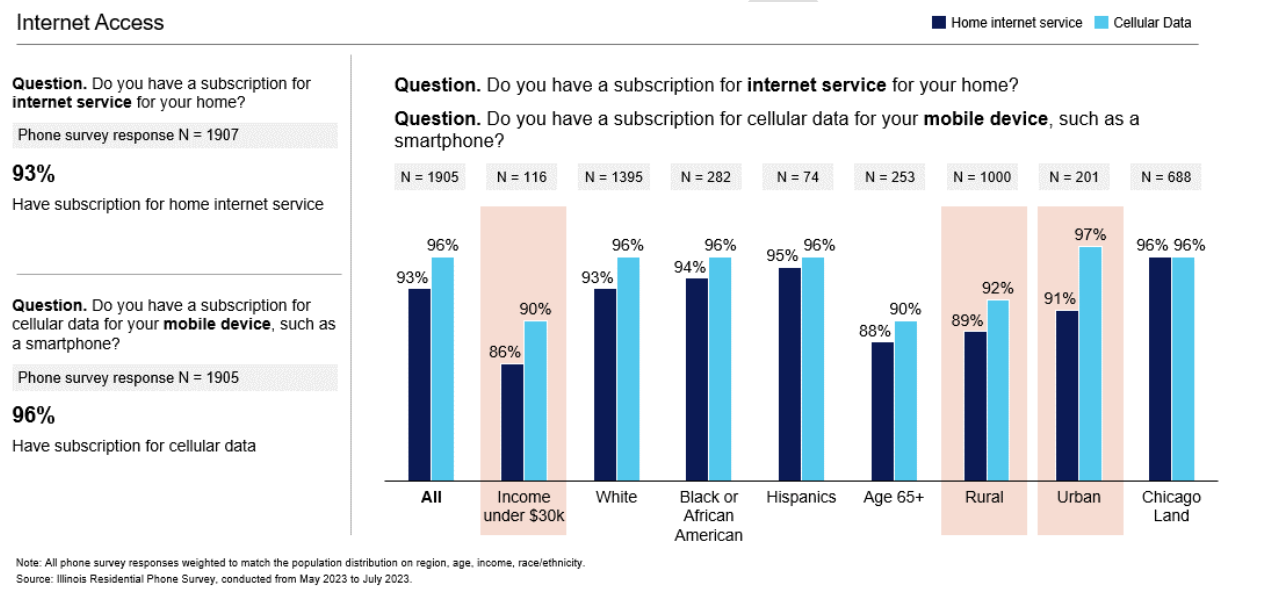
Figure 5. Broadband adoption in Illinois. Percentage of households in Illinois with broadband subscriptions—such as cable, fiber-optic, or DSL—by county



According to the Illinois-wide phone survey on internet use, 93% of Illinois residents have a home internet subscription, and 96% have a mobile data plan. The rate of internet subscription may be higher in the Illinois-wide survey than in ACS data, since the survey did not ask about fixed-broadband internet services (such as cable, fiber-optic, or DSL services only). Among covered populations, individuals with an annual household income under $30,000, aging individuals, and individuals in rural areas reported significantly lower rates of subscription than the average respondent. Subscription rates for individuals with an annual household income under $30,000

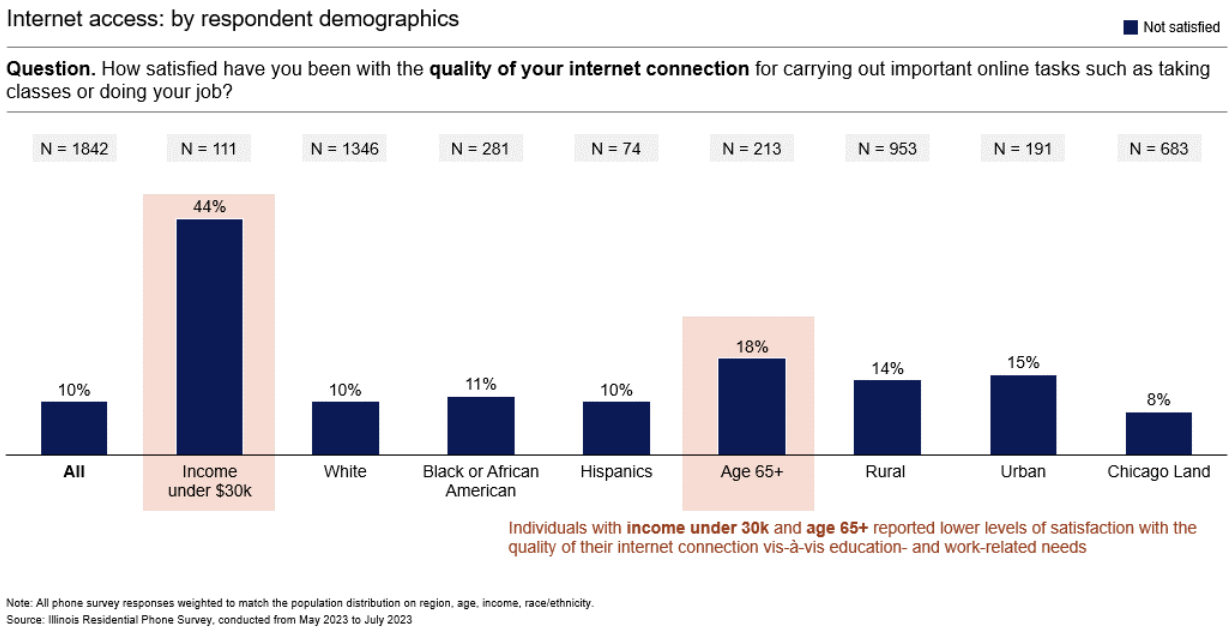
reported a 6% lower subscription rate in mobile data, and a 7% lower subscription rate in internet service at home. A detailed breakdown is shown in **Figure 6** below.

Figure 6. Internet access-related questions asked and results in the Illinois Residential Phone Survey



When **asked how satisfied they have been with the quality of their internet connection** when it comes to completing important online tasks—such as taking classes—**10% of Illinois residents reported that they were not satisfied**, 17% reported being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 29% reported being somewhat satisfied, and 44% reported being very satisfied, according to the state-wide internet use phone survey. The rate of dissatisfaction is highest among lower-income individuals (44% dissatisfied), followed by aging individuals (18% dissatisfied). See **Figure 7** below for details.

Figure 7. Internet access-related questions asked and results in the Illinois Residential Phone Survey

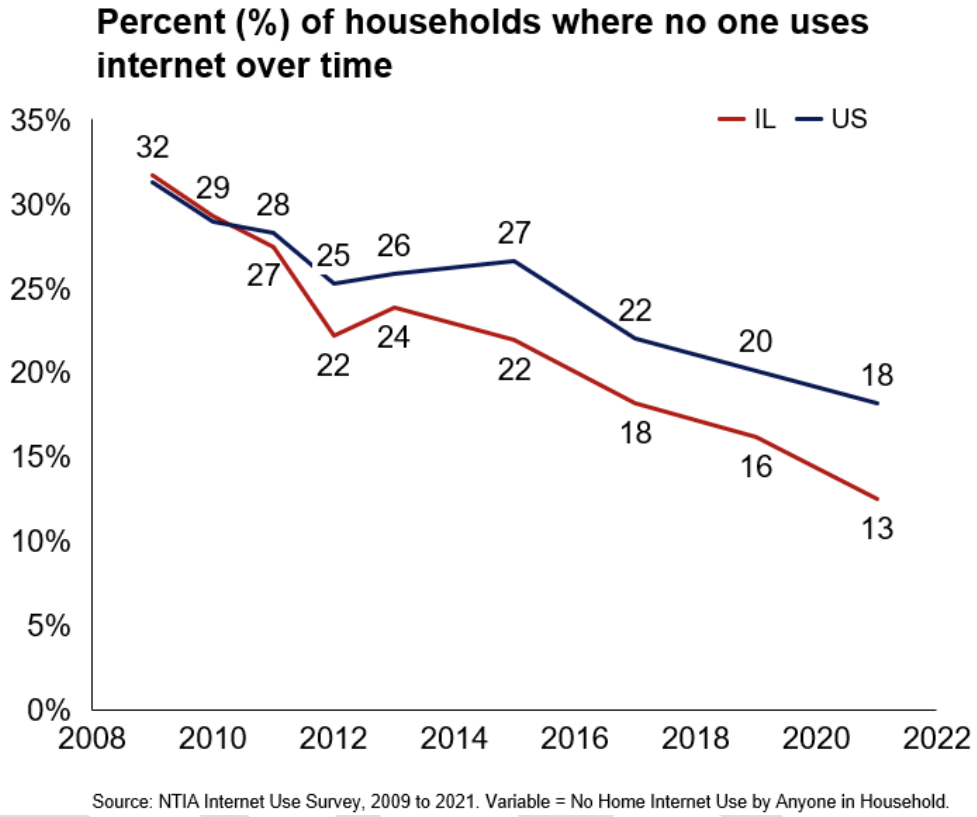


Internet use in Illinois over time

Data on internet use over time from the NTIA Internet Use Survey reveals that the share of households where no one uses the internet at home declined from 32% to 13% from 2009 to 2021 (Figure 8).[177] This rate of decline is faster than the average U.S. rate (from 32% to 18% in the same period).

[177] NTIA Internet Use Survey, 2009 to 2021. Variable = No home internet use by anyone in household

Figure 8. Households where no one uses the internet at home in Illinois, with the entire U.S. divided by total households. [178]



Source: NTIA Internet Use Survey, 2009 to 2021. Variable = No Home Internet Use by Anyone in Household.

Broadband subscription-related needs and barriers

At multiple stakeholder engagement events and in regional and local government-led digital equity plans, affordability is cited as the primary barrier to adoption. See Section 3.2.2.2 for an analysis of broadband affordability.

In local government surveys, many residents reported dissatisfaction with the speed and reliability of offered services. Many local governments have conducted surveys to understand the quality of broadband services in the regions and localities they represent:

[178] NTIA Internet Use Survey, 2009 to 2021. Variable = No home internet use by anyone in household

- 59% of respondents in **Livingston County** were not satisfied with the speed of their current service, and 56% were not satisfied with the reliability of their current service, according to 393 survey responses received by the Livingston County Broadband Team.[179]
- 72% of respondents in **Kankakee County** were not satisfied with their service's speed, and 70% were not satisfied with its reliability, according to the **Kankakee County Broadband Plan**.[180]
- The **Jackson County Broadband Plan** reports that 51% of Jackson County respondents are dissatisfied with the reliability of their local internet connection, and 54% are dissatisfied with their local internet speed.[181]
- In the **Champaign County Internet Survey**, the internet service index—which combines data on reliability, download and upload speeds, customer service, and the value for the money of the current internet service providers (ISPs) in Champaign—was determined to be 3.67 on a 1 to 5 scale.[182]
- The **Village of Elsah's Accelerate Illinois Final Report** states that 74% of the Village's residents are unhappy with their internet service. Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents reported that they are less than satisfied with the reliability of their service, and 63% are dissatisfied with the speed of their service. [183]
- According to the **Knox County Broadband Plan**, 65% of respondents said that they have experienced service interruptions in the past. Only 24% of respondents were "extremely satisfied" with their internet service's reliability. For 13% of respondents, unreliable service was the reason they had no internet service.[184]

[179] Connect Livingston Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois Round 2
[180] Kankakee County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois Round 2
[181] Jackson County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois Round 1
[182] Champaign County Internet Survey, Connect Champaign County, July 2022
[183] The Historic Village of Elsah, Accelerate Illinois Round 1
[184] Knox County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois Round 1

- In the Peoria-Woodford Broadband Planning Report, 46% of Peoria respondents and 47% of Woodford respondents reported dissatisfaction with their internet service's speeds. Fifty percent of Peoria respondents and 36% of Woodford respondents reported dissatisfaction with their internet service's reliability. [185]

The same dissatisfaction with speed and reliability was echoed in numerous listening sessions conducted during the IBL's state-wide listening tour. A participant in the Effingham listening session noted, "I'd be waiting to download farming programs and critical reports because my kid's homework chokes our internet until 11:00 p.m."[186] A participant living in MDU commented, "We live in a neighborhood with many multi-unit houses, so density is an issue; there are lots of paying customers there, but I haven't heard of one family being able to use more than one device at home." [187]

Many residents and community organizations reported difficulties in dealing with internet service providers during the state-wide listening tour. A participant in the Effingham listening session commented, "*It took me two months to get someone from the internet service provider to come out. Someone told me over the phone that I would be covered, but it wasn't true*."[188] Community organizations said that ACP-participating ISPs can be particularly difficult to deal with, citing long wait times, a lack of customer service representatives, and unclear instructions/assistance from ISPs on outages, maintenance requests, and other issues.[189]

[185] Peoria-Woodford Broadband Planning Report, Accelerate Illinois Round 2
[186] Effingham Listening Session, March 22
[187] Bloomington-Normal Listening Session, Central Region, May 16
[188] Effingham Listening Session, March 22
[189] City of Chicago Listening Session, April 19

The City of Chicago's Digital Equity Plan highlights a need to support the customer experience in navigating broadband subscriptions. Many customers find that available support does not meet their accessibility needs. They find it hard to meet providers' restrictive policies and are sometimes confused by the various consumer options for internet service.[190]

Participants in the IBL's state-wide listening tour also reported that installation appointments for residents in rural areas often last multiple hours due to difficulty in obtaining a connectivity signal. As a result, residents sometimes have to miss work or take time off. One participant in the East Central listening session noted, "It feels like towers in underserved communities are never working, and you never know when they are coming for maintenance. They will give you a date when you ask, but that date is rarely accurate, and there can be long periods of no internet on full blocks in neighborhoods."[191]

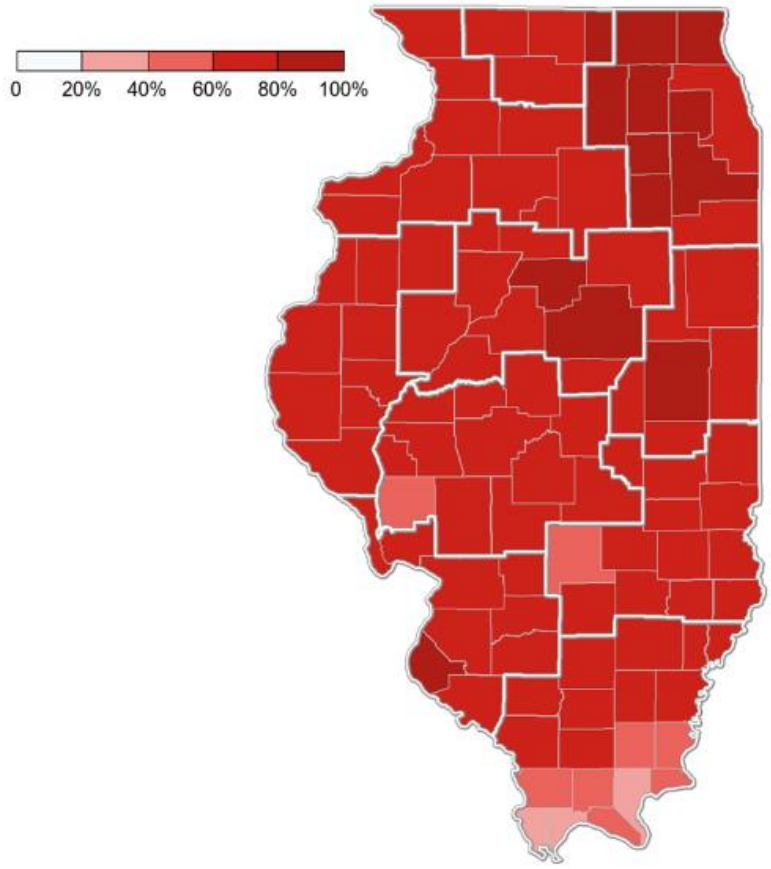
3.2.1.2 Increased households, businesses, and CAIs with access to internet-capable devices

Device access in households in Illinois

Based on the American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates, 79% of Illinoisans, or 3.9 million, have access to either a desktop or laptop. The Southern region (64% have access), West Central region (70%), and the Southeast region (70%) have the lowest rates of access to a desktop or laptop. The Northeast region of Illinois leads the state in desktop or laptop access at rate of 82%. Among counties, the five with the lowest subscription rates are all in the Southern region: Alexander County (32% have access), Pulaski County (33%), Pope County (40%), Massac County (48%), and Gallatin County (50%).[192] See Figure 9 for more details.

[190] City of Chicago's Digital Equity Plan, January 2023
[191] City of Chicago Listening Session, May 3
[192] U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates

Figure 9. Percentage of Illinois households with access to internet-enabled devices—either a desktop or computer—by county.



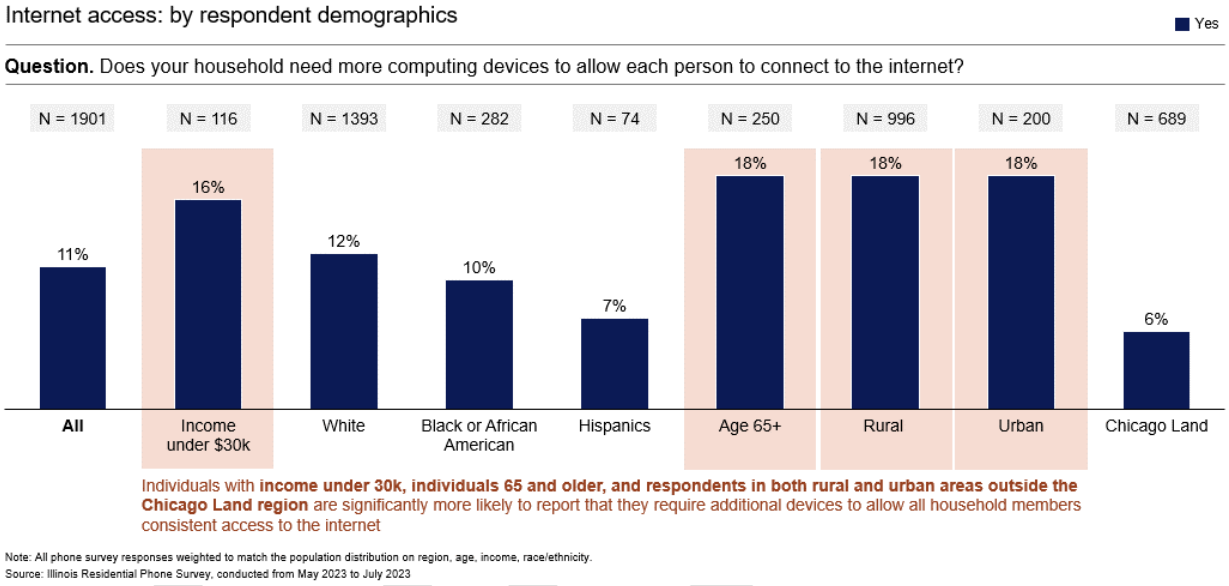
Illinois-wide phone survey results showed that 11% of all households need more computing devices—desktop, laptop, tablet, and smart phone—to allow each person to connect to the internet. Among the demographic groups and covered populations, individuals with annual household income under $30,000, individuals 65 and older, and respondents in both rural and urban areas outside the Chicago Land region are significantly more likely to report that they require additional devices to provide all household members with consistent access to the internet:

- Among residents with annual household incomes under $30,000 per year, 16% cite the need for more devices to allow each person to connect to the internet.

- Among residents ages 65 and over, 18% cite the need for more devices to allow each person to connect to the internet.
- Among residents living in rural or urban communities (compared to individuals in Chicagoland), 18% cite the need for more devices to allow each person to connect to the internet.

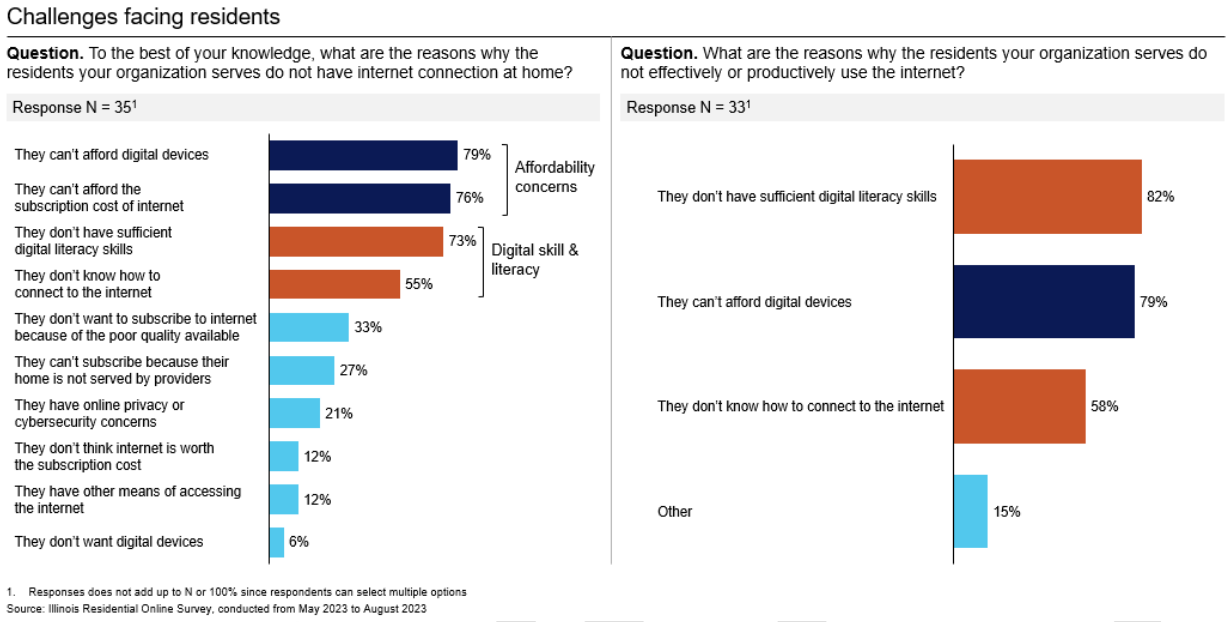
See details on these survey findings in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Device access-related questions asked and results in the Illinois Residential Phone Survey.



Illinois non-profits and community anchor institutions (CAIs) were also surveyed and cited **gaps in access to digital devices as the primary reason why the Illinoisans they serve do not use the internet at home.** Affordability is one of the main issues hindering at-home internet use, as 79% of responding organizations stated that the residents they serve cannot afford the digital devices needed to enable internet connection at home. See **Figure 11** for more details.

Figure 11. Causes of residents' low adoption rates cited in survey of Illinois non-profits and community anchor institutions.



Device access-related needs and barriers

Limited access to devices was mentioned throughout the listening tour and echoed in many regional digital equity reports. The issue is more severe for certain covered populations. In the **City of Chicago Digital Equity Plan**, the need for devices and inadequacy of devices were two recurring themes in community conversations. Twenty-nine percent of participants said that they needed devices, and 14% stated that their current devices did not meet their needs. In the **Connect Lake County Digital Equity Strategy Plan**, device access has a clear equity divide, as 98% of survey respondents with an annual income of over $50,000 had a personal computing device, while only 70% of households with an annual income of less than $25,000 per year had such a device.

Households with multiple members may need more than one device, as device access is especially challenging for households with multiple children. The Tazewell County ICC Planning Team issued a county-wide household survey to explore residents' current broadband needs. When asked about device access, 72% of respondents indicated that they had two to five devices

including tablets, laptops, or smart phones that needed to connect to the internet.[193] The need for each member of a household to have a device was also brought up in listening sessions. At an East Central listening session, a participant observed, *"If the person does not have internet [service], they may not have a device beyond their smartphone. Programs may need to provide internet access coupled with improving device access, especially if you think about households with single mothers. If you have multiple children that need devices, you need reliable internet coverage and device access to ensure adoption."*[194] One participant in the Chicago listening session noted, "*Every single child needed a device that was reliable, and then they also had to train the parents on how to use it*."[195]

Device access is critical to students, and a failing computer could be the deciding factor between finishing school or dropping out. Students—especially those with low incomes, those pursuing a GED, and English-language learners—rely on their educational institutions for internet access and devices (such as school-provided Chromebooks and other laptops).[196] A listening session participant commented, "*Students live on really thin margins. A failing computer could be the deciding factor of being able to finish the semester or dropping out. Devices are expensive, and we can't expect them to be able to buy a new one immediately."*[197] As mentioned above, some students get internet access and devices (e.g., Chromebooks, laptops) through their courses, but many community colleges do not have the resources to distribute devices to all eligible students.[198]

Beyond access to devices, in regional reports Illinois residents highlight a need for convenient means of repairing and maintaining devices. The **Champaign County Broadband Infrastructure Assessment Report** noted that computers are short-lived electronics that must be replaced every three or four years. This puts a cost burden on low-income households that must pay for not

[193] Tazewell County Broadband Planning, ICC Round 2
[194] East Central Listening Sessions, April 12-13
[195] Chicago Listening Session, April 19
[196] Virtual Listening Session, May 4
[197] Virtual Webinar, May 9
[198] Virtual Webinar, May 4

only a device, but also its maintenance.[199] The Connect Lake County Digital Equity Strategy Plan found that 11% of its survey respondents could not replace their computer if it became unusable, and 31% expected that replacing their device would take six months. In short, 42% of Lake County households would not be able to use broadband for extended periods due to computer problems rather than internet connectivity issues. Moreover, 75% of low-income survey respondents were not able to use broadband for extended periods due to computer problems.[200]

Many residents find device-lending programs helpful, but also cite challenges in programs' capacity, terms of use for the devices, and the need for digital skills programs to supplement the devices:

- The limited capacity of lending programs is often mentioned by residents. Public libraries have an insufficient number of computers or have a set amount of time in which residents may use devices.[201] One participant in the Bloomington-Normal listening session said that the local library's device-lending program includes 13 hotspots and 11 Chromebooks, but all of these devices are typically checked out due to lack of access in the area. [202]
- Programs need to match the right devices to the population that needs them. One participant in the City of Chicago Listening Session noted, "*Some people need a cell phone or tablet because they're mobile in the day with their job, while others need a desktop or laptop because they might be a student. To have continued use and learning, you have to provide the device that meets their needs; otherwise, they won't be used*." [203]
- Data collection requirements from local and state-funded programs can limit community organizations' ability to serve hard-to-reach populations. One community organization that participates in device-access and literacy programs in Chicago noted, "*We have children that*

[199] Champaign Broadband Infrastructure Engineering Assessment Report, March 2022
[200] Connect Lake County Digital Equity Strategic Plan, prepared for Connect Waukegan, April 2022
[201] East St. Louis Listening Session, March 16
[202] Bloomington-Normal Listening Session, May 16
[203] City of Chicago Listening Session, April 19

are homeless who come into our program for help, but they don't have an address to put [in]. We need to be mindful in what data we're pulling."[204]

- **Lending programs should be combined with the digital literacy training needed.** One representative from scaleLIT suggested that community organizations offering digital literacy programs connect with organizations providing device-lending programs to ensure that those receiving devices can access available training and resources.[205] The **City of Chicago Digital Equity Plan** offers four recommendations for getting devices into the hands of residents, two of which are paired with digital skill-building programming.[206]
- **Privacy concerns can make residents reluctant to use loaner devices**. A participant who receives internet service and devices from the Chicago Public Schools program noted that certain constraints—including limited hours of service and a lack of privacy—significantly inhibited the participant from conducting certain activities (e.g., online banking, viewing health records) via the library's internet service.[207]

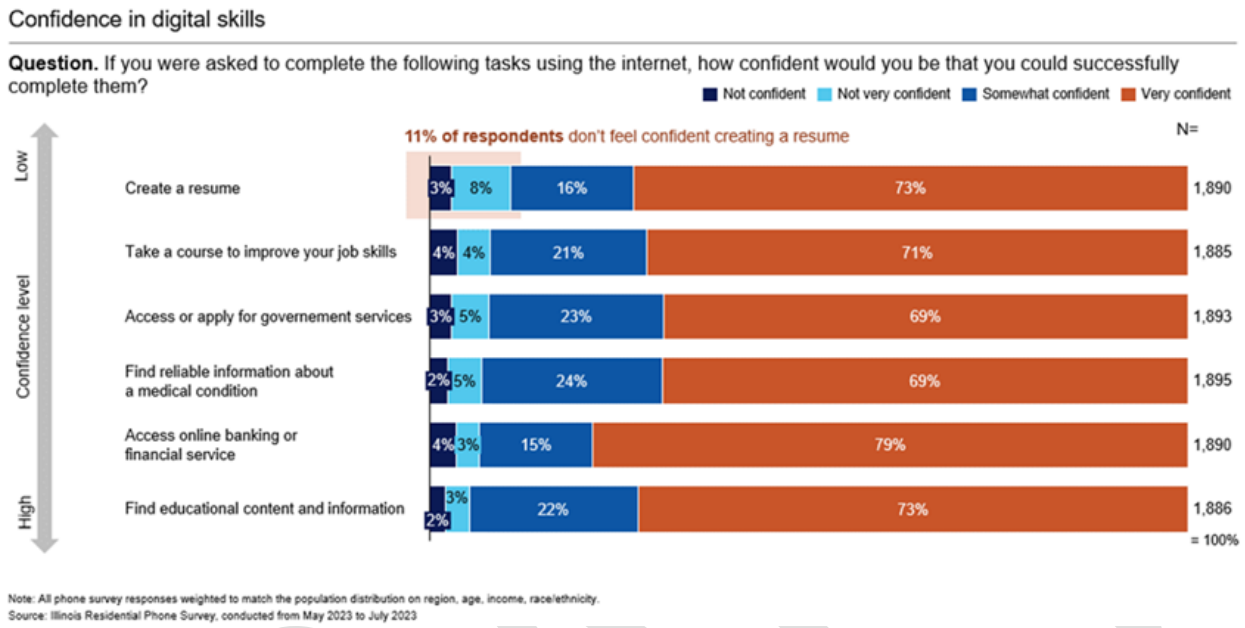
3.2.1.3 Improved digital literacy

Current state of digital literacy in Illinois

Based on the Illinois-wide internet use phone survey, at least 11% of Illinois residents (or 1.3 million residents in 0.54 million households) have low digital literacy skills, which is defined as not feeling confident about completing at least one of the surveyed basic tasks via the internet.[208] Of all the skills surveyed, residents feel least confident about creating a resumé (11% not confident) and taking a course to improve digital literacy skills (8% not confident). See **Figure 12** for more details.

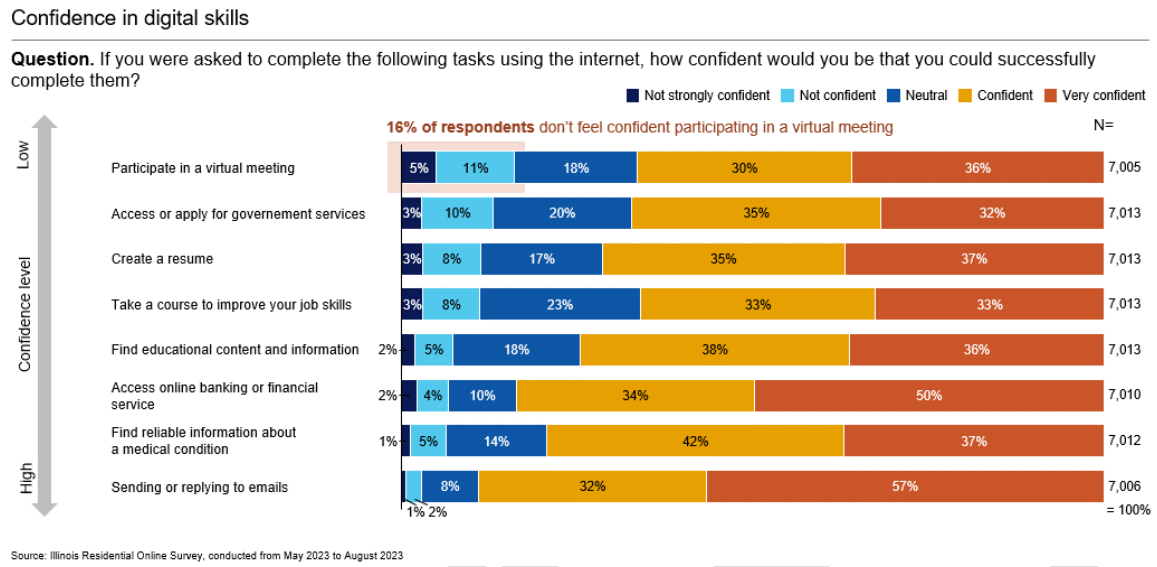
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Chicago Digital Equity Plan, January 2023
[207] City of Chicago Listening Session, May 3
[208] The survey consisted of randomly sampled respondents and was weighted to match the demographics of Illinois—accounting for region, age, income, and ethnicity. The phone survey is a representative sample, and the findings could be extrapolated to the population.

Figure 12. Digital literacy-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Phone Survey.



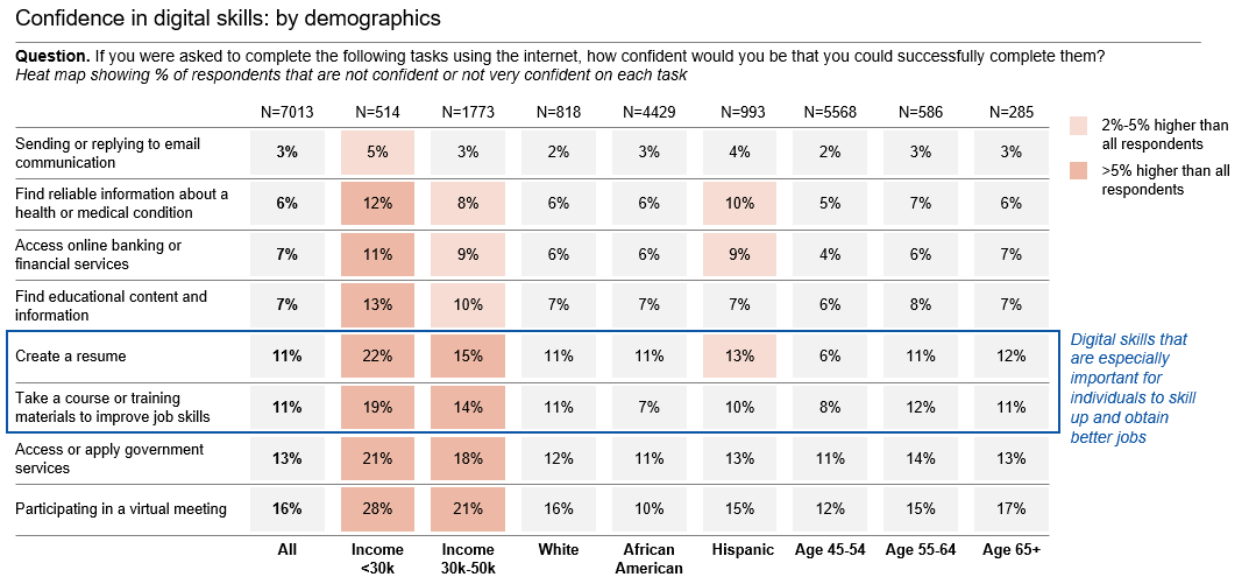
Similar findings are observed in the Illinois-wide internet use online survey. Approximately 3 to 16% of respondents reported not feeling confident about completing basic tasks on the internet. Survey respondents feel least confident about participating in a virtual meeting (16% do not feel confident), accessing or applying for government services (13%), creating a resumé (11%), and taking a course to improve job skills (11%). See Figure 13 below for more details.

Figure 13. Digital literacy-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Internet Survey.



Among demographic groups and covered populations, individuals in covered, low-income households reported the lowest level of digital literacy. Two times more individuals whose annual household income is below $30,000 reported feeling not confident about almost all tasks surveyed. Individuals whose annual household income is between $30,000 and $50,000 per year also reported feeling less confident about most tasks. **Hispanic respondents** reported feeling less confident about using the internet to access information (e.g., finding reliable information about a health or medical condition and accessing online banking or financial services.) See **Figure 14** for more details.

Figure 14. Digital literacy-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Internet Survey.



Local organizations and local governments were asked to share insights on the current state of digital literacy in their communities. When asked why the residents they serve do not have internet service at home, 73% of responding local organizations cited a lack of sufficient digital skills as a factor. When asked why the residents they serve do not effectively or productively use the internet, 82% of responding local organizations cited a lack of sufficient digital skills as a factor. See Figure 11 above for more details.

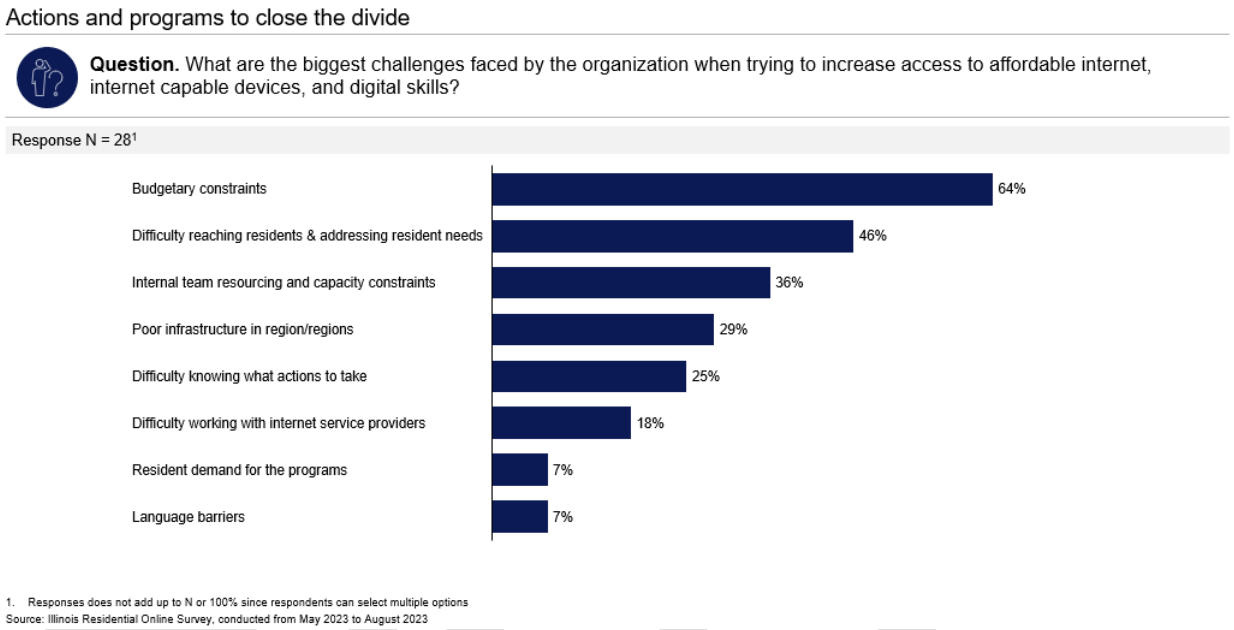
Digital literacy-related needs and barriers

The state-wide listening tour and the multiple regional and local digital equity plans developed by regional and local governments provide further insights into the digital literacy-related needs and barriers faced by residents in different regions of the state. These insights are synthesized below.

Existing digital literacy programs are frequently constrained by limitations in staff capacity and budget. As shown in Figure 15, when asked about the challenges they face in achieving their respective missions, the non-profits and CAIs surveyed said that budgetary constraint is the most

common challenge they, as 64% of participating organizations face this challenge. Internal team resourcing and capacity constraint is the third most challenge faced (cited by 36% of the participating organizations.)

Figure 15. Challenges faced by non-profits and community anchor institutions according to the state-wide survey.



The accessibility of digital literacy programs is a barrier to increasing digital literacy skills for all. Stakeholder engagement sessions with non-profits revealed that programing needs to be available in communities where residents live and to be: (1) accessible by public transportation, (2) provided in multiple languages, (3) scheduled at feasible hours for working families, and (4) offered with child-care options. An attendee at the City of Chicago listening session observed, "*Classes, call centers, tech support should be in different languages, including Spanish, but also Polish and others. The languages offered need to meet community needs; right now, they don't.*"[209]

[209] City of Chicago Listening Session, April 19

Anxiety associated with digital skill-building hinders Illinoisans from acquiring digital skills. A participant in the City of Chicago listening session mentioned that, during the pandemic, such skills became essential, but many residents were left behind. These residents now feel anxious when they consider further technological advancement. To improve digital literacy, practitioners may have to address these negative feelings, perhaps by developing curricula that cover the full range of internet-related activities, including such basics as how to turn on a personal computer or device.[210] As another participant in the City of Chicago listening session commented, *"There is importance to addressing the shame and embarrassment that goes along with not knowing these things. Working at a mental health facility, there is a lot of shame with saying you struggle with anxiety or depression. But if you aren't able to say this to others, you may not be able to access the services you need. The same goes for digital literacy."*[211]

Aging individuals would benefit from targeted digital literacy courses to improve digital skills. An attendee at the City or Arora listening session observed, "*My parents have trouble navigating online services. My mom cannot do online banking on her own because she cannot access her account, or she forgets her passwords. My parents also do not understand the importance of cybersecurity. I have to tell them they cannot use the same password for every service. Internet companies should be responsible for providing some type of basic cybersecurity protection, just like electric companies make it hard to touch hot wires."*[212] Another attendee at the North Central listening session commented, "*Some parents feel ashamed that they do not already know how to use the internet, but, like reading, it is something we all had to learn."*[213]

Training needs to go beyond simply using the internet to include essential trouble-shooting skills related to internet access. One attendee at the City of Chicago listening session noted, "*If you don't understand how to run speed tests or understand the aspects of the internet—like download and upload speeds—you can't advocate for yourself to ISPs or communicate what*

[210] Ibid.
[211] City of Chicago Listening Session, April 19
[212] City of Arora Listening Session, May 18
[213] North Central Listening Session, March 16-17

issues you have with your service." [214]Another attendee at the virtual webinar observed, "*We're fortunate to provide hotspots to some of our students. But when they had issues, they didn't have the basic knowledge (e.g., digital skills) to correct and troubleshoot."*[215] An attendee at a North Central Region listening session who represented a local organization commented, "*When we give away computers, we hear from people that they had to have their relatives come help them set the device up. We do not have anyone to go to their houses to help them set up and connect the device, which is a barrier*."[216] It has become evident that digital literacy barriers have impact even before devices are turned on; one attendee at the Northeast listening session observed that, even when devices are provided through free programs—such as the one run by Chicago Public Schools—"*a lot of people didn't know how to connect to their modems, or update the devices, or troubleshoot when they opened the wrong email, got a virus. A lot of the devices eventually became useless."*[217]

The inability to discern and navigate potential scams inhibits residents—especially elderly individuals—from using digital platforms to complete daily tasks.[218] Those who are not deterred by security concerns are often unequipped to navigate potential scams. An attendee at the Central listening session noted that not only the elderly but also students are susceptible to security issues. After providing devices to students, the participant said, "We found that support became a central challenge… iOS updates, security updates, how to evaluate phishing scams—all are a huge challenge for many families."[219]

Residents of all ages would benefit from advanced digital skills training, particularly as it relates to cybersecurity. According to listening session attendees, community-based organizations have observed that younger age groups—especially in higher education—benefit from more advanced

[214] City of Chicago Listening Session, April 19
[215] Virtual Webinar, May 9
[216]North Central Listening Session (Peoria), May 16-17
[217] City of Chicago Listening Session, May 3
[218] Northeast Listening Session, May 18
[219] Central Listening Session, April 25-26

digital skills training, particularly if it addresses cybersecurity concerns or distinguishing between credible and non-credible sources of information.[220] As the role of the internet and technologies in healthcare, education, farming, and entertainment continues to expand, listening session participants noted, tailored training can enable community members to build upon fundamental digital skills to meet increasingly complex technology needs.[221]

3.2.1.4 Increased emphasis on multi-sector strategies to broadband adoption

During the state-wide listening tour and in regional and local digital equity plans, the value of internet adoption was often noted, especially in education and healthcare. Several mentioned internet adoption as an enabler of multiple use cases in agriculture. The broadband needs related to these use cases and strategies are described below.

Broadband-related needs and barriers in agriculture

The successful implementation and economic benefits of multiple agriculture use cases depend on access to high-speed internet. Illinois State University projects that robust broadband infrastructure could increase average yields by 4% for corn and soybean acres in five participating "Broadband Breakthrough" counties: Edgar, Hancock, McLean, Ogle, and Schuyler. The increased crop yield could net a return of over $42 million per year. This impact could be extended throughout the state through comprehensive broadband deployment.[222] The **Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB)**, whose voting membership represents three of every four farmers in the state, has stated publicly that state-wide solutions are needed to encourage broadband adoption by farmers and rural communities.[223] The IFB maintains that its members want better, faster,

[220] Virtual Webinar, May 9
[221] Virtual Webinar, May 9
[222] Broadband Breakthrough: Infrastructure Planning for Rural Farming Communities
[223] "Who we are," Illinois Farm Bureau

more reliable, and more affordable broadband service, which improves economic development, education, and healthcare in rural areas.

Strong internet connectivity is needed to support evolving farm operations in rural communities. According to the Champaign County Broadband Infrastructure Engineering Assessment Report, interviews with farmers revealed that the industry uses smart machinery—mostly John Deere equipment—that relies on broadband. The farmers interviewed use fixed-wireless broadband and expressed a need for upgraded technology, as current DSL and fixed-wireless services are too slow.[224] In Broadband for All – Plan for Ogle, Lee, Boone, and Putnam Counties, strong internet connectivity was reported as an urgent need in rural communities to support evolving farm operations. Lack of robust broadband severely hampers enhanced innovations on farms.[225] Investments in broadband infrastructure have reaped a significant return for Illinois farms.

In addition to broadband infrastructure, farmers need devices to support their farm operations. A participant in the East Central listening session commented, "*From a business perspective, farmers are doing pretty well with utilizing applications on their smartphones to conduct their business operations, but it is so much easier on a laptop or computer interface.*"[226]

Providers must work with farmers and landowners on broadband installation projects to protect their property rights. [227] A Farm Bureau representative who attended the listening session in Southwest Illinois contended that internet providers should check in with farmers and landowners during broadband infrastructure installations to make sure that private property rights are not infringed upon.[228] In the East Central listening session, a resident mentioned that residents' skepticism about the land easement process is warranted due to fiber companies' previous intrusions onto private property during service installations. The resident said that

[224] Champaign County Broadband Infrastructure Assessment Report, March 2022
[225] Broadband for All – Ogle, Lee, Boone, and Putnam Counties, Accelerate Illinois Round 2
[226] East Central Listening Sessions, April 12-13
[227] IFB Weekly: Most Recent Talking Points as of 3/13/23, Illinois Farm Bureau
[228] Southwest Listening Sessions, March 15-16

county-wide oversight in the funding distribution plan could help to ensure cohesiveness and coordination in installation efforts.[229]

Broadband-related needs and barriers in education

According to the **2020 Illinois School District Technology Survey, unreliable home internet access and lack of access to devices directly affect remote and hybrid learning by disrupting the continuity of learning and preventing access to digital resources**. Survey results show that 99.3% of school districts said that students face obstacles to home connectivity, highlighting the need for any adoption solutions to involve the education sector. The main three types of barriers reported were (1) unavailable internet access (reported by 25% of districts), (2) monthly or ongoing internet expenses (32% of districts), and (3) limited bandwidth (23% of districts).

Unequal access to the internet and devices exacerbates the educational divide among covered populations. One participant in the Central region listening session commented, "*There are a number of low-income college, GED, and English language learning students who have said that they sign up to take a class every single term so that they can check out a school Chromebook or laptop that they can use for home, for work, or for other uses. Many community and four-year colleges have trouble supplying and servicing enough devices to meet all their students' needs*."[230] In an East Central listening session, a participant noted that applications for financial scholarships at community colleges are frequently online, making them inaccessible to some students. The same participant had a friend who had to visit a restaurant parking lot daily to complete a master's program due to lack of internet service at home.[231]

Repeatedly during listening sessions, residents shared experiences of having to travel to parking lots to complete homework and coursework at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. During COVID-19, some schools in southern Illinois have tried to turn buses into static connectivity

[229] East Central Listening Sessions, April 12-13
[230] Webinar, May 9
[231] East Central Listening Sessions, April 12-13

centers, a Southeast listening session participant said, but the effort has seen little success due to reliability issues.[232] To obtain the internet access needed for their schoolwork, many students had to travel to public parking lots with Wi-Fi service, which raises safety concerns. [233]

Broadband-related needs and barriers in healthcare

Healthcare services are becoming increasingly digital, but without broadband access residents cannot take advantage of them. An East Central listening session participant commented, "*Many things are digitally based, such as virtual healthcare. Many rural residents are unable to access these services.*"[234] A Bond County resident shared with the Bond County Broadband Initiative that they had a parent with diabetic equipment that depended on internet connectivity—which their unreliable internet service made challenging.[235] In the **Knox County Broadband Plan**, a resident shared, "*We had to up the amount of data due to the amount of devices we have, and it slows down the speed and reliability greatly on a daily basis. We have medical devices hooked to it as well, and I don't like that it's not reliable.*"[236]

Reliable internet access is essential to the operation of hospitals. Hospitals need a reliable and low-latency connection for telehealth visits and to outsource specialties, remotely diagnose and treat patients, and promote the use of digital health devices, all of which have become increasingly important since the advent of COVID-19. In Southwest Illinois, a listening session participant noted that even hospital systems in the region pay two internet providers to ensure access when one provider's service goes out.[237]

[232] Southeast Listening Sessions, March 22
[233] Southwest Listening Sessions on March 15-16
[234] East Central Listening Sessions, April 12-13
[235] Bond County Broadband Initiative, Accelerate Illinois Round 2
[236] Knox County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois Round 1
[237] Southwest Listening Sessions, March 15-16

3.2.2 Broadband affordability

3.2.2.1 Affordable Connectivity Program: Increased financial assistance for low-income consumers

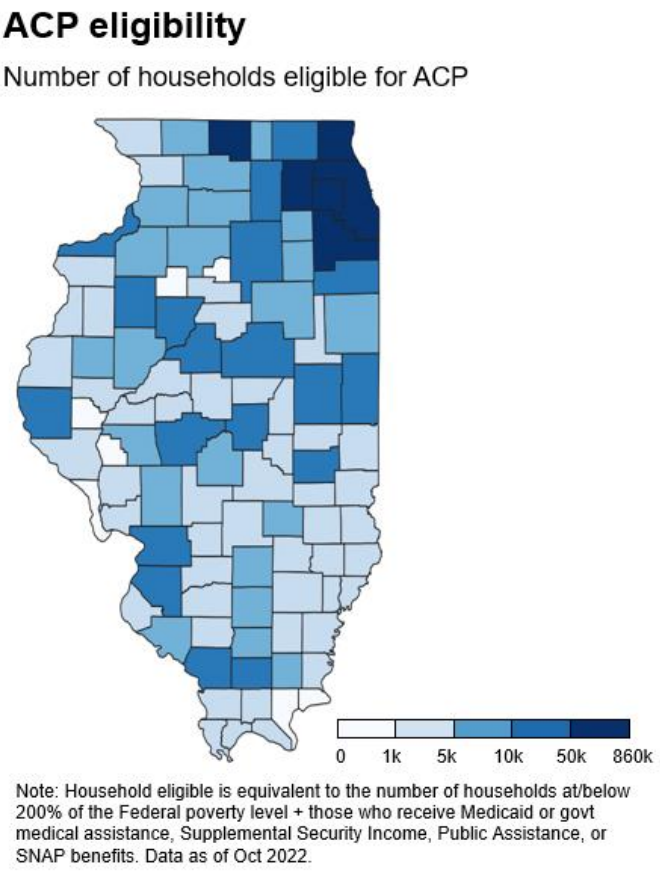
ACP-eligible population in Illinois

Based on the methodology a professor at USC Annenberg described in Estimating participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), 1.9 million eligible households in Illinois (49% of all households in the state) could enroll in ACP.[238,239] Counties with the largest ACP-eligible population are concentrated in the Northeast region of the state; the top five include: Cook County (863,000 eligible), DuPage County (77,000 eligible), Lake County (72,000 eligible), Will County (58,000 eligible), and Winnebago County (57,000 eligible). See Figure 16 below for information on all counties.

Southern regions of the state have a higher share of population that is eligible for ACP. The top five counties in the state with the highest share of ACP-eligible population—Alexander County (69% eligible), Jackson County (63% eligible), Pulaski County (58% eligible), White County (58% eligible), and Saline County (57% eligible)—are all located in Illinois' Southern region.

[238] Methodology from Estimating participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), October 2022; "Households eligible" figures are equivalent to the number of households at or below 200% of the Federal poverty level, plus those who receive Medicaid or government medical assistance, Supplemental Security Income, public assistance, or SNAP benefits.
[239] U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates

Figure 16. Number of households eligible for ACP by county.



Current ACP adoption in Illinois

As of September 1, 2023, 621,000 households, or 33% of eligible Illinois households, were enrolled in ACP, ranking Illinois 23rd in ACP enrollment among all 50 states.[240,241,242] The enrollment rate is highest in the Southwestern region of the state (with 55% of the eligible population enrolled), followed by the Northeast region (33%) and Central region (32%). The enrollment rate is lowest in the West Central region (with 23% of the eligible population

[240] Calculated based on data from USAC ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker, September 2023, and methodology from Estimating participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), October 2022
[241] Institute for Local Self-Reliance's ACP dashboard
[242] USAC ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker, September 2023

enrolled), followed by the Northwest region (25%) and the East Central region (26%). See the full breakdown by region in Table 8 below.

Table 8. ACP eligibility and enrolment rate by region. Data as of September 2023.[243]

Region	# of households	# of eligible households	% households eligible	# of households enrolled	% eligible households enrolled
Northeast	3,320,187	1,198,874	36%	393,412	33%
Southwestern	268,583	101,790	38%	55,904	55%
North Central	259,549	104,322	40%	29,341	28%
Central	219,765	92,344	42%	29,682	32%
Northwest	201,108	83,919	42%	20,845	25%
Northern Stateline	174,161	81,589	47%	26,154	32%
Southern	148,152	78,179	53%	24,567	31%
East Central	142,814	70,537	49%	18,314	26%
Southeastern	109,612	50,500	46%	14,107	28%
West Central	86,324	40,115	46%	9,335	23%
TOTAL	4,930,255	1,902,169	39%	621,661	33%

When the size of the eligible population and the enrollment rate are combined, **roughly 1.3 million households in Illinois are eligible but have not enrolled in ACP.** Most of this population is concentrated in the Northeast region (with 805,000 households eligible but not enrolled), followed by the North Central region (74,000) and Northwest region (63,000). At the county level, Cook County has the highest number of eligible-but-not-enrolled population (554,000),

[243] Calculated based on data from USAC ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker, September 2023, and methodology from Estimating participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), October 2022

followed by DuPage County (61,000), Lake County (54,000), Kane County (44,000), Will County (40,000), Winnebago County (37,000), and Champaign County (32,000).[244,245]

Current ACP availability in Illinois

To assess the availability of ACP programs, the state sampled the top 10 state-wide and top 10 regional providers to see if they offer ACP on their websites. The sampling shows that only three of the 20 providers do not offer ACP on their websites. These three providers combined have a market share of less than 1%, suggesting that the low adoption rate of ACP is not caused by lack of provider offerings.[246] See **Figure 17** below for more details.

Figure 17. Breakdown showing whether ACP is offered by one of the top-10 providers, whether state-wide or regional, in Illinois.[247]

Top state-wide providers (serving five or more regions)

Provider	Share[1]	ACP	Price[2]
T-Mobile US	26.1%	✓	$50
Xfinity	18.0%	✓	$30
AT&T Inc	16.4%	✓	$60 – 70
VERIZON	9.4%	✓	$50
RCN	6.1%	✓	$30
US Cellular	5.8%	✓	N/A
FRONTIER	3.7%	✓	$55 – 60
Mediacom	2.5%	✓	$30 – 50
Charter Communications Inc	1.7%	✓	$30 – 50
Rise Broadband	1.0%	✓	$80
Sparklight	0.8%	✓	$65
W A T C H TV	0.7%	✓	$120

Top regional providers (serving four or fewer regions)

Provider	Share[1]	ACP	Price[2]
Metronet Holdings	2.2%	✓	$40
i3 Broadband	0.7%	✓	$40
Royell Communications, Inc	0.4%	✗	$55
Cass Cable TV Inc	0.3%	✓	$75
Surf Internet	0.3%	✓	$55
IllinoisNet.com	0.2%	✗	$89
Harrisonville Telephone Company	0.2%	✓	N/A
Adams TelSystems Inc.	0.2%	✓	$75
Wabash Communications	0.2%	✓	$76
Mid Century Telephone Cooperative	0.2%	✓	N/A
DNA Communications	0.1%	✗	$100
Campus Communications Group	0.1%	✓	$70

1. Share defined as number of locations provider offers internet divided by all provider offerings in the state.
2. Full price for 100Mbps based on provider website checks. N/A indicates either provider does not offer 100Mbps or full price is not available on website. Range indicates different prices are offered in different locations checked.

Source: Provider share and region categorization based on FCC Data Map, March 2023. Price and ACP categorization based on provider website check in April 2023.

[244] Calculated based on data from USAC ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker, December 2022, and methodology from Estimating participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), October 2022

[245] USAC ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker, December 2023

[246] Market share defined as number of specific provider offerings divided by all provider offerings in the state. Data based on FCC National Broadband Map, accessed March 2023.

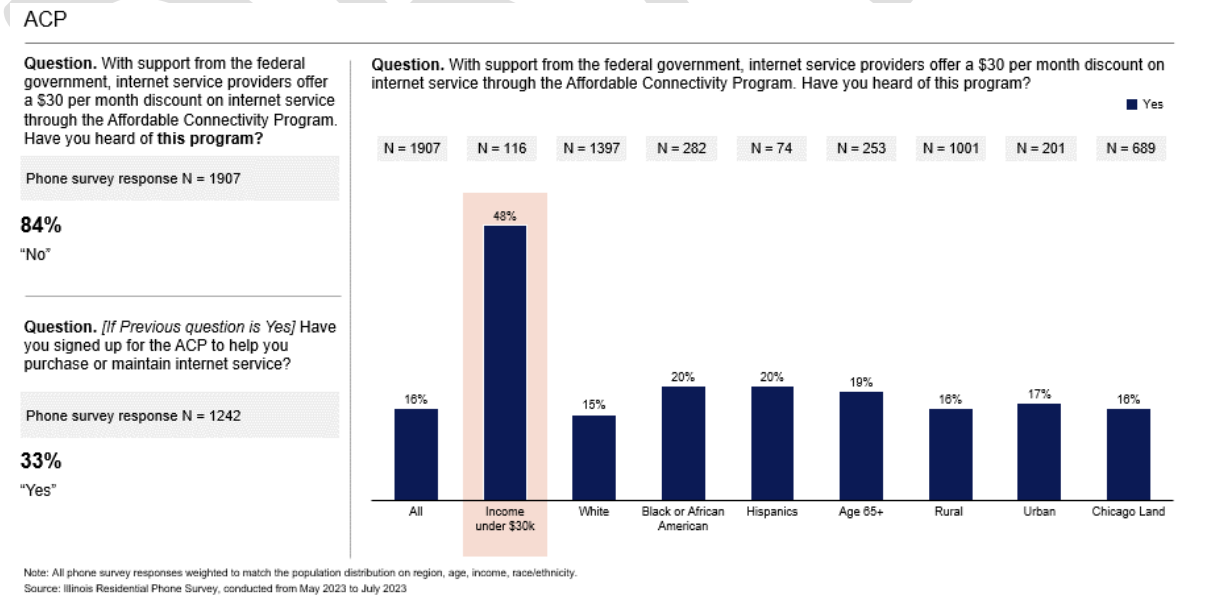
[247] For each provider, their offerings' share is indicated based on the total number of state providers' offerings in Illinois. The full price breakdown for 100 Mbps service is also included, based on the price available on the provider's website. Green checks indicate that ACP is offered.

ACP awareness

In the state-wide resident phone survey, respondents were asked if they had heard of the ACP program. Only 16% of respondents answered that they had. Awareness is higher among low-income individuals (48%), suggesting that prior outreach efforts may have succeeded in reaching the target population of ACP, but there is still room for improvement.

Of the 16% who are aware of the ACP program in the state-wide survey, 33% indicated that they have signed up for the ACP program, 45% indicated that they did not meet the qualification guidelines, 10% indicated that they were unable to show that they qualify, 7% noted that they already receive free internet services, 4% stated that it is too difficult to sign up, and the remaining 1% said that they do not need internet services. The survey data highlights the importance of programs that increase awareness of ACP among targeted demographic groups, as well as programs that assist individuals in signing up for ACP. In both the phone and online surveys, libraries, schools, and non-profits are rated as the most trustworthy source of information about benefit programs. See details of the survey data in **Figure 18** below.

Figure 18. ACP-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Phone Survey.



Similar themes on ACP awareness emerged in regional and state plans for digital equity and/or broadband and in the listening sessions. About 77% of survey respondents were not aware of any internet service subsidy program in Whiteside County, according to the **Whiteside County Broadband Plan**.[248] During listening sessions, the state observed that few participants had heard of the ACP. At one of the sessions in Southwest Illinois, only three participants indicated previous knowledge of the program.[249] One attendee at the Central region listening session observed, "*Providers need to share more. They have programs, which provide smaller devices and cheaper forms of service, but they don't do a good job of reaching the entire community. Advertising is often just for existing customers*."[250]

Other needs and barriers in ACP enrollment

The state-wide survey results showed that many residents feel mistrust and hesitancy toward government-sponsored subsidies, which inhibits ACP enrollment and subsequently broadband adoption. In the state-wide resident survey, local governments are rated as the least trustworthy source of information about benefit programs. (See **Figure 19** below for more details.) Similar sentiments were expressed in multiple listening sessions in the East Central, Northeast, and West Central regions. One participant in the City of Chicago listening session commented, "*Lots of people don't sign up because they are concerned about revealing their immigration status, even though that won't happen with us. I have to reassure them many times or show them that another family got internet access without any problems."*[251] The same issue was brought up by another participant in the same listening session: "*People don't trust programs from the government—and they have reasons not to. People need to know exactly what they will be getting, and what for. The messaging being clear and direct is a first place to start.*" [252]

[248] Whiteside County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois Round 1

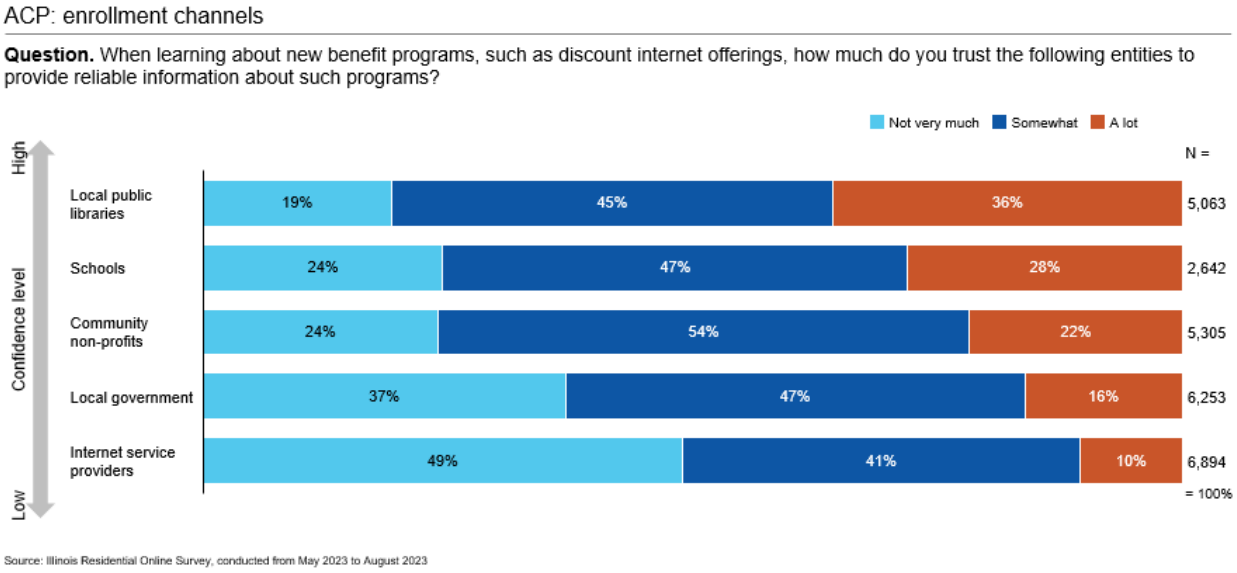
[249] Southwest Listening Sessions, March 15-16

[250] Central Listening Session, April 26

[251] City of Chicago Listening Session, May 3

[252] City of Chicago Listening Session, May 3

Figure 19. ACP-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Web Survey.



Lack of robust and accessible communication emerged as another reason for low ACP adoption. Community organizations cited a need for more resources (e.g., staff, print materials) that account for language, generational, and cultural differences in communities. Listening session attendees reiterated that ACP programs should include robust, accessible customer support functions. ACP participants reported receiving unclear, inconsistent information about internet plans, subsidies, equipment needs, and customer support services. Residents emphasized that many internet services supported by ACP subsidies go unused because information about accessible support is not clearly communicated.[253] A City of Chicago resident noted that the language used in ACP outreach might alienate residents: "*When you start a conversation with, 'Hey, you need this,' they can shut down because the message might seem patronizing.*"[254]

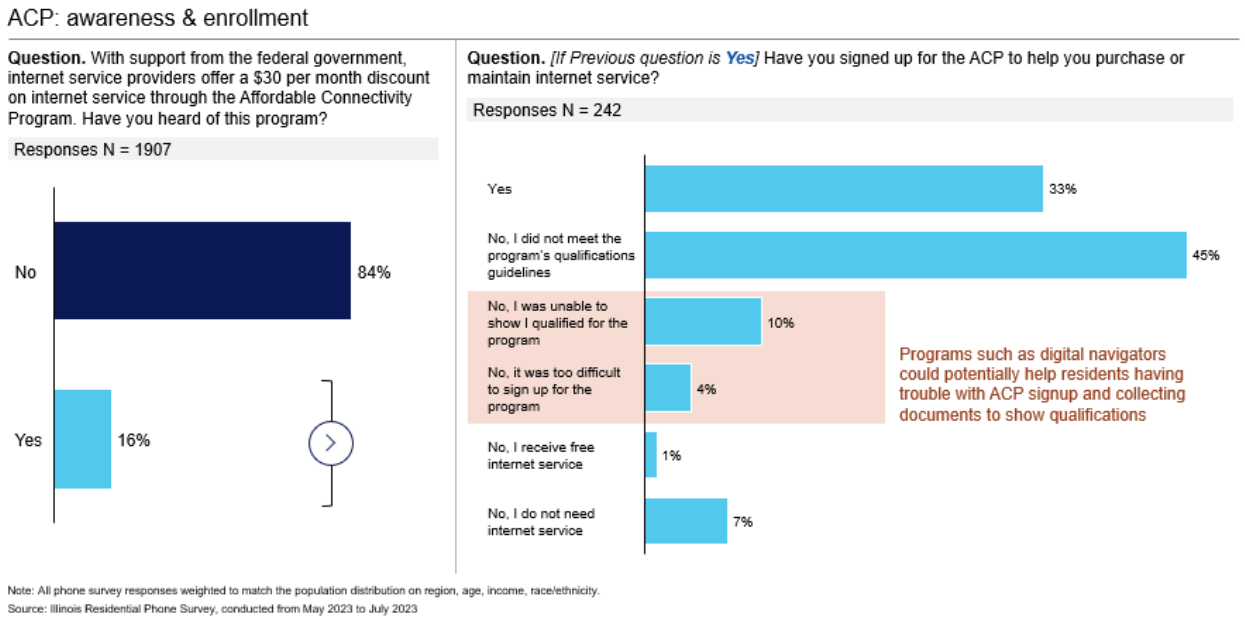
Based on survey results in the **Connect Lake County Digital Equity Plan, residents who need ACP the most may not have the necessary documentation or digital skills to enroll in ACP**. The plan points out that residents without Social Security numbers typically require four to six hours of

[253] City of Chicago Listening Session, May 10

[254] City of Chicago Listening Session, May 3

support per enrollment. Likewise, ACP enrollment requires applicants to upload their documents and manage emails—digital literacy skills that not all residents have.[255] Residents experienced difficulties in showing qualifications and signing up for ACP. In the state-wide resident survey, 10% of respondents who have heard about ACP were unable to show qualifications for the program, and another 4% indicated that it was too difficult to sign up. (See Figure 20 below for more details.)

Figure 20. ACP-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Web Survey.



Subsidies from ACP may not go far in areas where the average price of internet service is much higher. As a Northeast listening session attendee noted, the subsidy may help people connect to the internet, but "*the ACP does not go very far if your internet bill is $300 per month*."[256] North Central participants reiterated this position, noting that families with multiple children who need

[255] Connect Lake County Digital Equity Strategic Plan, Prepared for Connect Waukegan, April 2022
[256] Northeast Listening Session, May 18

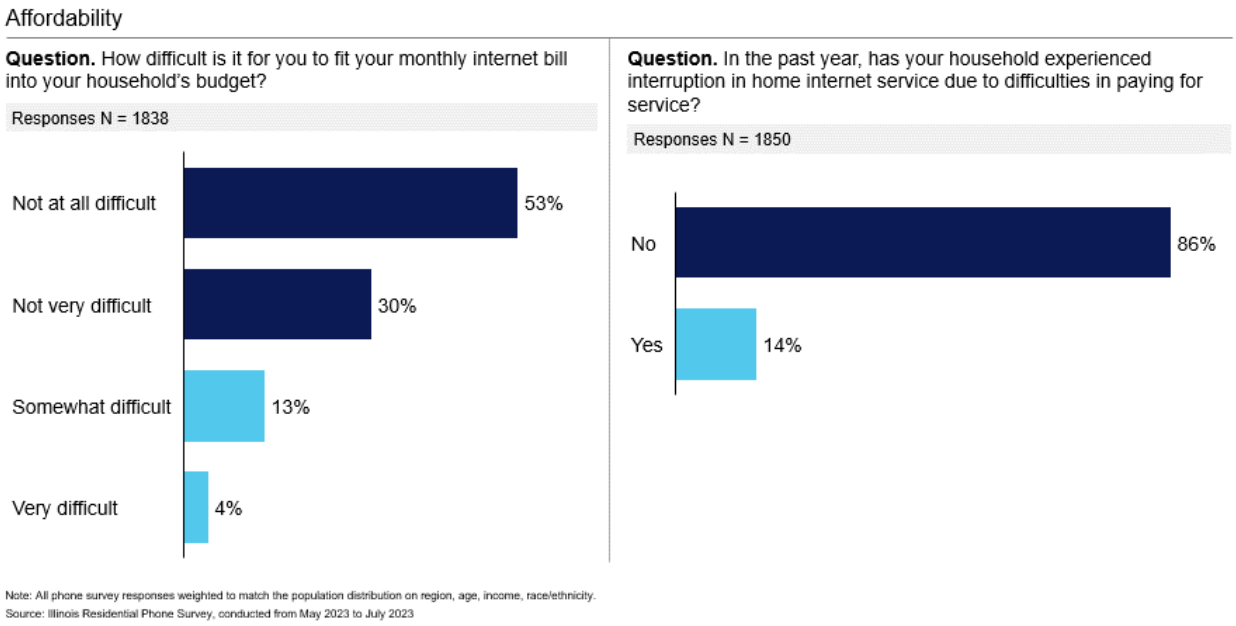
multiple devices usually require plans that will cost more than the $30 ACP subsidy. Even with PCs for People programs, an internet subscription may still be out of reach for these families.[257]

3.2.2.2 Increased financial assistance for low-income consumers

Need of financial assistance

In the state-wide resident phone survey, 17% of respondents said they found it difficult to afford their internet bill, and 14% experienced disrupted service because they had difficulty paying. About 29% were categorized as "subscription-vulnerable" due to affordability concerns and/or difficulties in paying. (See details in **Figure 21**.)

Figure 21. Affordability-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Phone Survey.



The need for financial assistance is much higher for low-income individuals. Individuals with an annual household income under $30,000 have a much harder time paying for internet services; 67% of surveyed individuals in this group find it difficult to pay for service, versus 17% of the

[257] North Central Listening Session, May 16-17

general population. They are 15% more likely to experience service interruption due to difficulty in paying, and 40% more likely to be subscription vulnerable. (See **Figure 22**, **Figure 23**, and **Figure 24** for a survey breakdown by covered population.)

Figure 22. Affordability-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Phone Survey.

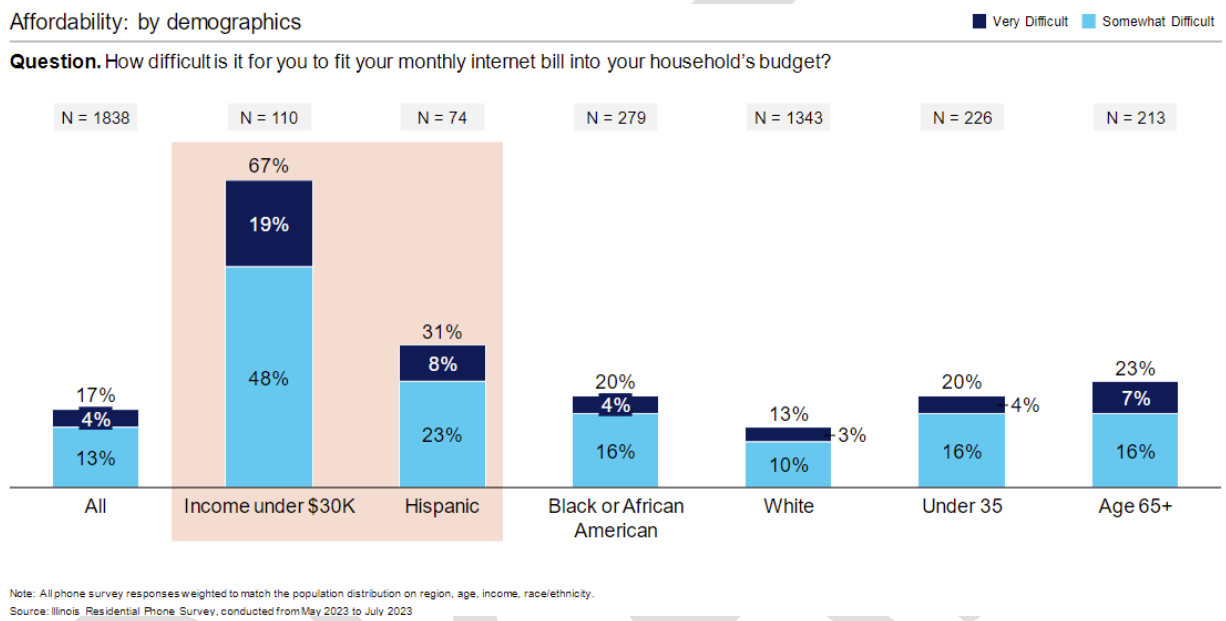


Figure 23. Affordability-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Phone Survey.

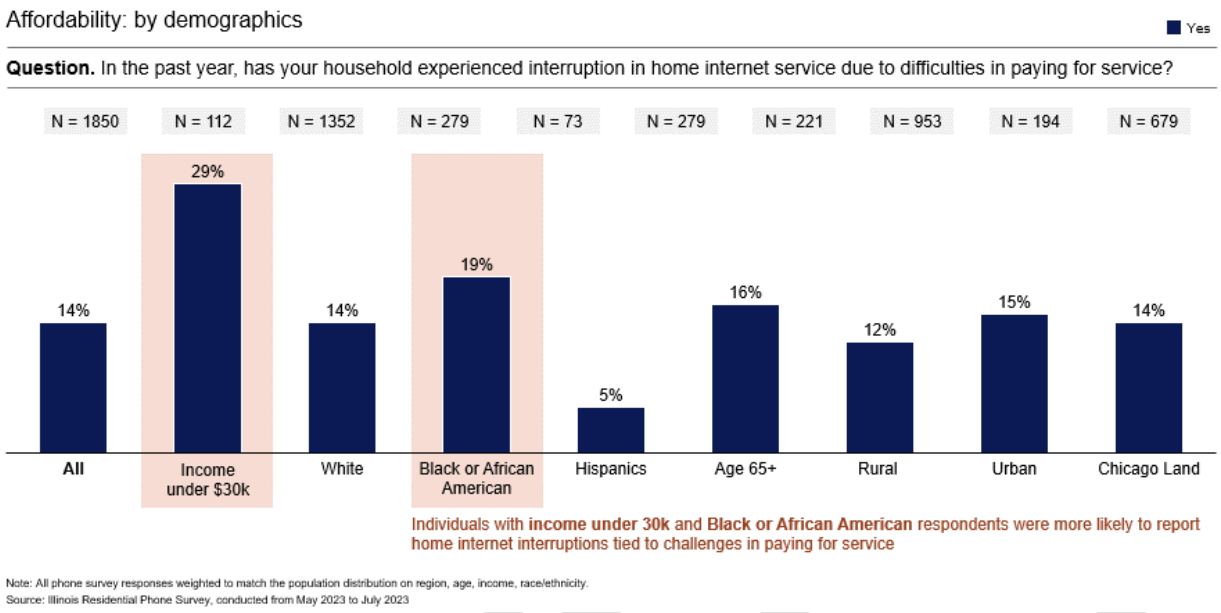
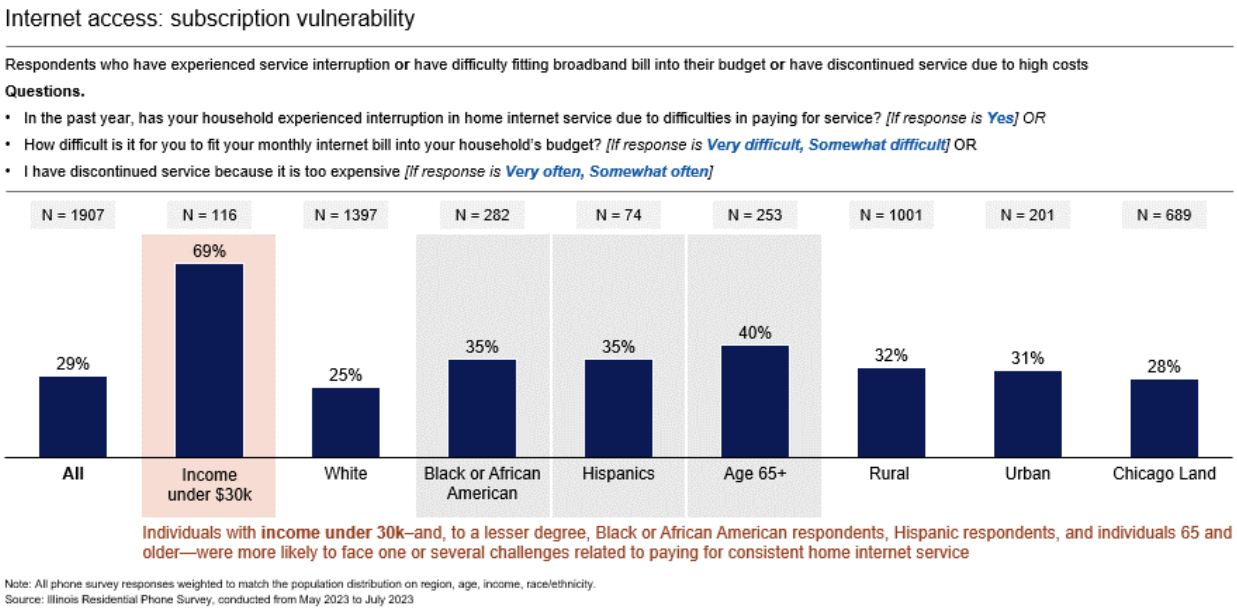


Figure 24. Affordability-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Phone Survey.



Other programs and digital equity plans likewise noted the need for assistance programs for low-income consumers.

- The Connect Waukegan Broadband Assessment completed by what is now known as the Connect Lake County Taskforce noted that no active public-private partnerships are working with internet service providers on broadband assistance programs for low income or at-risk households.[258]
- The City of Chicago Digital Equity Plan noted that, while 21% of respondents with incomes under $20,000 aim to get a job, and 21% are interested in starting a business, nearly 20% do not have internet service at home to pursue these professional goals.[259]
- The County Digital Equity Action Plan found that community members with cost concerns face several facets of digital inequity, as affordability barriers prevent people from buying internet subscriptions, buying an adequate computing device, or paying for tech training or tech support services if no free programs are offered in their area.[260]

The feedback received during the listening sessions indicated the need to provide more assistance to low-income consumers. Across all regions, a lack of affordable internet options—especially for low-income households—was cited as one of the main barriers to internet adoption. A participant in the Joliet Listening Session noted, "*Internet is expensive, but it is something that is needed. However, a lot of people are living off a limited income and [internet services] are not affordable for them*."[261]

[258] Connect Waukegan
[259] Chicago Digital Equity Plan, January 2023
[260] Cook County Digital Equity Action Plan, October 2023
[261] Joliet Listening Session, May 31

Programs to provide financial assistance to low-income individuals

Several publicly funded broadband initiatives have launched across Illinois over the past decade. The IOB hopes that implementing the IL BEAD Plan will facilitate the deployment of affordable, high-speed, and high-quality wireline or wireless networks.[262] The Illinois General Assembly considered HB3275, the Illinois Low Income Broadband Assistance Program Act, in 2021-2022. The bill would have required the DCEO to establish an Illinois Low-Income Broadband Assistance Program to ensure that low-income families can access remote learning and work platforms through available, affordable broadband service.[263] This piece of legislation did not take effect but indicates that legislators recognize a need for additional low-cost options for low-income families in Illinois.

Moving forward, the state plans to continue promoting the ACP program by using its ACP Outreach Grant. The FCC awarded seven Affordable Connectivity Outreach Grants to applicants across Illinois in March 2023. Through the DCEO's IOB, the state secured $700,000 in ACP Outreach Grants from the FCC and plans to use this money to facilitate the ACP enrollment of an additional 150,000 households from 102 counties over two years. This plan will be executed through a competitive subgrantee program.[264]

In addition to the IOB, six more entities—including the City of Chicago and City of Waukegan—have received funding awards from the competitive national outreach program. These funds represent 3.1% of all ACP outreach grants made through the program. In total, 197 grants were awarded across all 50 states.[265] These awards indicate widespread interest in ACP outreach and suggest that the state can expect substantial forthcoming support for low-income consumers.

Many local governments have launched or plan to launch additional programs to aid low-income individuals:

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[262] Universal Broadband in Illinois: Studying the Costs of Providing Free and Affordable Service for All Residents, December 2020
[263] Bill Status of HB3275
[264] Adapted from the DCEO's ACP Outreach Grant Application
[265] FCC Announces $66M in Affordable Broadband Outreach Grants, March 2023

- According to the City of Chicago's Digital Equity Plan, Chicago will conduct a coordinated, citywide campaign to increase ACP sign-ups among eligible populations. Community organizations and government institutions will serve as bases for the program. The City of Chicago also plans to work with the Chicago Housing Authority to support enrollment in the Affordable Connectivity Program through funding received from the FCC Affordable Connectivity Program Grants.[266]
- The READY Cohort in the North Central region plans to enlist and train local library staff and non-profit stakeholders to help library patrons sign up for the ACP, according to the North Central Region Broadband READY Report.[267]
- Kids First Chicago's Defeating the Digital Divide Report identified four factors prohibiting ACP adoption: (1) limited awareness of the program, (2) a lack of clarity about the offerings and processes, (3) mistrust in the available services, and (4) structural limitations. The report recommends that staff be trained to address these factors, as community-based organizations (CBOs) have served in the past as critical navigators for eligible families. These organizations can raise awareness about the program, answer questions about the sign-up process, share details about the program's robust consumer protections, and help serve as advocates if any service issues arise between families and ISPs. The report also notes a need for budgetary support for CBOs so they can hire and train staff to lead community conversations about the root causes of low ACP adoption rates.[268]
- The Connect Lake County's Digital Equity Strategy Plan states that Lake County residents have previously faced challenges enrolling in the ACP due to language barriers or a lack of digital navigators to assist them. This finding indicates a need for enrollment assistance that a digital navigator can directly provide. Lake County plans to deploy more digital navigators to

[266] City of Chicago Digital Equity Plan, January 2023
[267] North Central Region Broadband READY Report, Bloomington Normal EDC
[268] Defeating the Digital Divide: How Chicago Can Achieve True Digital Equity, Kids First Chicago

support outreach and enrollment efforts in communities and overcome the difficulties posed by complex applications.[269]

3.2.2.3 Increased options for broadband services, including a wider range of low-cost services

Current broadband pricing in Illinois

The IOB conducted a state-wide analysis to learn more about the affordability of broadband subscriptions in Illinois. Using provider data from the March 2023 FCC National Broadband Map, the office identified providers offering broadband subscriptions in Illinois. For each combination of providers, technologies, and speeds, the office randomly sampled 10 locations for price checks on provider websites. Combining the price data with availability data from the FCC, the IOB established a preliminary understanding of prices for internet service with advertised download speeds of 100Mbps+ (**Figure 25**) and 25Mbps+ (**Figure 26**).

[269] Connect Lake County Digital Equity Strategic Plan, Prepared for Connect Waukegan, April 2022

Figure 25. Broadband subscription prices for download speeds of 100+ Mbps.

DATA AS OF 03/21/2023

Region	% of BSLs	Price of internet for advertised download speed of 100Mbps+			
		Less than $25	From $25-50	More than $50	Not Available
Northeast	56%	0%	97%	1%	2%
Northern Stateline	4%	0%	82%	7%	11%
Northwest	6%	0%	38%	39%	22%
North Central	6%	0%	59%	27%	14%
East Central	3%	0%	51%	39%	11%
Central	6%	0%	53%	31%	16%
West Central	3%	0%	45%	36%	18%
Southeast	3%	0%	12%	60%	28%
Southern	5%	0%	11%	61%	29%
Southwest	7%	0%	74%	13%	13%
Total	**100%**	**0%**	**77%**	**15%**	**9%**

Source: Provider distribution based on FCC Data Maps, accessed Mar 21, 2023. Internet price based on desk research.

In aggregate, residents must pay at $25 to $50 per month for download speeds of 100 Mbps in most of the state. Nowhere in the state were residents able to access 100Mbps internet service for less than $25; 77% of state residents have access to 100Mbps internet service for less than $50, 15% of residents pay more than $50 for 100Mbps service, and 9% do not have access to 100Mbps internet service at all—the unserved and underserved locations of the state. There are significant disparities among different regions in Illinois: The Northeast region, home to 56% of the population in the state, offers the most affordable internet service. Regions where internet prices are the highest include the Southern region (where only 11% have access to 100Mbps internet service for less than $50), the Southeast region (12%), the Northwest region (38%), and the West Central region (45%).

In some but not all regions of the state, residents can choose to subscribe to a lower-cost plan that offers 25 Mbps download speeds. **Figure 26** below documents the price distribution of

internet plans with download speeds of 25Mbps. Compared to the price of 100Mbps internet service, 25Mbps internet service is more affordable on average. Sixty-seven percent of state residents have access to 25Mbps internet service for less than $25 per month—a cost that could be reduced to nothing with the assistance of programs like the ACP. Eighty-five percent of residents have access to 25Mbps service for less than $50, and only 10% of residents have to pay more than $50 for such services. However, some regions of the state do not have access to such affordable plans: almost no residents in the state's three southern regions (Southeast, Southern, and Southwest regions) can access 25Mbps internet service for less than $25. Almost half of the residents in the Southeast and Southern regions must pay more than $50 for 25Mbps.

Figure 26. Broadband subscription prices for download speeds of 25+ Mbps.

DATA AS OF 03/21/2023

Region	% of BSLs	Price of internet for advertised download speed of 25Mbps+			
		Less than $25	From $25-50	More than $50	Not Available
Northeast	56%	94%	4%	1%	1%
Northern Stateline	4%	72%	25%	1%	2%
Northwest	6%	23%	57%	14%	6%
North Central	6%	56%	25%	14%	6%
East Central	3%	47%	13%	32%	8%
Central	6%	46%	21%	25%	8%
West Central	3%	43%	45%	7%	6%
Southeast	3%	0%	27%	49%	24%
Southern	5%	2%	18%	56%	24%
Southwest	7%	0%	81%	10%	9%
Total	**100%**	**67%**	**18%**	**10%**	**5%**

Source: Provider distribution based on FCC Data Maps, accessed Mar 21, 2023. Internet price based on desk research.

Similar concerns about subscription prices were frequently mentioned in the listening sessions conducted in the state's Southern regions. In Southeast Illinois, listening session participants

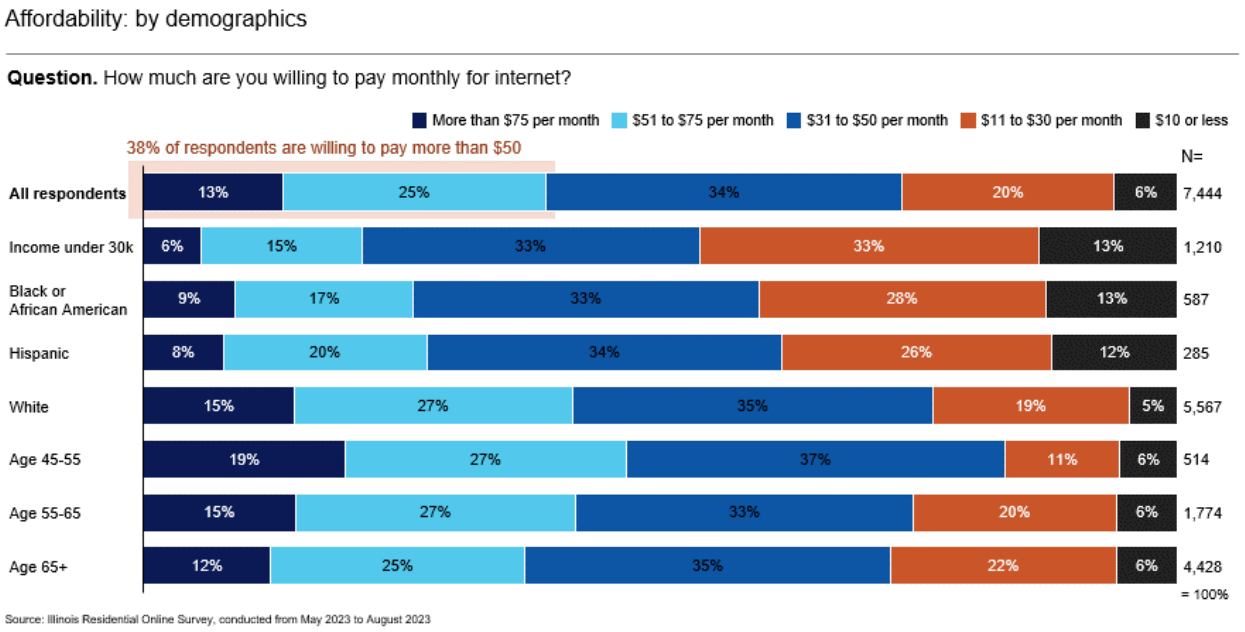
reported paying between $90 and $200 a month for service.[270] In Southern Illinois, one resident pays $500 for both satellite and phone services. Another resident pays over $300 for speeds under 100 Mbps.[271] In Southwest Illinois, residents said they had to pay over $100 for monthly service, in addition to paying hundreds of dollars for installation.[272] Another participant in the same region noted that internet costs vary by neighborhood, forcing residents to frequently negotiate their internet rates back down to their original prices.[273]

Illinois residents' willingness to pay for internet service

When asked about their willingness to pay, **38% of respondents to the state-wide survey about internet use reported that they are willing to pay more than $50 per month**, while 34% are willing to pay between $31 to $50, and $26% are willing to pay $30 or less. The gap between internet prices and residents' willingness to pay—that is, 32% of state residents lack access to 100Mbps internet for less than $50, while 62% are willing to pay more than $50—demonstrates the extent of the affordability gap in Illinois.[274] The affordability gap is more pronounced for certain covered populations: only 21% of individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000, 26% of Black or African American individuals, and 28% of Hispanic individuals are willing to pay more than $50 for 100Mbps service.

[270] Southeast Listening Sessions, March 22
[271] Southern Listening Sessions, March 1-2
[272] Southwest Listening Session, March 15-16
[273] Ibid.
[274] See estimation in previous paragraphs and **Figure 25** and **Figure 26** for more details.

Figure 27. Affordability-related questions asked and results from the Illinois Residential Online Survey.



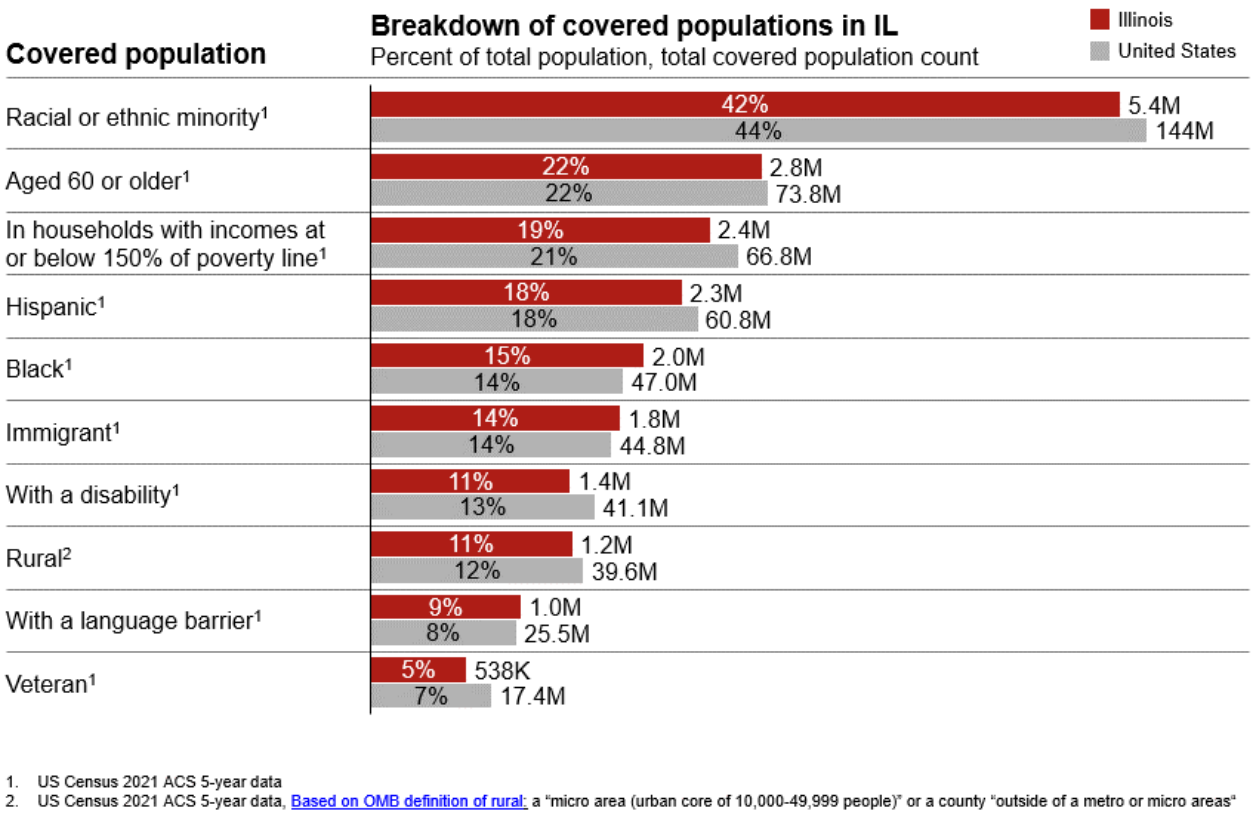
3.2.3 Covered population needs assessment

3.2.3.1 Overview of the size of the Illinois covered populations

According to the Digital Equity Act's "Population Viewer," 9.9 million of Illinois' 12.6 million residents (78.2%) are members of a covered population.[275] Households in racial or ethnic minorities, individuals over 60 years old, and individuals in households with incomes below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are the largest covered populations in Illinois.[276] See **Figure 28** for the full breakdown of covered populations in Illinois relative to the US population.

[275] Digital Equity Act Population View, U.S. Census Bureau
[276] US Census 2021, ACS 5-Year data

Figure 28. Covered populations in Illinois compared to the national average.



1. US Census 2021 ACS 5-year data
2. US Census 2021 ACS 5-year data, Based on OMB definition of rural: a "micro area (urban core of 10,000-49,999 people)" or a county "outside of a metro or micro areas"

Figure 29 below summarizes each region's share of covered populations. As shown, the following regions have the highest percentage of each covered population:

- Income of less than 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (individuals living in covered households): 24% and 26% of residents in the East Central and Southern regions, respectively, have incomes below the FPL.
- Aging individuals: 28% and 27% of residents in the Northwest and West Central regions, respectively, are aging individuals.
- Veterans: 8% of residents in the Southwest region are veterans.
- Individual with disabilities: 19% of residents in the Southern region are individuals with disabilities.

- **Individuals with low English literacy:** 42% of residents in the Northeast region have low English literacy.
- **Racial and ethnic minorities:** 56% and 30% of the Northeast region and the Northern Stateline region, respectively, represent racial or ethnic minorities.
- **Immigrants:** 19% of residents in the Northeast region are immigrants.
- **Individuals in rural communities:** 100% and 67% of residents in the Southeast and Southern regions, respectively, live in rural communities.

Figure 29. Share of covered populations by region.

Share of each covered population as a proportion of total regional population

Top 2 highest proportions | Above population median | Below population median

	Income less 150% of FPL	Aging ind. (60+)	Veterans	Ind. with disabili-ties	Ind. with low English literacy	Black or African American	Hispanic	Immi-grants	Rural
Northeast	18%	21%	3%	10%	**42%**	**16%**	**24%**	**19%**	0%
Northern Stateline	23%	25%	6%	14%	**15%**	10%	**14%**	**8%**	10%
Northwest	20%	**28%**	6%	14%	10%	5%	10%	4%	36%
North Central	20%	24%	5%	12%	6%	8%	4%	4%	24%
East Central	**24%**	22%	5%	11%	15%	11%	7%	**8%**	22%
Central	21%	26%	6%	14%	4%	9%	3%	2%	44%
West Central	23%	**27%**	6%	15%	4%	5%	4%	2%	46%
Southeast	22%	26%	6%	**16%**	4%	3%	2%	1%	**100%**
Southern	**26%**	26%	**7%**	**19%**	5%	6%	3%	2%	**67%**
Southwest	18%	24%	**8%**	14%	4%	**15%**	4%	2%	23%
Illinois average	**19%**	**22%**	**4%**	**11%**	**31%**	**14%**	**18%**	**14%**	**11%**

Covered populations excluded: Justice-impacted individuals, LGBQT+ individuals, and women
Source: US Census 2021 ACS 5-Year

The following was observed for the covered populations where county-level data was available[277]:

- Hispanic. Individuals who identify as Hispanic, regardless of race, make up more than 20% of the population in six counties: Kane, Cook, Lake, Kendall (in Northeast Illinois), Boones (in Northern Stateline), and Cass (in Central Illinois).
- African American or Black. Individuals who identify as Black or African American alone make up more than 20% of the population in five counties: Alexander and Pulaski (in Southern Illinois), Cook (in Northeast Illinois), St. Clair (in Southwest Illinois), and Peoria (in North Central Illinois).
- Immigrants or foreign-born individuals. In four counties—Cook, DuPage, Lake, and Kane (in Northeast Illinois)—immigrants make up more than 17% of the population.
- Individuals with a language barrier or individuals who do not speak English "very well." In three counties—Cook, Kane (in Northeast Illinois), and Cass (in Central Illinois)—more than 10% of the population has a language barrier.
- Individuals over 60. In 15 counties—Hardin, Pope, Gallatin, Pulaski (in Southern Illinois), Henderson, Hancock, Schuyler (in West Central Illinois), Jo Daviess, Putnam, Carroll (in Northwest Illinois), Calhoun (in Southwest Illinois), Stephenson (in Northern Stateline), Shelby (in Central Illinois), Marshall (in North Central Illinois), and Edgar (in Southeast Illinois)—more than 30% of the population is above 60 years of age.
- Individuals with a disability or civilian non-institutionalized individuals with a disability. In 12 counties—Hardin, Pulaski, Gallatin, Alexander, Perry, Massac, Franklin, Wabash (in Southern Illinois), McLean (in North Central Illinois), McHenry (in Northeast Illinois), McDonough (in West Central Illinois), and Calhoun (in Southwest Illinois)—more than 20% of the population has a disability.

[277] US Census 2021 ACS 5-Year

- **Individuals with incomes 150% below the FPL.** In 18 counties—Alexander, Jackson, Pulaski, Franklin, White, Pope, Perry, Union, Gallatin, Wayne, Wabash (in Southern Illinois), Coles, Fayette, Clay (in Southeast Illinois), Vermilion, Champaign (in East Central Illinois), Know (in West Central Illinois), and Winnebago (in Northern Stateline)—more than 25% of the population has income below 150% of the FPL.
- **Veterans.** In ten counties—Pope, Pulaski, Wabash (in Southern Illinois), St. Clair, Calhoun (in Southwest Illinois), Menard, Greene (in Central Illinois), Carroll (in Northwest Illinois), Henderson (in West Central), and Marshall (in North Central Illinois)—veterans make up more than 10% of the population.
- **Rural.** Sixty-two of Illinois' 102 counties are considered to be rural, with 100% of Southeast Illinois counties, 67% of Southern Illinois counties, 46% of West Central counties, and 44% of Central Illinois counties falling under the U.S. Office of Budget Management's (OMB) definition of "rural."[278]

3.2.3.2 Broadband adoption and device access by covered population

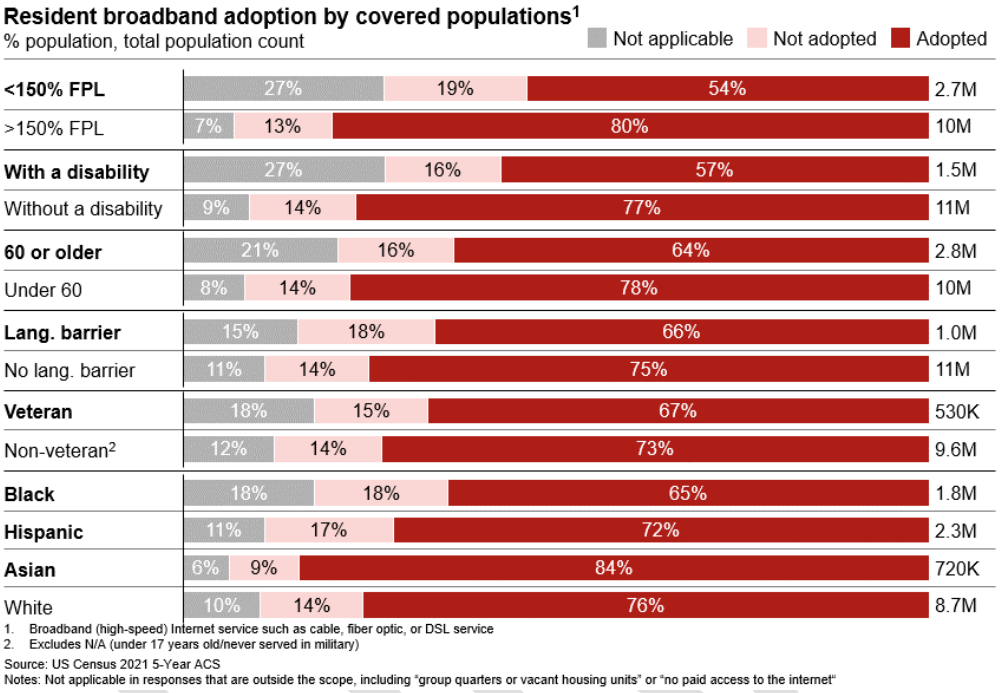
Broadband adoption

Using ACS data, the state compared the broadband adoption rate for each covered population with the state average. **Covered populations tend to have lower rates of broadband adoption than populations that are not covered**. The adoption gap is largest between individuals with household income below and above 150% of the federal poverty line (a 26pp difference), followed by individuals with and without a disability (a 20pp difference), individuals older and younger than 60 years of age (a 14pp difference), individuals with and without a language barrier (a 9pp difference), and veterans and non-veterans (a 6pp difference). When looking at race,

[278] The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) designates counties as "Metropolitan," "Micropolitan," or "Neither." A metro area has a core urban area of 50,000 or more in population, and a micro area has an urban core of at least 10,000 (but less than 50,000) in population. All counties that are not part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) are considered rural, according to Defining Rural Population, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (Data source: Core-based statistical areas (CBSAs), metropolitan divisions, and combined statistical areas (CSAs), March. 2020.)

broadband adoption rates among Black or African American (65%) and Hispanic populations (72%) are lower than that of the White population (76%). Interestingly, Asian populations had the highest adoption rate among the racial groups (84%). Full details on covered populations' adoption rates are shown in Figure 30 below.

Figure 30. Adoption rates among covered populations in Illinois, according to ACS 2021 5-year estimates.

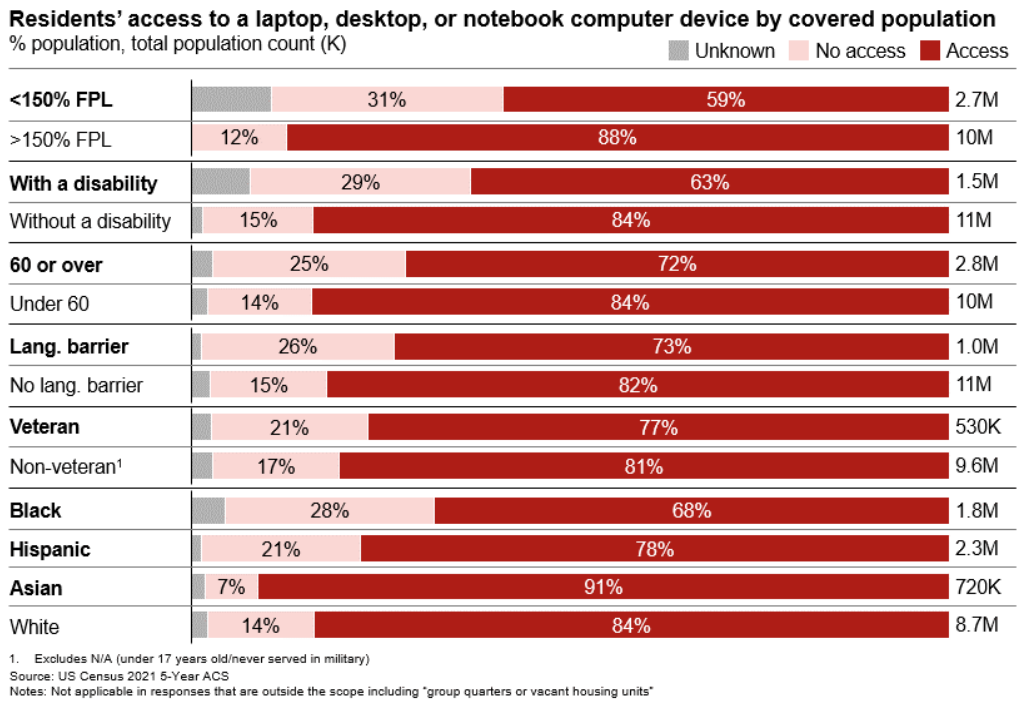


Device access

Most covered populations have lower device-access rates than populations that are not covered. The largest device access gap is observed between individuals with household incomes below and above 150% of the federal poverty line (FPL) (a 29pp difference), followed by individuals with and without a disability (a 21pp difference), individuals older and younger than 60 years oof age (a 12pp difference), individuals with and without a language barrier (a 9pp differences), and veterans and non-veterans (a 4pp difference). When looking at race, the device-access rates among Black or African American (68%) and Hispanic populations (78%) are lower than that of the White population (84%). Asian populations have the highest device-access rate among the

racial groups (91%). Full details on covered populations' device-access rates are shown in Figure 31 below.

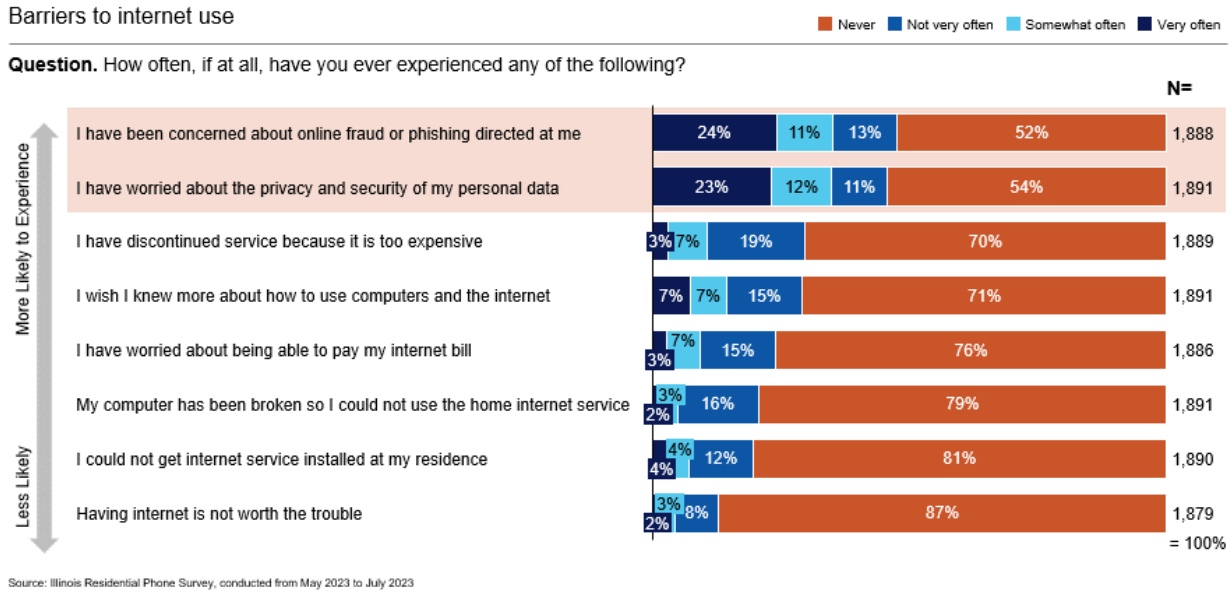
Figure 31. Device access rates among covered populations in Illinois, according to ACS 2021 5-year estimates.



3.2.3.3 Barriers to digital equity faced by covered populations

In the state-wide residential phone survey of internet use, participants were asked how often they encounter barriers to internet use. In aggregate, respondents are most worried about online fraud or phishing (with 35% "somewhat often" or "very often" worried), and the privacy and security of their personal data (35%). Respondents sometimes worry about lacking digital skills (14%), affordability (10%), and price (10%). Respondents are least worried about infrastructure availability (8%), broken devices (5%), and the value of internet service (5%). See Figure 32 below for more details.

Figure 32. Questions asked about barriers to internet use results from the Illinois Residential Phone Survey.



The survey's results are broken down by covered population to better understand the barriers facing each.[279] **Low-income respondents** indicated that they face greater barriers to internet use in all tested experiences; these respondents reported above-average likelihood to experience all of the barriers measured. They are three times more likely to worry about broken devices and the inability to pay, and they are twice as likely to worry about lacking digital skills. **Aging individuals** are almost twice as likely to worry about online fraud, phishing, privacy, and the security of their personal data. This group is also twice as likely to worry about how to use the computer and the internet. Affordability is a worry for the **African American** population; 5% more individuals in this group experienced discontinued services due to price. **Individuals in rural areas** are 10% more likely to be concerned about online fraud, phishing, privacy, and the security of their personal data. They also have more trouble getting internet services installed in their residences (3% more likely), more likely to discontinue services due to affordability concerns (2%

[279] Cut by the following covered populations are not included due to insufficient responses: veterans, individuals with disabilities, and justice impacted individuals.

more likely), and more likely to worry about digital skills (3% more likely.) See the full breakdown by covered population in **Figure 33** below.

Figure 33. Questions asked about barriers to internet use and results from the Illinois Residential Phone Survey.

Barrier to internet use

Question. How often, if at all, have you ever experienced any of the following? [1]
Percent answering "Very Often" or "Somewhat Often"

2%-4% higher than all respondents | 5%-9% higher than all respondents | >10% higher than all respondents

	N=1880	N=115	N=238	N=1385	N=277	N=72	N=372	N=295	N=251	N=989
Having internet is not worth the trouble	5%	12%	4%	4%	4%	0%	2%	3%	8%	4%
I could not get internet service installed at my residence	8%	12%	8%	6%	5%	6%	4%	12%	8%	11%
My computer has been broken so I could not use the home internet service	5%	14%	6%	4%	5%	2%	4%	6%	5%	4%
I have worried about being able to pay my internet bill	10%	32%	9%	8%	11%	10%	8%	10%	10%	11%
I have discontinued service because it is too expensive	10%	26%	10%	10%	15%	5%	7%	10%	16%	12%
I wish I knew more about how to use computers and the internet	14%	35%	9%	13%	11%	13%	7%	18%	28%	17%
I have been concerned about online fraud or phishing directed at me	35%	40%	20%	39%	27%	19%	25%	51%	54%	42%
I have worried about the privacy and security of my personal data	35%	40%	16%	39%	26%	18%	28%	52%	50%	41%
	All	Income <30k	Income 30k-50k	White	African American	Hispanic	Age 45-54	Age 55-64	Age 65+	Rural

1. Across sub questions, N varies by at least 1-3 respondents. The minimum N has been displayed on the page.

Source: Illinois Residential Phone Survey, conducted from May 2023 to July 2023

3.2.3.4 Summary of findings by covered population

In this section we consolidate all insights related to covered populations' needs and the barriers they face. These comprehensive insights consider all survey results, feedback from state-wide listening tours, and information included in regional and local digital equity plans and programs. While some insights may be repeated, this subsection provides readers with a full overview of all information related to each covered populations in one location.

Black/African American Illinoisans

Covered population: Black/African Americans		
Demographic information (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
Size of covered population	2.0 million	
Counties with high share (20%+) of covered population	Alexander and Pulaski (Southern Illinois), Cook (Northeast Illinois), St. Clair (Southwest Illinois), and Peoria (North Central Illinois)	
Digital equity baseline data (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
	Covered population only	State-wide
Broadband adoption	65%	72%
Device access	68%	79%
Needs and barriers assessment		
More likely to experience a disruption in broadband access due to affordability challenges. The state-wide survey showed that Black/African Americans are 5% more likely than the average Illinoisan to experience service interruptions due to difficulties in paying for service. Less willing to pay for internet service. The state-wide survey showed that Black/African Americans are 12% less willing than the average Illinoisan to pay more than $50 monthly for internet service. More likely to be subscription vulnerable. The state-wide survey showed that Black/African Americans are 6% more likely than the average Illinoisan to be "subscription vulnerable" (i.e., to have experienced service interruption due to difficulty in paying for it, have found it hard to fit a monthly internet bill into the household budget, or have discontinued service because it was too expensive). Lower telemedicine use rates. **The Disputing Disparities Report** published by the AARP Illinois noted that telemedicine use rates are lower for African American or Black Medicaid beneficiaries compared to White beneficiaries.[280]		

[280] Disrupt Disparities: Challenges and Solutions for 50+ Illinoisans of Color, AARP Illinois, 2020

Region-specific insights captured in listening sessions and local government digital equity plans

Local government digital equity plans

The **Chicago Digital Equity Plan** notes that black communities have low broadband adoption rates compared to other race and age demographics.[281]

Listening session feedback

Less reliable infrastructure in poor Black and Brown neighborhoods

A City of Chicago listening session participant mentioned that black and brown communities in particular are adversely affected by inadequate internet reliability and infrastructure, noting disparity in broadband connection and customer support: "*Internet infrastructure is a major barrier that I've been complaining about for over 10 years. The provider skipped 83rd-87th street when expanding their infrastructure and will never provide an answer as to why. No one on those blocks can get reliable, affordable service, but people outside of those blocks can*."[282]

A City of Chicago listening session attendee expressed a similar sentiment on the disparity of services: "*Oftentimes it is the poor Black and Brown neighborhoods and communities that do not have access to internet. I do not know if it is deliberate, but to have specific areas that have different infrastructure and coverage does not seem accidental*."[283]

A state-wide virtual listening session participant noted that "*We have absolutely no high-speed internet. That area is predominantly Black, and because it's a poorer area, providers don't want to invest in the infrastructure there. There is no option for internet there*."[284]

[281] Chicago Digital Equity Plan, 2023

[282] City of Chicago Listening Session, May 10

[283] Ibid.

[284] State-wide Virtual Listening Session, May 09

Hispanic Illinoisans

Covered population: Hispanics		
Demographic information (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
Size of covered population	2.3 million	
Counties with high share (20%+) of covered population	Kane, Cook, Lake, Kendall (Northeast Illinois), Boones (Northern Stateline), and Cass (Central Illinois).	
Digital equity baseline data (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
	Covered population only	State-wide
Broadband adoption	72%	72%
Device access	78%	79%
Needs and barriers assessment		
More likely to encounter difficulties in paying for internet service. The state-wide survey showed that Hispanics are 14% more likely than the average Illinoisan to find it difficult to fit the monthly internet bill into their household budget. Less willing to pay for internet service. The state-wide survey showed that Hispanics are 10% less willing to pay more than $50 monthly for internet service than the average Illinoisan. More likely to be subscription vulnerable. The state-wide survey showed that Hispanics are 6% more likely than the average Illinoisan to be subscription-vulnerable (i.e., to have experienced service interruptions due to difficulty in paying for the service, have found it difficult to fit a monthly internet bill into their household budget, or have discontinued service because it was too expensive). Less confident about some tasks related to the internet. The state-wide survey showed that Hispanics are 4% more likely to lack confidence about finding reliable information about a health or medical condition via the internet. They are also 2% more likely to lack confidence about accessing online banking or financial services, and 2% more likely to lack confidence about creating a resumé online than the average Illinoisan.		

Region-specific insights captured in listening sessions and local government digital equity plans

Listening session feedback

Less reliable infrastructure in poor Black and Brown neighborhoods

A City of Chicago listening session participant mentioned that black and brown communities in particular are adversely affected by inadequate internet reliability and infrastructure, noting disparity in broadband connection and customer support: "*Internet infrastructure is a major barrier that I've been complaining about for over 10 years. The provider skipped 83rd-87th street when expanding their infrastructure and will never provide an answer as to why. No one on those blocks can get reliable, affordable service, but people outside of those blocks can*."[285]

A City of Chicago listening session resident expressed similar sentiments on the disparity of services: "*Oftentimes it is the poor Black and Brown neighborhoods and communities that do not have access to internet. I do not know if it is deliberate, but to have specific areas that have different infrastructure and coverage does not seem accidental*."[286]

Language as a barrier in digital literacy skills development

A representative from a local organization in Chicago noted that Hispanics who speak only Spanish need digital ESL classes, devices, and more awareness of existing digital literacy programming and services.[287]

[285] City of Chicago Listening Session, May 10

[286] Ibid.

[287] City of Chicago Listening Session, April 19

Aging Illinoisans

Covered population: Aging individuals		
Demographic information (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
Size of covered population	2.8 million[288]	
Counties with high share (30%+) of covered population	Hardin, Pope, Gallatin, Pulaski (Southern Illinois), Henderson, Hancock, Schuyler (West Central Illinois), Jo Daviess, Putnam, Carroll (Northwest Illinois), Calhoun (Southwest Illinois), Stephenson (Northern Stateline), Shelby (Central Illinois), Marshall (North Central Illinois), and Edgar (Southeast Illinois)	
Digital equity baseline data (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
	Covered population only	State-wide
Broadband adoption	64%	72%
Device access	72%	79%
Needs and barriers assessment		
Less likely to be satisfied with the quality of their internet connection. The state-wide survey showed that individuals above age 65 are 8% more likely than the average Illinoisan to be dissatisfied with the quality of their internet connection, especially for carrying out important online tasks. More likely to need additional computing devices. The state-wide survey showed that individuals above age 65 are 7% more likely than the average Illinois to need additional computing devices so that each person in their household can connect to the internet. More likely to be subscription vulnerable. The state-wide survey revealed that individuals above age 65 are 11% more likely than the average Illinoisan to be subscription-vulnerable (i.e., to have experienced service interruptions due to difficulty in paying for the service, have found it difficult to fit a monthly internet bill into their household budget, or have discontinued service because it was too expensive). More likely to believe that having internet is not worth the trouble. The state-wide survey showed that individuals above age 65 are 3% more likely than the average Illinoisan to believe that having internet is "not worth the trouble." More likely to worry about digital skills. The state-wide survey showed that individuals above age 65 are 14% more likely than the average Illinoisan to worry about how to use computers and the internet.		

[288] Individuals aged 60 or older

More likely to worry about online security. The state-wide survey indicated that individuals above age 65 are 19% more likely to be concerned about online fraud and phishing and 15% more likely to worry about privacy and the security of their personal data than the average Illinoisan.

Stronger need for digital literacy to support overall well-being. The Disputing Disparities Report published by the AARP Illinois noted that Internet use supports the well-being of older adults by connecting them to health services and information, improving their interpersonal connections, and increasing their independence. Broadband adoption among older adults is especially important as government and health services move to online platforms.[289]

Region-specific insights captured in listening sessions and local government digital equity plans

Listening session feedback

Online security is a major barrier to internet use by aging individuals.

A Joliet listening session participant noted that their organization primarily supports people 55 years of age and older and that "*scams are the biggest digital issue that people come to us for*."[290]

A state-wide listening session participant reported that local, older individuals do not understand technology and do not want to get involved in it, noting, "*They are scared by it. They're scared about the viruses.*"[291]

Aging individuals are overlooked in digital literacy skills development.

A representative of a community-based organization in the City of Chicago said that aging individuals are often the heads of their households but are overlooked in efforts to build digital skills. They face a mix of barriers, including low incomes, lack of digital literacy, and not recognizing the need for computers and the internet.

Deficiency in digital skills adversely affects other aspects of life.

A Centralia listening session participant noted that older residents have trouble completing applications for state-based programs because they are "*unable to complete the photo upload process due to a lack of digital comfortability.*"[292]

[289] Disrupt Disparities: Challenges and Solutions for 50+ Illinoisans of Color, AARP Illinois, 2020
[290] Juliet Listening Session, May 31
[291] State-wide Virtual Listening Session, May 09
[292] Centralia Listening Session, March 15

Low-income Illinoisans

Covered population: Low-income individuals		
Demographic information (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
Size of covered population	2.4 million[293]	
Counties with high share (25%+) of covered population	Alexander, Jackson, Pulaski, Franklin, White, Pope, Perry, Union, Gallatin, Wayne, Wabash (Southern Illinois), Coles, Fayette, Clay (Southeast Illinois), Vermilion, Champaign (East Central Illinois), Know (West Central Illinois), and Winnebago (Northern Stateline)	
Digital equity baseline data (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
	Covered population only	State-wide
Broadband adoption	54%	72%
Device access	59%	79%
Needs and barriers assessment		
Less likely to be satisfied with the quality of their internet connection. The state-wide survey showed that individuals with annual household income under $30,000 are 34% more likely than the average Illinoisan to be dissatisfied with the quality of their internet connection, especially for carrying out important online tasks. More likely to need additional computing devices. The state-wide survey revealed that individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000 are 5% more likely than the average Illinoisan to need additional computing devices to allow each person in their household to connect to the internet. They are also 9% more likely than the average Illinoisan to worry about broken computers. More likely to have difficulty paying for internet service. The state-wide survey showed that individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000 are 50% more likely than the average Illinoisan to find it difficult to fit a monthly internet bill into their household budget. More likely to experience a disruption in broadband access due to affordability issues. The state-wide survey indicated that individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000 are 15% more likely than the average Illinoisan to experience service interruptions due to difficulties in paying for internet service. Less willing to pay for internet service. The state-wide survey showed that individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000 are 17% less willing to pay more than $50 monthly for internet service than the average Illinoisan.		

[293] Individuals in households with incomes at or below 150% of the federal poverty line (FPL)

More likely to be subscription vulnerable. The state-wide survey revealed that individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000 are 40% more likely than the average Illinoisan to be subscription-vulnerable (i.e., to have experienced service interruptions due to difficulty in paying for the service, have found it difficult to fit a monthly internet bill into their household budget, or have discontinued service because it was too expensive).

Less confident about all tasks related to the internet. The state-wide survey showed that individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000 are 2% more likely to lack confidence about sending or replying to email communications, 6% more likely to lack confidence about finding reliable information online about a health or medical condition, 4% more likely to lack confidence about accessing online banking or financial services, 4% more likely to lack confidence about finding educational content and information online, 11% more likely to lack confidence about creating a resumé online, 8% more likely to lack confidence about taking a course or using training materials online to improve their job skills, 8% more likely to lack confidence about accessing or applying for government services online, and 12% more likely to lack confidence about participating in a virtual meeting than the average Illinoisan.

More likely to believe that having internet service is not worth the trouble. The state-wide survey showed that individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000 are 7% more likely than the average Illinoisan to believe that having internet service is "not worth the trouble."

More likely to have trouble getting internet services installed. The state-wide survey showed that individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000 are 4% more likely than the average Illinoisan to experience trouble getting internet services installed at their residence.

More likely to worry about digital skills. The state-wide survey indicated that individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000 are 21% more likely than the average Illinoisan to worry about how to use computers and the internet.

More likely to worry about online security. The state-wide survey showed that individuals with annual household incomes under $30,000 are 5% more likely to be concerned about online fraud and phishing and 5% more likely to worry about privacy and the security of their personal data than the average Illinoisan.

Region-specific insights captured in listening sessions and local government digital equity plans

Local government digital equity plans

The **Chicago Digital Equity Plan's** citywide survey found that nearly half of respondents without a device at home have an annual income below $20,000, and nearly 20% of households with income below $20,000 lack home internet service, compared to 3% of households with incomes between $74,000 and $99,000.[294]

The **Connect Lake County Digital Equity Strategy Plan** notes that device access in Lake County has a clear equity divide, as 98% of survey respondents with an annual income of over $50,000 had a personal computing device, while only 70% of households with an annual income of less than $25,000 per year had a personal

[294] Chicago Digital Equity Plan, 2023

computing device. The survey also found that 75% of low-income respondents were not able to use broadband service for extended periods due to computer problems.[295]

The Connect Lake County Digital Equity Strategic Plan found that residents in households making less than $50,000 annually are more likely to use libraries or other public buildings to access the internet at least daily, weekly, or monthly.[296]

Listening session feedback

Lack of interest in broadband service is disproportionately prevalent among low-income households.

A past participant from an Illinois Care Connect (ICC) cohort observed, *"There is a low value placed on the internet in low-income households based upon their traditionally poor experience in the past—slow speed, poor device, little tech support, and low digital literacy—so when you ask residents if home internet is important to them, they often say 'not really,' because it does not add value in their daily life. They do not know what they are missing."*[297]

A Bloomington-Normal listening session participant shared, "*We have neighbors that are afraid of the internet and technology. Either they cannot handle it or do not want to handle it, and that is a major barrier. They are on a tight income and what limited amount of funds they do have, they do not want to risk the chance of getting scammed through their technology. This type of broadband meeting or the broadband survey may not even interest them because they do not want to learn about technology. Everything they are hearing on the news and around them is painting technology in a negative light*"[298]

Lack of affordable options puts internet service completely out of reach for low-income households.

A Ullin listening session participant observed that residents have to pay $100 to get their names on a list for installation, wait a year to get the proper equipment (and pay $500 to do so), and then pay a $120 monthly fee, noting, "*For low-income homes and kids, I don't see how they would be able to afford that. Good, affordable service is not out there yet."*[299]

Another Ullin listening session participant shared similar feedback: "*When you look at the income of these citizens, there is no way they can pay. Sometimes with our satellite and phones it is $500 a month, and for some people down here, that is a house payment."* [300]

A representative of an affordable housing organization in Chicago commented, "*Affordability is always a big issue. An $80-100 monthly bill is a barrier for most people in the community. It needs to be free."*[301]

Financial assistance from ACP is not sufficient to offset high costs.

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[295] Connect Lake County Digital Equity Strategic Plan, Prepared for Connect Waukegan April 2022
[296] Ibid.
[297] "What Have We Learned?" End of Program Evaluation, Illinois Connected Communities Round 2
[298] Bloomington-Normal Listening Session, May 16
[299] Ullin Listening Session, March 1
[300] Ibid.
[301] City of Chicago Listening Session, April 19

A Macomb listening session participant observed that the $30 ACP credit is usually not enough for the families she supports. For the plans they need, they are quoted a monthly amount that they cannot commit to, even with the $30 discount.[302]

Provider competition or participation in low-income areas is lacking.

A Macomb listening session participant shared, "*There is a clear distinction of where the competition for providers stops in the community. Those in the more affluent areas have three provider options; others in affordable housing only have one option, and it is not reliable*."[303]

A Southwest region listening session participant said, "Some providers in Southwest Illinois have declined requests to expand their services into Washington Park, an impoverished area. Perhaps they lacked the financial incentive to do so."[304]

[302] Macomb Listening Session, May 3

[303] Ibid.

[304] Southwest Listening Session, March 16

Illinoisans in rural areas

Covered population: Individuals in rural areas		
Demographic information (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
Size of covered population	1.2 million[305]	
Rural counties in Illinois	62 of Illinois' 102 counties are considered to be rural, with 100% of Southeast Illinois counties, 67% of Southern Illinois counties, 46% of West Central counties, and 44% of Central Illinois counties counted as rural.	
Digital equity baseline data (state-wide resident phone survey, 2023)[306]		
	Covered population only	State-wide
Subscription to internet service[307]	89%	93%
Device access[308]	82%	89%
Needs and barriers assessment		
More likely to have trouble getting internet services installed. The state-wide survey showed that individuals in rural areas are 4% more likely than the average Illinoisan to have trouble getting internet services installed at their residence. More likely to discontinue service because it is expensive. The state-wide survey indicated that individuals in rural areas are 2% more likely than the average Illinoisan to discontinue service because it is too expensive. More likely to worry about digital skills. The state-wide survey showed that individuals in rural areas are 3% more likely than the average Illinoisan to worry about how to use computers and the internet. More likely to worry about online security. The state-wide survey revealed that individuals in rural areas are 7% more likely to be concerned about online fraud and phishing and 6% more likely to worry about privacy and the security of their personal data than the average Illinoisan.		

[305] "Rural" defined based on OMB definition: a "micro area (urban core of 10,000-49,999 people)" or a county "outside of a metro or micro area."

[306] State-wide residential phone survey results used since ACS data does not differentiate between rural and non-rural individuals.

[307] Statistics based on answer to the survey question, "Do you have a subscription to internet service for your home?"

[308] Statistics based on answer to the survey question, "Does your household need more computing devices to allow each person to connect to the internet?"

More dependent on broadband for economic development. **The Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB)** issued talking points stating a need for state-wide solutions that encourage broadband adoption by farmers and rural communities. The IFB maintains that its members want better, faster, more reliable, and more affordable broadband service, which improves economic development, education, and healthcare in rural areas.[309]

Region-specific insights captured in listening sessions and local government digital equity plans

Local government digital equity plans

Hancock County Broadband Breakthrough shows that broadband service is needed for precision agriculture in counties with a high share of rural population.[310]

The **Champaign Broadband Infrastructure Engineering Assessment Report** notes that accessing computers in public places like libraries obligates residents to travel, which is especially hard in rural parts of Illinois. [311]

Broadband for All – Plan for Ogle, Lee, Boone, and Putnam Counties reports that strong internet service is an urgent need in rural communities to support evolving farm operations. Lack of robust broadband service severely hampers enhanced innovations on farms.[312]

Listening session feedback

No affordable and reliable infrastructure in rural areas

Virtual listening session participant shared, "*Many rural residents rely on satellite service for internet access. Unfortunately, this service is unreliable, with slow speeds and frequent outages—especially during inclement weather. This unreliability can hinder residents from doing important tasks. It also comes with extremely high monthly fees and installation fees.*" [313]

Lack of provider interest in expanding access or increasing competition

Attendees at both the North Central and Northwest regions' listening sessions voiced the concern that low population density in rural areas discourages providers from offering services to their communities.[314]

A Southwest region listening session participant commented, "In rural areas there is only one option. Even though it is not affordable, we have to buy it. Competition would be nice."[315]

Difficulty in getting installation

[309] Who we are, Illinois Farm Bureau
[310] Hancock County Broadband Breakthrough
[311] Champaign Broadband Infrastructure Engineering Assessment Report, March 2022
[312] Broadband for All – Ogle, Lee, Boone, and Putnam Counties, Accelerate Illinois Round 2
[313] Virtual Listening Session on 5/4
[314] North Central Listening Sessions, May 16-17; Northwest Listening Sessions, May 9-10
[315] Southwest Listening Sessions, March 15-16

A participant in the East Central region listening session noted that installation appointments for residents in rural areas are lengthy, often lasting multiple hours due to difficulty in obtaining a connectivity signal. As a result, residents sometimes have to miss work or take time off. [316]

Adverse effects of unreliable internet service

An attendee at the East Central region listening session noted, "*Many things are digitally based, such as virtual healthcare. Many rural residents are unable to access these services.*"[317]

A Knox County resident shared, "*We had to up the amount of data due to the amount of devices we have, and it slows down the speed and reliability greatly on a daily basis. We have medical devices hooked to it as well, and I don't like that it's not reliable.*"[318]

[316] East Central Listening Sessions, April 12-13
[317] Ibid.
[318] Knox County Broadband Plan, Accelerate Illinois Round 1

Illinoisans with a language barrier

Covered population: Individuals with a language barrier		
Demographic information (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
Size of covered population	1.0 million	
Counties [319]with high share (10%+) of covered population	Cook, Kane (Northeast Illinois), and Cass (Central Illinois)	
Digital equity baseline data (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
	Covered population only	State-wide
Broadband adoption	66%	72%
Device access	73%	79%
Needs and barriers assessment		
The following needs and barriers were highlighted by participants in the Spanish-speaking listening session[320]: Low trust in government-sponsored programs hinders participation in affordability and device-access programs. Security concerns are a significant barrier for residents and can inhibit internet adoption and usage altogether for many non-English-speaking residents. Participation in internet or device-access programs is low due to potential participants' embarrassment, sensitivity, or a feeling that they will not benefit from them. ISPs' non-English resources for device troubleshooting are limited. If available, the resources are often unclear and sometimes intimidating for users, which inhibits internet adoption altogether for some residents. Infrastructure is lacking in underserved communities with a high number of non-English-speaking individuals. Residents have experienced long periods of full blackout due to ISP towers that are inoperable or in constant need of maintenance.		
Region-specific insights captured in listening sessions and local government digital equity plans		
Local government digital equity plans		

[319]

[320] City of Chicago Spanish Speaking Listening Session, April 19

The **Broadband READY East Central** report notes that the East Central region ranked first in share of individuals with a language barrier. Participants in the EC READY program reported concerns about technology and privacy as well as not having enough support for "marginalized" individuals and experiencing hostility when trying to access technology support services.[321]

The **Cook County Digital Equity Action Plan** found that many internet and computer resources are not made available in languages other than English.[322]

The **Chicago Digital Equity Plan** observed that 17% of participants discussed accessibility challenges, such as language spoken and inaccessibility for a person with a disability.[323]

[321] Broadband READY East Central Region Plan, August 2022

[322] Cook County Digital Equity Action Plan, October 2023

[323] Chicago Digital Equity Plan, 2023

Illinoisans with disabilities

Covered population: Individuals with disabilities		
Demographic information (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
Size of covered population	1.4 million	
Counties with high share (20%+) of above covered population	Hardin, Pulaski, Gallatin, Alexander, Perry, Massac, Franklin, Wabash (Southern Illinois), McLean (North Central Illinois), McHenry (Northeast Illinois), McDonough (West Central Illinois), and Calhoun (Southwest Illinois)	
Digital equity baseline data (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
	Covered population only	State-wide
Broadband adoption	57%	72%
Device access	63%	79%
Needs and barriers assessment		
The following needs and barriers have been highlighted for individuals with disabilities: High prices and insufficient infrastructure are often barriers to broadband home access for individuals with disabilities. [324] Individuals with disabilities have less access to computers, internet, and broadband in both rural and non-rural areas. [325] Beyond access to internet and devices, there are a range of online accessibility features (e.g., subtitles, vision assisting features, read aloud, etc.) that could decrease barriers to equitable internet access. [326]		
Region-specific insights captured in listening sessions and local government digital equity plans		
Local government digital equity plans: The **Cook County Digital Equity Action Plan** notes that many internet and computer resources are not made available with the necessary accommodations to support those with disabilities or other special navigation needs.[327]		

[324] TECHNOLOGY AND DISABILITY, October 2022

[325] A guide to internet accessibility for Americans with disabilities, August 2023

[326] Ibid.

[327] Cook County Digital Equity Action Plan, October 2023

The **Chicago Digital Equity Plan** observes that 17% of participants discussed accessibility challenges, such as language spoken and inaccessibility for persons with disabilities. [328]

Listening session feedback:

Low digital literacy level

A Joliet listening session participant shared, "My mom calls me every day to help her with her internet issues. She's a senior with a disability. They don't have the broad picture of what they can do with the internet."[329]

Illinois residents who are Veterans

Covered population: Veterans		
Demographic information (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
Size of covered population	538,000	
Counties with high share (10%+) of covered population	Pope, Pulaski, Wabash (Southern Illinois), St. Clair, Calhoun (Southwest Illinois), Menard, Greene (Central Illinois), Carroll (Northwest Illinois), Henderson (West Central), and Marshall (North Central Illinois)	
Digital equity baseline data (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
	Covered population only	State-wide
Broadband adoption	67%	72%
Device access	77%	79%
Needs and barriers assessment		
The following needs and barriers have been highlighted for veterans: There is a significant number of veterans living in rural communities which often experience lack of broadband deployment. [330]		

[328] Chicago Digital Equity Plan, 2023

[329] Juliet Listening Session, May 31

[330] Veterans and the Digital Divide, December 2021

Rural communities also face challenges with a shortage of healthcare providers which can be exacerbated by limited broadband access that veterans that decreases telehealth access.[331] Digital illiteracy and perception of the relevance of broadband discourages some veterans from adopting broadband, in part due to the tendency of veterans to be older than the general population and disinformation targeting veterans. [332] Veterans are more likely than non-veterans to cite a lack of computer as the primary barrier to subscribing to internet services. Price of devices and monthly costs of services are key barriers to adoption. [333]
Region-specific insights capture in listening sessions and local government digital equity plans
Listening session feedback: Internet service is essential for veterans to access telehealth services, especially due to the higher rate of disabilities among veterans. A Macomb listening session participant shared, "Telehealth is critically important for veterans who have to use the [government system]. The closest location is quite far away, so it puts a huge burden on the veterans in the community to have to go to those facilities." The participant further noted that reliable telehealth options would make it easier for veterans in the community to get the care they need.[334]

Incarcerated Illinoisans

Covered population: Incarcerated individuals		
Prison population data sets from the Illinois Department of Corrections[335]		
Size of covered population	~30,000	
Counties with high share (10%+) of covered population	N/A	
Digital equity baseline data (ACS 5-year data, 2021)		
	Covered population only	State-wide
Broadband adoption	N/A	72%

[331] Ibid.

[332] Report on Promoting Broadband Internet Access Service for Veterans, May 2019

[333] Ibid.

[334] Macomb Listening Session, May 3

[335] Prison Population Data Sets

Device access	N/A	79%
Needs and barriers assessment		
Incarcerated individuals benefit from digital literacy training to enable use of devices and (limited) internet access to support ongoing learning while incarcerated; and to access to essential services, and job readiness upon release. [336] A lack of connection to the outside world can increase the likelihood of re-offense upon release. The inability to keep up with technological changes while in prison causes a lack of digital literacy which often a barrier of access to secure jobs for formerly incarcerated people. [337]		

[336] People In Prison Should Have Access to Digital Technology, August 2023

[337] Ibid.

4 Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

This section discusses how IOB has collaborated and will continue to collaborate with broadband and digital equity stakeholders across the state.

4.1 Coordination and Outreach Strategy

4.1.1 Stakeholder engagement approach prior to BEAD and digital equity programs

Outreach and engagement with broadband and digital equity stakeholders have been core priorities of the IOB since its inception. Feedback received has been used to inform the office's priorities and shape its programming.

The IOB and IBL's Broadband READY program has 10 cohorts aligned with each economic development region in the state. The program is designed to identify current digital inequities and to define next steps toward creating a digitally inclusive system. Community and economic-development organizations, educators, local leaders, and other related stakeholders will collaborate to execute these next steps.[338] Additionally, the IOB's "Accelerate Illinois" and "Broadband Breakthrough" programs encourage community-driven broadband expansion by providing grants and communities with expert consultation.[339] The IOB's "Illinois Connected Communities" program engages communities in a cohort forum to offer best practices, expert consultations, and grants.[340]

Also working toward these goals is the IOB's Broadband Advisory Council, which includes representatives from various internet service providers, state agency officials, legislators, and certain broadband-related stakeholders. The council convenes quarterly.[341]

The IOB keeps stakeholders updated through regular webinars and newsletters, which are produced and distributed in cooperation with the Illinois Extension and Benton Institute.

[338] Broadband READY, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
[339] Accelerate Illinois, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
[340] Illinois Connected Communities, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
[341] Illinois Broadband Advisory Council, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

4.1.2 Stakeholder engagement approach for BEAD and DE programs

To create the IL SDEP and IL BEAD Plan, the Illinois Office of Broadband's stakeholder engagement process involved listening to, understanding, and collaborating with a broad range of broadband and digital equity stakeholders. The IOB's aims were to: (1) assess and understand needs and barriers, (2) inventory and map existing broadband assets, and (3) learn what works.[342] With this in mind, the IOB set three objectives for its engagement of key stakeholders:

1. Understand the various stakeholders' experiences and perspectives to inform the BEAD and State Digital Equity plans
2. Communicate about the upcoming federal funding opportunity, the work already done by the Office of Broadband and the Illinois Broadband Lab to progress toward goals, and the work ahead
3. Enable existing partners to fulfill the mission of equitable and inclusive broadband access, and form new partnerships with key stakeholders who are committed to this mission.

During the stakeholder engagement process, Illinois involved five stakeholder groups based on the groups mentioned in the BEAD Notice of Funding Opportunity: (1) government entities, including local government bodies and state agencies; (2) service providers; (3) other private companies, including small businesses; (4) non-profits and community organizations; and (5) the residents and the organizations that serve them, with a focus on covered populations. [343]

To determine which organizations and entities from these groups to target and engage throughout the stakeholder engagement process, the IOB and IBL identified, catalogued, and involved its existing partners and supporters throughout the state (Section 4.1.1). These practitioners and partners included persons and organizations who have previously engaged with the Illinois Broadband Lab during webinars or existing programming. Partnerships were key

[342] Core Team Meeting, January 2023
[343] Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program Notice of Funding Opportunity

to the IOB and IBL for scaling and expanding programming efforts; these partnerships were leveraged during plan development to gain additional perspectives on the needs and best practices related to digital equity in Illinois.

When planning for stakeholder engagement, the IOB and IBL reviewed the distribution of covered populations and broadband metrics (Figure 16) to understand the diversity of Illinois' regions before engagement began. The Northeast and Northern Stateline regions have relatively high proportions of individuals with low English literacy, racial minorities, immigrants, and indigenous persons. The Southern region has low rates of broadband adoption and device access, as well as relatively high proportions of unserved Broadband Serviceable Locations (BSLs), individuals with incomes less than 150% of the federal poverty line, individuals with disabilities, and veterans. The Southeast region has low rates of broadband adoption and relatively high proportions of unserved Broadband Serviceable Locations, individuals with disabilities, and aging individuals.

Figure 34: Summary statistics on broadband metrics and covered populations across the 10 regions of Illinois.

Legend[1]
Top 2 highest proportions
Above population median
Below population median

	Broadband metrics			Share of each covered population as a proportion of total regional population							
	Unserved	Broad-band adoption[1]	Access to devices	Income less 150% of FPL	Aging ind. (60+)	Veterans	Ind. with disabili-ties	Ind. with low English literacy	Racial & ethnic minorities[2]	Immi-grants	Rural
Northeast	1%	76%	94%	18%	21%	3%	10%	42%	56%	19%	0%
Northern Stateline	2%	68%	91%	23%	25%	6%	14%	15%	30%	8%	10%
Northwest	6%	63%	91%	20%	28%	6%	14%	10%	19%	4%	36%
North Central	6%	67%	92%	20%	24%	5%	12%	6%	16%	4%	24%
East Central	8%	65%	92%	24%	22%	5%	11%	15%	25%	8%	22%
Central	9%	63%	90%	21%	26%	6%	14%	4%	14%	2%	44%
West Central	6%	60%	87%	23%	27%	6%	15%	4%	11%	2%	46%
Southeast	24%	58%	90%	22%	26%	6%	16%	4%	6%	1%	100%
Southern	23%	49%	87%	26%	26%	7%	19%	5%	11%	2%	67%
Southwest	8%	68%	91%	18%	24%	8%	14%	4%	22%	2%	23%
Illinois average	5%	72%	93%	19%	22%	5%	11%	9%	45%	14%	11%

1. For broadband adoption and devices access: darkest color indicates lowest proportions, middle color indicates below state average, and light grey indicates above state average
2. Includes Black or African American, American Indian and Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, Some other race, Two or more races, and Hispanic populations

Covered populations excluded: Justice-impacted individuals, LGBQT+ individuals, women, and rural residents
Units used for analysis: BSLs: unserved; Households: broadband adoption and access to devices; Individuals: all covered populations
Source: US Census 2021 ACS 5-Year, FCC Maps

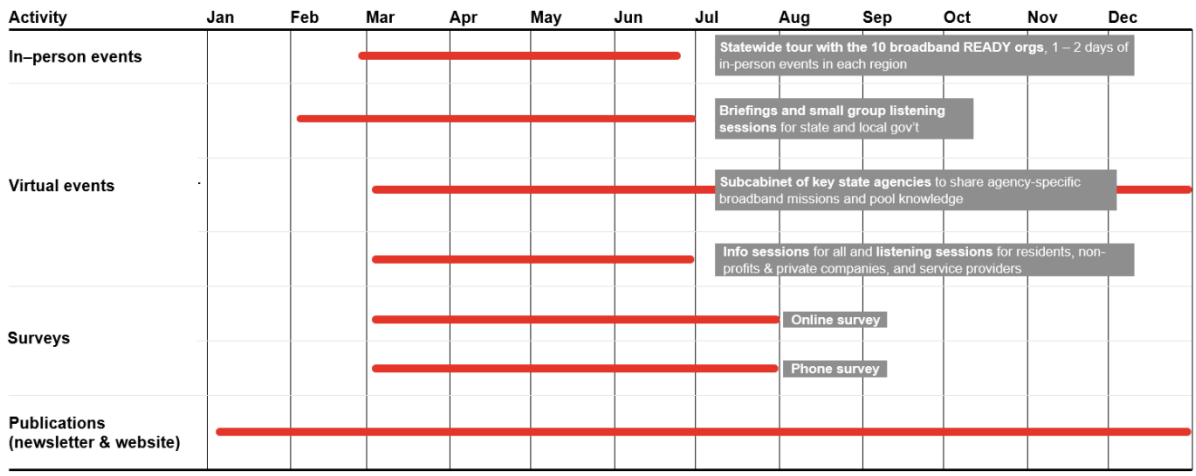
To engage members of these stakeholder groups, Illinois led a multi-channel stakeholder engagement process. This effort began with individual conversations and briefings with local legislators and government officials about current broadband efforts across Illinois. The state invested in various activities to facilitate an inclusive stakeholder engagement process that would reach stakeholders who have historically been left out of state planning processes. To engage stakeholders from across Illinois, the state conducted outreach efforts through the following channels during development of the IL SDEP and IL BEAD Plan:

- In-person events. Through a statewide listening tour, several stakeholder groups—including residents, non-profits, community organizations, small businesses, and local governments—were invited to participate in in-person listening sessions held in local Illinois communities.
- Virtual events. State government agencies were engaged through the State Government Broadband Working Group, which was established at the beginning of the stakeholder engagement process. The broadband subcabinet met regularly to discuss federal funding opportunities and to bring in agency leaders with a stake in closing the digital divide. Local

governments could also choose to participate in small-group listening sessions. The director of the IOB hosted individual conversations with legislators and local government leaders. Briefings on the IOB and IBL for local governing bodies (e.g., city councils and county boards) were offered as follow-ups to one-on-one conversations. Additionally, virtual listening sessions were hosted for key stakeholder groups to provide updates on the Office of Broadband and Illinois Broadband Lab activities. These virtual sessions also gathered feedback on digital equity and broadband-related experiences. The state hosted four virtual listening sessions, one of which was facilitated in Spanish. Of the three sessions in English, one targeted residents, one targeted local organizations, and one targeted internet service providers.

- Surveys. The IOB and IBL administered phone and online surveys. The online survey was available to members of all stakeholder groups so that they could share their experience in deploying, using, and promoting broadband. The phone survey was administered to a statistically significant sample of Illinoisians. Additionally, the state administered a survey specifically targeting community anchor institutions (CAIs) to learn about their connectivity and how they provide broadband access to the community. The state also specifically surveyed public housing authorities (PHAs) to understand the challenges, barriers, and benefits related to broadband access for covered households.
- Publications. The new Illinois Broadband Lab website and social media platforms were launched to disseminate information about stakeholder engagement efforts and updates on the federal funding application process. Additionally, the bi-weekly “Illinois Broadband Connections” newsletter published by the Benton Institute in partnership with the Office of Broadband includes updates on stakeholder engagement efforts.

Figure 35: The IOB and IBL launched a multi-channel stakeholder engagement process during the drafting of the IL SDEP and will continue engaging with stakeholders once the IL SDEP is complete.



The goal of the in-person listening sessions and phone survey was to provide a forum that could reach stakeholders—especially among covered populations—that may currently lack broadband access and to engage local residents, non-profits, and community organizations. In-person outreach was organized around the Illinois Department of Commerce Economic Development Regions, which cover all 102 counties in the state. The in-person resident and non-profit engagement events were planned around the Economic Development Regions in Illinois. Each region has an existing Broadband READY program, which is housed under the Office of Broadband. The Illinois Broadband Lab planned engagement events for residents and non-profits in partnership with the Broadband READY team, local government representatives, the University of Illinois Extension, and local organizations. Through these partnerships, Illinois built upon existing broadband-related efforts in the community and engaged stakeholders through organizations they were familiar with.

The IL SDEP incorporates the feedback received from stakeholder engagement activities in the following sections in this document: (1) Section 2.2 – Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes, (2) Section 3.1 – Asset Inventory, (3) Section 3.2 – Needs Assessment, and (4) Section 5.0 – Implementation. As it engaged with various stakeholders, the state noted the major concerns, needs, and gaps in broadband equity throughout Illinois. Additionally, the State

recorded existing and ongoing community and local efforts across the state related to broadband deployment, access, and equity that contributed to the IL SDEP. The takeaways from the stakeholder engagement efforts conducted as a part of this IL SDEP were used as key input for the IL BEAD Plan. The outcomes of stakeholder engagement efforts are summarized in Section 4.1.2.

The Illinois Office of Broadband and the Illinois Broadband Lab plan to continue engaging stakeholders through channels established prior to stakeholder engagement efforts and through activities begun as part of these efforts. For example, the Illinois Office of Broadband convenes the Broadband Advisory Council quarterly. The council includes representation from various internet service providers, state agency officials, legislators, and certain broadband-related stakeholders. Additionally, the Illinois Office of Broadband plans to continue its State Government Broadband Working Group. Through this group, the state plans to monitor the implementation of the IL SDEP to ensure that digital services are meeting constituents' needs throughout the state. The Illinois Broadband Lab website and Office of Broadband newsletters (published in partnership with the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society) will continue to be disseminated and updated regularly.

The State Government Broadband Working Group includes representatives from the broader DCEO, Illinois' workforce agency that coordinates with 22 local workforce areas, the Illinois Department of Labor, Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), and the Illinois Community Colleges Board (ICCB). The DCEO engages with labor organizations and community-based organizations to find the best ways to expand the talent pipeline for key industries, including energy, construction, and transportation.

To accomplish its implementation strategy, the state will continue to convene these organizations—both through the council and independently, as these organizations develop their own strategies to ensure that digital literacy and skill-building are included and aligned among agencies. As previously mentioned, the state plans to also work closely with the Office of Employment and Training as it develops its WIOA Plans to align workforce development

resources across Illinois' key industries and to anticipate demand, including the demand for an expanded, highly skilled workforce to deploy broadband.

The Illinois Broadband Lab and Broadband READY teams will continue to engage the local partners who have been involved in the stakeholder engagement process. The regional Broadband READY teams will participate throughout the stakeholder engagement process so that local partners will be involved throughout and after the implementation of the IL SDEP.

4.1.3 Stakeholder engagement schedule for BEAD and DE programs

Through local coordination and outreach strategies, the state was able to engage a variety of stakeholders both in-personal and virtually. Across the 10 regions, 1,162 residents, local government representatives, and representatives of community-based organizations attended one of the "10-Region Stakeholder Engagement Tour" events (Table 9), and 88 attended virtual sessions. In sum, 1,250 listening session attendees were engaged by the state.

The IOB and IBL visited 20 cities across Illinois and hosted 54 listening sessions (Table 10). Over 40 organizations were represented in these listening sessions. Twenty-four in-person listening sessions and two webinars were hosted for residents; 18 of these events were combined with sessions for local organizations and non-profits. Twenty-two in-person listening sessions and two webinars were hosted solely for local organizations and non-profits. Nineteen in-person listening sessions and two webinars were hosted for local government representatives. One virtual webinar was also hosted for internet service providers.

Table 9: Overview of 10-Region Stakeholder Engagement Tour with planning partners, events, and attendees by region as of June 2023

Region	Dates	Host sites	Numbers of attendees	Example CAIs and non-profits represented
Southern	3/1 – 3/2	Shawnee Community College, SIU Carbondale	90 – 100	Agriculture organizations, government representatives, economic development organizations, education non-profits
Southwest	3/15 – 3/16	SIU East St. Louis, Kaskaskia College	90 – 100	Agriculture organizations, government representatives, local non-elected leaders, and educational organizations and schools
Southeast	3/22	Effingham Extension Office	30 – 40	County farm bureaus (Richland, Effingham, Clay, and Jasper), Illinois Extension, county boards (Effingham, Jasper, and Bond), City of Effingham
East Central	4/12 – 4/13	Champaign Farm Bureau, Danville Area Community College	90 – 100	Parkland College, Champaign County Board, High Speed for Edgar County, Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband, Danville Area Community College, high schools
Northeast – City of Chicago	4/19, 5/3, 5/10	City of Chicago – City Hall, Malcolm X College, Steinmetz College Prep High School, Urban League Chicago	170 – 180	UChicago Internet Equity Initiative, scaleLIT, YMCA of Metro Chicago, Chicago Urban League, Women Employed, The Northwest Center, Teamwork Englewood; Latinos Progresando, Puerto Rican Cultural Center, Southwest Organizing Project, Project Exploration, Literacy Works, ChiCommons LWCA, Black Star Project
Northeast – Aurora, Libertyville, Kankakee, Joliet	5/18, 5/24, 5/25, 5/31	Waubonsee Community College, Lake County Health	180 – 190	City of Aurora IT department, Waubonsee Community College faculty, local government

Region	Dates	Host sites	Numbers of attendees	Example CAIs and non-profits represented
		Department, Kankakee Public Library, Joliet City Council		representatives, U.S. Department of Commerce employees, NTI Network Technologies
Central – Springfield, Decatur	4/25 – 4/26	Macon County Extension Office, Lincoln Library, Innovate Springfield	110 – 120	IL Heartland Library System, Heritage Behavioral Health Center, Faith Coalition for Common Good, IMC Illinois Migrant Council, government representatives
West Central - Macomb	5/3	Macomb City Hall	80 – 90	Rushville Public Library, Western Illinois University, Memorial Hospital, University of Illinois Extension, Catch A Star Learning Center, government representatives
Northern Stateline	05/23	Rockford Public Library, Region 1 Planning Council	10 – 20	Local government representatives, University of Illinois Extension, UD Department of Commerce
Northwest – Moline, Morrison	5/9 – 5/10	Rock Island Casino, WIU Quad Cities, Morrison Institute of Technology	50 – 60	Western Illinois University, Henry County Farm Bureau, Highland Community College, government representatives
North Central	5/16 – 5/17	Milner Library, Manual high School, Glen Okay Community Learning Center	110 – 120	Government representatives, Normal Public Library, Illinois State University, farm bureaus (McLean County, Peoria County), Peoria Public School, Manual High School

Region	Dates	Host sites	Numbers of attendees	Example CAIs and non-profits represented
Statewide	3/14, 4/21, 4/28, 5/4, 5/9, 5/23	Virtual	170	Illinois Farm Bureau, Illinois Capital Development Board, Illinois State University, North Park University Library

4.1.4 Collaborating partners in BEAD and DE programs

Table 10: Partners identifies the new and existing collaboration partners with whom Illinois plans to engage as it develops and implements the IL SDEP. The state partnered with several of these organizations to host listening sessions during stakeholder engagement efforts for the BEAD and DE Programs. The list is ordered as follows: (1) statewide organizations and state agencies, (2) local or municipal governments and organizations, and (3) academic institutions.

Table 10: Partners

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Benton Institute for Broadband & Society (Benton Institute)	The IOB partners with the Benton Institute on both broadband-related programming and the bi-weekly "Illinois Broadband Connections" publication. Programming has included ICC, Accelerate, and Broadband Breakthrough, all of which have helped the state engage over 50 communities across 38 counties on broadband infrastructure planning and digital equity initiatives since 2019. The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society was a main funding source for ICC, Accelerate Illinois, and Broadband Breakthrough.
Connected Nation (CN)[344]	Currently, the IOB partners with CN to (1) identify and engage broadband providers and infrastructure owners that operate in the State of Illinois, (2) collect and validate broadband deployment data by technology and speed, and 3) prepare maps and data identifying available broadband service. CN also supported the state in its FCC Mapping Challenge efforts. CN assisted in comparing the Illinois Broadband Lab Map to the FCC Map to identify areas where service might be misreported in the new FCC maps, planned and implemented field validation efforts, and assembled a desktop research team to support the FCC Availability Challenge.
Heartland Forward (Connecting the Heartland Initiative)	The IOB partners with Heartland Forward to place six Connection Corps fellows in Illinois and raise awareness of adoption resources such as the ACP. Fellows have also engaged in organizing digital literacy events, organizing device distribution and ACP enrollment with PCs for People, supporting local broadband planning efforts (Greater Peoria Economic Development Region, Southwest Leadership Council through Accelerate and Broadband Breakthrough, broadband planning in Mercer), and collaborating with the Illinois Office of Broadband on various programs to help with outreach efforts and build partnerships.
Illinois Association of Housing Authorities (IAHA)	The IOB collaborates with the IAHA through the State Broadband Working Group, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP. The IAHA is also participating in stakeholder engagement efforts to survey housing authorities across Illinois.

[344] Connected Illinois Round 1 Projects Announced, July 2020, Illinois Broadband Connections

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)	The IOB partners with the IBHE on projects like the Illinois Drive-Up Hotspots Map. The IOB collaborates with the IBHE through the BAC and State Broadband Working Group, which are regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Illinois Century Network (ICN)	The IOB partners with the ICN through its role in the Connect Illinois Broadband Grant program, which sets aside $20 million for upgrades to the 100 GB ICN, the state's existing 2,000-mile open-access institutional fiber network. This network serves over 3,400 K-12, higher education, and library locations across Illinois.[345] The ICN's middle-mile network effort is managed in collaboration with the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology and will be leveraged to increase service to CAIs and support last-mile providers during broadband deployment efforts.
Illinois Commerce Commission	The IOB collaborates with the Illinois Commerce Commission through the BAC and State Broadband Working Group, both of which are regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)	The IOB partners with the ISBE on projects like the Illinois Drive-Up Hotspots Map and through its representation on the BAC. During the implementation of the IL SDEP, the IOB plans to work with the ICCB on workforce development solutions to increase the workforce supply for broadband deployment. The ICCB is a member of the State Government Broadband Working Group.
Illinois Department of Aging (IDoA)	The IOB collaborates with IDoA through the BAC and State Broadband Working Group, which are regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family (HFS)	The IOB collaborates with HFS through the BAC and State Broadband Working Group, which are regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.

[345] Connect Illinois, DCEO

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT)	The IOB collaborates with the DoIT through the IBL. DoIT provides the necessary subject matter expertise to conduct merit reviews and related activities within the IOB.[346] The ICN is managed by DoIT and serves over 2,000 locations in Illinois.[347] DoIT is also a member of the BAC and the State Government Broadband Working Group.
Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES)	The IOB collaborates with IDES through the State Broadband Working Group, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL)	The IOB collaborates with IDOL through the State Broadband Working Group, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH)	The IOB collaborates with IDPH through the State Broadband Working Group, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Illinois Department of Transportation	The IOB collaborates with IDOT through the State Broadband Working Group, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB)	The IOB collaborates with the IFB through the BAC, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP. The IOB also partners with the IFB throughout its stakeholder engagement efforts to market local events and support community members participating in the online survey.
Illinois Guardianship & Advocacy Commission (GAC)	The IOB collaborates with GAC through the State Broadband Working Group, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Illinois Library Association (ILA)	The IOB collaborates with the ILA through the BAC, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP. The IOB also partners with the ILA throughout its stakeholder engagement efforts to market local events and support community members participating in the online survey.

[346] Illinois Broadband Advisory Council Annual Legislative Report, January 2023
[347] Illinois K-12 Broadband Network, NASCIO

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Illinois Library and Information Network (ILLINET)	The IOB partners with the ILLINET in its stakeholder engagement efforts to market local events and support community members participating in the online survey.
Illinois Rural Development State Office, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	The IOB partners with the Illinois Rural Development State Office in its stakeholder engagement efforts to market local events and support community members participating in the online survey.
Illinois Soybean Association	The IOB partners with the Illinois Soybean Association to host the Broadband Breakthrough program, an agriculture-themed Accelerate Illinois track.[348] Broadband Breakthrough engages rural counties on digital equity and works with the farming community on the broadband infrastructure-planning process.
Illinois State Police	The IOB collaborates with the Illinois State Police through the State Broadband Working Group, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)	The IOB partners with the ISBE on projects like the Illinois Drive-Up Hotspots Map. The IOB collaborates with the ISBE through the State Broadband Working Group, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
LatinX DLN	The IOB partners with the LatinX DLN throughout its stakeholder engagement efforts to share local events and support community members participating in the online survey. LatinX DLN was a member of the second cohort of Illinois Connected Communities (ICC).
National Digital Inclusion Alliance	The IOB and IBL are affiliated with the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, which advances digital equity by supporting community programs and equipping policymakers to act.[349]

[348] Connect Illinois Overview and Status, December 2022
[349] Illinois Broadband Lab

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Next Century Cities	The IOB partners with Next Century Cities to continue telling the stories of local communities throughout the broadband deployment and adoption process. Next Century Cities supports the state in conducting video interviews with community advocates, local officials, and residents from various communities.[350]
Office of Community Relations, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	The IOB collaborates with Illinois EPA through the State Broadband Working Group, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Office of Minority Economic Empowerment, DCEO	The IOB collaborates with the Office of Minority Economic Empowerment through the State Broadband Working Group, which is regularly updated and engaged on topics related to the development of the IL SDEP.
Office of the Secretary of State	The IOB partners with the Office of the Secretary of State, which houses the Illinois State Library. The Illinois State Library supports the state in conducting its stakeholder engagement process by connecting the IBL with local libraries. These libraries serve as a marketing channel to Illinois residents who frequent these community institutions.
PCs for People	The IOB partners with PCs for People through its Connect Illinois Computer Equity Network and plans to engage PCs for People in the stakeholder engagement process.
Pew Charitable Trusts	The IOB partners with the Pew Charitable Trusts' Broadband Access Initiative.[351]
Office of the President, Cook County	The IOB and IBL are engaging representatives from the city in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in Northeastern Illinois. In addition, the IBL supports the Cook County Office of Digital Equity in its capacity-planning and program development.

[350] Illinois Connected Communities Kickoff, August 2020, Illinois Broadband Connections
[351] Celebrating 50 Editions of Illinois Broadband Connections, May 2022, Illinois Broadband Connections

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Mayor's Office, City of Chicago	The IOB and IBL are engaging representatives from the city in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in Northeastern Illinois. In addition, the IBL supports the City of Chicago's Digital Equity Coalition in its capacity-planning and program development.
City of Rockford	The IOB and IBL engaged representatives from the city in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in the Northern Stateline region.
City of Macomb	The IOB and IBL engaged representatives from the city in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in the West Central region.
City of Effingham	The IOB and IBL engaged representatives from the city in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in Southeast Illinois.
Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois	The IOB and IBL are engaging representatives from the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in Southwest Illinois. The council also participated in round one of the Illinois Connected Communities program and round two of Accelerate Illinois through Kaskaskia College.
Region 1 Economic Development Council or Regional Planning Council (R1)	The IOB and IBL continue to partner with the Region 1 Economic Development Council through its Northern Stateline Broadband READY team. The IOB and IBL engaged representatives from the Regional Planning Council in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in Northern Stateline Illinois. R1 maintains new relationships that were developed in the Northern Stateline region during the stakeholder engagement process.
Bloomington-Normal EDC	The IOB and IBL continue to engage Bloomington-Normal EDC through its North Central Broadband READY team. Additionally, Bloomington-Normal EDC supported the stakeholder engagement efforts in North Central and maintains relationships developed during the stakeholder engagement process.
Chicago State University	The IOB and IBL continue to engage Chicago State University through its Northeast Broadband READY team. Additionally, Chicago State University supports the stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northeast and maintains relationships developed during the stakeholder engagement process.

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Danville Area Community College	Danville Area Community College supports the IOB and IBL's stakeholder engagement efforts in East Central and plans to work with the IBL to maintain relationships developed during the stakeholder engagement process.
Eastern Illinois University	The IOB and IBL continue to partner with Eastern Illinois University through its Southeast Broadband READY team. The IOB and IBL are engaging representatives from Eastern Illinois University in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in Southeast Illinois. Eastern Illinois University maintains new relationships developed in the Southeast region.
Illinois State University (ISU)	The IOB and IBL partner with the ISU to host the Broadband Breakthrough program, an agriculture-themed Accelerate Illinois track.[352] ISU served as a key partner in designing the Broadband Breakthrough program by providing mapping support from their research team to show the economic impact of reliable, high-speed broadband in rural areas. This mapping work was initially funded by an Illinois Innovation Network seed grant. In addition, ISU is the North Central READY team lead. ISU also supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the North Central region.
Kaskaskia College	The IOB and IBL engaged Kaskaskia College as a cohort member of Accelerate Illinois. Additionally, Kaskaskia College supports stakeholder engagement efforts in the Southwest region and plans to work with the IBL to maintain relationships developed during the stakeholder engagement process.
Northern Illinois University	The IOB and IBL continue to engage Northern Illinois University through its Northwest Broadband READY team. Additionally, Northern Illinois University supports the stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northwest and maintains relationships developed during the stakeholder engagement process.
Shawnee Community College	The IOB and IBL are engaging representatives from the city in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in Southern Illinois. Shawnee Community College plans to be a host location for in-person events.

[352] Connect Illinois Overview and Status, December 2022

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Southern Illinois University Carbondale	The IOB and IBL continue to partner with Southern Illinois University Carbondale through its Southern Broadband READY team. The IOB and IBL are engaging representatives from Southern Illinois University Carbondale in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in Southern Illinois. Southern Illinois University Carbondale plans to be a host location for in-person events. Southern Illinois University Carbondale expects to maintain relationships developed in the Southern region after the implementation of the IL SDEP.
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville	The IOB and IBL continue to engage Southern Illinois University Edwardsville through its Southwest Broadband READY team. The IOB and IBL are engaging representatives from Southern Illinois University in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in Southwest Illinois. Southern Illinois University Edwardsville expects to maintain relationships developed in the Southwest region after the implementation of the IL SDEP.
University of Illinois Springfield	The IOB and IBL continue to partner with University of Illinois Springfield through its Central Broadband READY team. The IOB and IBL are engaging representatives from the University of Illinois Springfield in the stakeholder engagement process to coordinate listening sessions in Central Illinois in partnership with city officials. University of Illinois Springfield expects to maintain relationships developed in the Central region after the implementation of the IL SDEP.
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign UIUC	The IOB and IBL continue to engage UIUC through their East Central Broadband READY team. Additionally, UIUC supports stakeholder engagement efforts in the East Central region and maintains relationships developed during the stakeholder engagement process.
University of Illinois System	The IOB has an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with the University of Illinois System for the Illinois Broadband Lab to support office programming, grow capacity, and facilitate data collection, mapping, and research.[353]
Illinois Innovation Network (IIN) (University of Illinois System)	The IOB collaborates with the Illinois Innovation Network through the IBL. The IIN also offers marketing support throughout the stakeholder engagement process. Many of the Illinois Innovation Network hubs have been leading the regional broadband planning efforts through the Broadband READY program, which is expected to be leveraged and scaled throughout the implementation of the IL SDEP.

[353] Connect Illinois Overview and Status, December 2022

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Illinois Extension (University of Illinois System)	The Illinois Extension collaborates with the IOB to support Illinois Connected Communities and Accelerate Illinois programs through communications, organizational support, and content curation. Additionally, the Extension supports community-driven broadband webinars and curates content on its website.[354]
Western Illinois University	The IOB and IBL continue to engage Western Illinois University through its West Central Broadband READY team. Additionally, Western Illinois University supported the stakeholder engagement efforts in the West Central region and maintains relationships developed during the stakeholder engagement process.
West Illinois University Quad Cities	Western Illinois University-Quad Cities supports the IOB and IBL's stakeholder engagement efforts in Northwest Illinois and plans to work with the IBL to maintain relationships developed during the stakeholder engagement process.
Macon County Extension Office	The Macon County Extension Office supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Central region.
Lincoln Library	The Lincoln Library in Springfield supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Central region.
Innovate Springfield	Innovate Springfield supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Central region.
Manual High School	Manual High School supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the North Central region.
Glen Oak Community Learning Center	Glen Oak Community Learning Center supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the North Central region.
Morrison Institute of Technology	Morrison Institute of Technology supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northwest region.

[354] Illinois Broadband Advisory Council Annual Legislative Report, January 2023

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Steinmetz College Prep High School	Steinmetz College Prep High School supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the city of Chicago.
Chicago Urban League	The Chicago Urban League supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the city of Chicago.
Malcolm X College	Malcolm X College supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the city of Chicago.
Kankakee Public Library	The Kankakee Public Library supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northeast region.
Lake County Permit Facility	The Lake County Permit Facility supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northeast region.
McLean County	McLean County supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the North Central region.
City of Bloomington	The City of Bloomington supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the North Central region.
City of Normal	The City of Normal supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the North Central region.
McLean County Regional Planning Commission	The McLean County Regional Planning Commission supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the North Central region.
Milner Library	Milner library supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the North Central region.
City of Joliet	The City of Joliet supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northeast region.
Cornerstone Services	Cornerstone Services supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northeast region.
Northern Stateline Illinois Broadband READY	The Northern Stateline Illinois Broadband READY team supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northern Stateline region.

Partners	Current or planned role in digital equity efforts
Rockford Public Library	The Rockford Public Library supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northern Stateline region.
Northeast Region Broadband READY Team	The Northeast Region Broadband READY team supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northeast region.
Waubonsee Community College	The Waubonsee Community College supported stakeholder engagement efforts in the Northeast region.

4.1.5 Plan for ongoing stakeholder engagement for digital equity

Ongoing stakeholder engagement is critical to ongoing planning and working toward digital equity. The development of this State Digital Equity Plan (SDEP) incorporated insights from stakeholder engagement sessions that were held during the creation of the plan, as well as from the broadband and digital equity plans that have been developed at the county and city levels and that were summarized in Section 2.5.

In addition, this SDEP was shared for public comment between [Date 1] and [Date 2]. The feedback received, as well as a description of how the feedback was accounted for in this plan, is provided in Appendix II.

As described in Section 5, implementation and stakeholder engagement will be critical to the ongoing planning, evaluation, refinement, and execution of the state's digital equity priorities. In addition to the core activities that engage stakeholders in the digital equity system in Illinois, IOB will also continue to work with the State Agency Broadband Working Group, which includes collaborators on workforce topics related to broadband deployment and digital equity.

5 Implementation

5.1 Implementation Strategy and Key Activities

5.1.1 Core activities the state plans to establish

Achieving digital equity in Illinois will ultimately result from the collaborative work of thousands of leaders, practitioners, researchers, and program designers across the state, with guidance from experts across the nation. The IOB aspires to lead a program that:

- Learns from and supports the decades of experience of digital equity practitioners, who have been doing the work in and with local communities.

- Supports the development of innovative programs that draw from the practices of social innovation.
- Allows practitioners to test and learn—enabled by data—while respecting digital learners' privacy.
- Evaluates programs holistically, incorporating culturally relevant assessment approaches.

To effectively facilitate digital equity in Illinois, the IBL plans to engage a broad range of digital equity leaders throughout the state. In particular, IBL intends to work with regional and local partners as well as community leaders to achieve the state's digital equity objectives by executing the core activities outlined in this section.

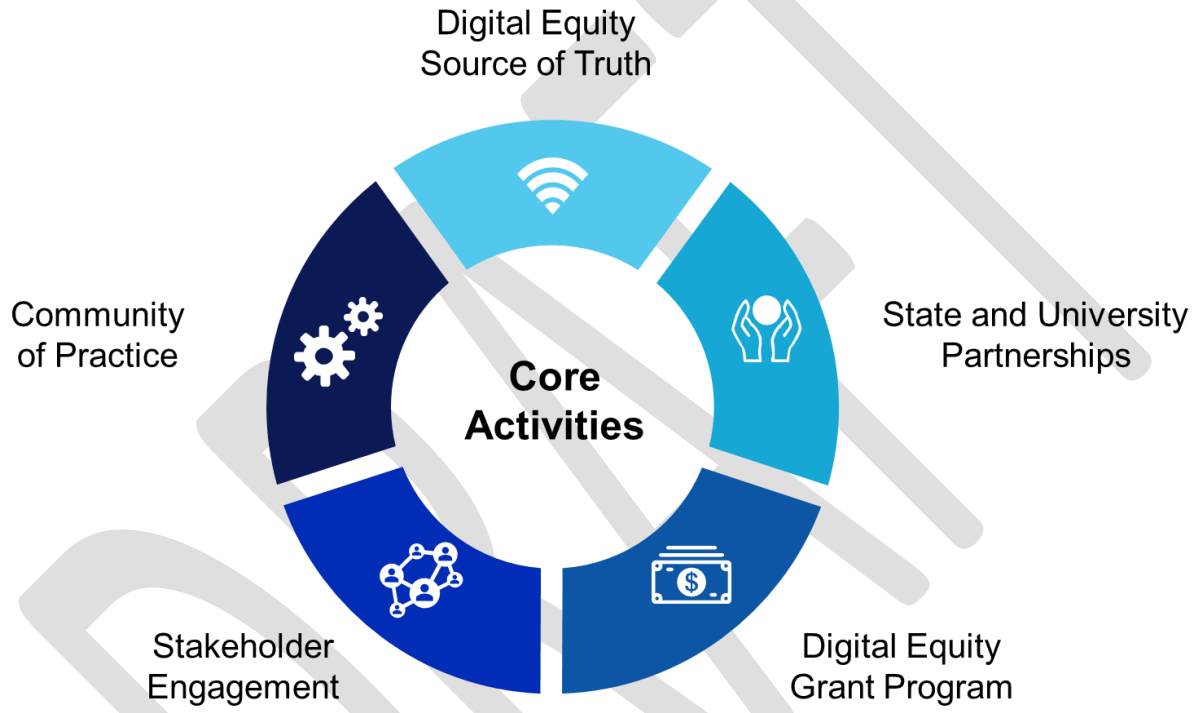
This important work will be led and orchestrated by conducting the following five core activities:

1. Maintain and make available an Illinois digital equity data sets to serve as the common source of truth. To support the state's digital equity practitioners to all be working from a common fact base, IOB/IBL will create and maintain a publicly available dataset ant tools which can be leveraged by digital equity practitioners around the state; a public-facing dashboard to track key metrics and KPIs, a public-facing asset inventory, and make ongoing updates to the IL SDEP.
2. Lead select statewide programming and university partnerships. IOB/IBL will coordinate state-wide programming on priority state-wide and regional projects, as well as research partnerships with universities, some of which will be coordinated with other state agencies.
3. Execute a state-wide digital equity grant program. IOB/IBL will facilitate a digital equity grant program which will fund programming which will provide resources to digital equity programs around the state.
4. Conduct ongoing stakeholder outreach and engagement. IOB/IBL will conduct and support stakeholder engagement across regions, and in communities to ensure the voices of residents and digital equity practitioners continue to shape the digital equity priorities and approaches.

5. **Support and sustain a digital equity community of practice.** IOB/IBL will foster partnerships and collaboration between new and existing organizations so that they may expand their impact by sharing knowledge and resources.

These core activities are further described in sections 5.1.1.2 – 5.1.1.7 below.

Figure 36: Core implementation activities of the Illinois Office of Broadband and Illinois Broadband Lab.



Members of the IBL will lead a subset of core activities, while local and regional leaders will champion the remaining activities. The state also plans to continue its core digital equity and inclusion programming (i.e., Broadband READY grants, the Digital Equity Capacity Kickstarter Program, Digital Navigators, etc.) to prepare for and complement the forthcoming digital equity programming.

5.1.1.1 Digital equity source of truth

Understanding the current state of digital equity in Illinois, as well as the gap between the current and desired states, depends on data. Determining the impact of programs and progress toward the goal of digital equity requires data as well. Hence, having a common source of truth for the work of digital equity throughout the state—especially the work driven by the IOB and IBL—will be critical to our work.

The IOB and the IBL plan to maintain publicly available dashboards and asset inventories that statewide partners can use to establish baselines and track progress on digital equity in Illinois. These tools will incorporate multiple metrics related to access, adoption, devices, and more—all of which will align with the state's broadband priorities. The resulting information and insights will allow the state to allocate funds appropriately, so that every Illinoisan has access to high-speed internet.

Key steps in creating this digital equity source of truth include:

- Creation and maintenance of a public-facing dashboard to track key metrics and KPIs
- Creation and maintenance of a public-facing asset inventory
- Ongoing updates to the IL SDEP

IOB/IBL expects that the state will lead the creation and updates of this DE source of truth. The IBL will focus on building and maintaining the public-facing dashboard, asset inventory, and the SDEP. Regional partners will help to build the asset inventory to ensure that the central inventory accurately reflects the programming in their areas.

5.1.1.2 State and university partnerships

While much of the work targeted for support by the IOB/IBL will take place at the local level, the IOB/IBL will lead several initiatives directly, in partnership with state agencies and universities at the state-wide level. Examples of current work led by the state office include Broadband READY

grants, the Digital Equity Kickstarter program, and the state-wide digital equity navigators network, among many others. Several of these programs are summarized below:

Broadband READY. A key component of the planned operating model is engaging regional and local partners via the Broadband READY program, which was established in 2020.[355] The Broadband READY program is made up of 10 distinct regions spanning the entire state. Each READY region has local reach and community presence, which the IBL plans to expand through this work. In highly active cities and counties of the state, the IBL will also work directly with established digital equity programs.

In partnership with Broadband READY and active cities and counties, the IBL hopes to:

- Incorporate critical community-level insights from regional and local partners, which will help the state to customize approaches to each region
- Partner with local, known, accessible points-of-contact throughout the regions to facilitate engagement with community organizations
- Partner with regional and local capacity-to-scale efforts to reach all members of underrepresented communities
- Standardize state-wide processes for collecting data, tracking KPIs, and evaluating programs' effectiveness at the local and regional levels.

Digital Equity Capacity Kickstarter program. In addition to the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant program, the Digital Equity Capacity Kickstarter program represents an integral and strategic component of the state's Connect Illinois vision and commitment to broadband access and use. Applications must cover one or more of the following categories related to access, adoption, and use:

[355] Broadband Regional Engagement for Adoption + Digital Equity

- Outreach and adoption: Facilitate awareness of and enrollment in low-cost broadband programs, such as the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).
- Digital skill-building, navigation, and use: Serve as primary point of contact for community members seeking guidance and support for digital literacy, digital skill-building, device access, and home broadband needs; provide advice, assistance, and tech support to community members on the use of digital tools and platforms; and coach, train, and guide residents individually or in groups on how to use their home internet service and devices to meet their day-to-day needs and achieve their goals.
- Community Technology Center access: Establish, administer, and expand Community Technology Centers (CTCs) to support basic computer literacy training programs offered at these centers; and provide access to computers, internet connectivity, and related training to Illinois communities with demonstrable need
- Access expansion feasibility: Identify and advance a community's vision and goals for broadband access; evaluate market options, consumer demand, and stakeholder alignment; engage internet service providers and build public-sector leadership; and consider next steps for a public-private partnership, grant funding, etc. to increase broadband access and connectivity.

The program announced its first set of awards in September 2023 and will continue to do so on a rolling basis until available funds are depleted. The program will serve a bridge to the forthcoming State Digital Capacity Grant Program. [356]

Digital Navigator Program. In September 2023, the IBL launched a statewide cohort of digital navigator fellows to plan and coordinate local digital equity programs. The fellows will provide on-the-ground support for digital skills and computer training; raise awareness and participation in the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP); support the efforts of local governments, collaborators, and community organizations in identifying local digital equity barriers; launch

[356] Digital Equity Capacity Kickstarter Program NOFO

programs and services that address unique local needs; and ensure that Illinoisans of all incomes and backgrounds can access the benefits of high-speed internet. At least one digital navigator fellow will be hired for a one-year term to work alongside existing Broadband Regional Engagement for Adoption + Digital Equity (READY) teams in each of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Opportunity's 10 regions. Assigned to the university or economic development authority leading Broadband READY efforts within each region, digital navigator fellows will support the efforts of local governments, collaborator agencies, and community organizations to identify local digital equity barriers and to launch programs and services that address unique local needs. [357]

Through partnerships with state agencies and universities, the state plans to:

- Collaborate with state agencies on select, shared priorities and aligned programs (e.g., workforce, education)
- Work with universities to define and execute a research agenda, which may include topics related to broadband use and high-priority focus areas, such as tele-health and digital agriculture.

In addition, IOB/IBL plans to collaborate with state leaders who lead partnerships with workforce agencies, labor organizations, and institutes of higher education across the state to scale the digital skills workforce. More specifically, the state will engage with relevant stakeholders to:

1. Support state agencies in implementing the digital literacy components of their strategic plans and programming portfolios, like the DCEO's Office of Employment and Training (OET)'s digital literacy components in its State of Illinois WIOA Unified State Plan and workforce programming.[358]

[357] Illinois launches statewide digital navigator program, Illinois Broadband Lab
[358] 2020 – 2024 State of Illinois WIOA Unified State Plan; Workforce Development, DCEO

2. Collaborate with manufacturing-focused organizations like the Illinois Manufacturer's Association (IMA) or the IMA Education Foundation (IMAEF) to scale programs that increase digital literacy skills in the manufacturing workforce.[359]
3. Support EV and clean energy-focused initiatives like the state's Electrify Illinois or DCEO's CEJA Workforce Program to integrate digital literacy skill-building into its training programs.[360]
4. Collaborate with state agencies (e.g., DCEO, ICCB, Illinois Department of Employment Security [IDES], and IDHS) to scale digital literacy and workforce development programs.[361]
5. Work with local governments to share best practices and to encourage residents to attend educational workforce development programs through scholarships, internships, and employer incentives (sourced from City of Harvey Broadband Strategic Plan[362]).
6. Work with state agencies (e.g., the IDES, the IDES American Job Centers, and DCEO's workNet Center) to share and promote digital economy opportunities with job-seekers.

5.1.1.3 Digital Equity Competitive Grant program

The digital equity plans shared by local governments, as well as feedback from local non-profits and residents, have all resoundingly confirmed that adequate resourcing is critical to successfully achieving the state's digital equity goal. The need for funding is discussed in nearly all of the county and city digital equity plans that were incorporated into this state digital equity plan. Moreover, the need to build capacity for digital inclusion work was conveyed at most listening sessions.

To fill these gaps, IOB/IBL intends to run a digital equity competitive grant program that will fund community-driven, well designed, and compelling programming. This core activity will:

[359] IMAEF Education Foundation Seeks Measures to Increase Training Opportunities, Strengthen Workforce
[360] Training and Degree Programs, Illinois Drives Electric; CEJA Workforce Programs, DCEO
[361] Broadband Strategic Plan, City of Harvey, September 2021
[362] IDES IllinoisJobLink.com; Illinois workNET

- Provide funding to support high-performing programs that have a track record of measurable success and support from the communities they serve.
- Seed and support new, innovative programs that take a test-and-learn approach.[363] This activity may include:
  - Designating funds specifically for innovative ("test and learn") programs instead of established ("tried and true") programs, while ensuring that the former have a distinct set of goals and KPIs
  - Implementing grantee selection criteria favoring applications that leverage insights from recent pilot programs or similar programs in applicants' communities
  - Establishing methods to ensure that grantees applying test-and-learn approaches are not penalized for failed experiments but are supported in implementing contingency plans that achieve intended objectives.
- Encourage collaborative partnerships (e.g., between state agencies and universities):
  - Partnerships between and among county governments, universities, and community organizations already exist and provide learning and scaling opportunities (e.g., community college device distribution programs in partnership with local and county governments). [364,365]
  - The state will consider implementing grantee-selection criteria that favor applications from entities working in partnership with other community organizations or local government partners.

[363] Examples of recent initiatives that take an innovative approach include mobile public Wi-Fi pilots (e.g., school buses equipped with hotspots, as described by attendees of the Southwest region listening session on March 16 and the Southeast region listening session [Effingham] on March 22) and farmers' use of "grain tower satellites," as mentioned at a Southeast listening session on March 22.

[364] East Central listening session on 4/13; Central listening session, April 25

[365] East Central region listening session (Danville Area Community College), April 13

- Institute performance measures and reporting mechanisms that incorporate the principles of culturally relevant evaluation, including but not limited to[366]:
  - Publishing criteria for grant applications, selection, and evaluation for public comment and review
  - Ensuring that internal review committees are diverse and committed to responding to cultural context
  - Leveraging various assessment methods in measurement criteria—including quantitative and qualitative outcomes—to evaluate an intervention's impact through benchmarks outlined in published evaluation criteria
  - Encourage partnerships with philanthropic and potentially other local government funding sources to drive sustainability.

Across the digital equity plans developed by local governments and feedback provided by residents and non-profits during listening sessions, a range of potential programs have been identified, including:

- Expanding device distribution programs to include additional support (e.g., digital literacy programming, system updates, troubleshooting, and hardware repairs) to improve devices' durability and functionality[367]
- Individualizing digital literacy curriculum to address a wide range of needs—including one-to-one support, multi-generational training, and task-based training—to meet individuals "where they are"[368]
- User training with respect to cybersecurity, privacy, and other digital safety matters
- Remote learning or telehealth services/facilities

[366] See Section 5.1.3 below for additional details on how the IBL intends to apply culturally relevant assessment processes.
[367] City of Chicago listening session on 5/3; Central listening session on 4/25 – 4/26
[368] City of Chicago listening session on 4/19

- Digital literacy/upskilling (from beginner-level to advanced)
- Computer science, coding and cybersecurity education programs
- Broadband sign-up assistance and programs that provide technology support
- Multi-lingual outreach to support adoption and digital literacy
- Prisoner education to promote pre-release digital literacy, job skills, online job acquisition skills, etc.
- Digital navigators.

While IO/IBL will run the statewide competitive grant program, regional and local partners will be engaged to provide technical assistance to local applicants and will also share relevant regional context with IBL to support its decision-making.

5.1.1.4 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement will remain a core activity throughout the implementation process so that feedback on IBL programming and practices can influence the direction of programming. To actively engage a diverse group of stakeholders, the IBL will continue to involve representatives from the following groups: (1) government entities, including local government bodies and state agencies; (2) service providers; (3) other private companies, including small businesses; (4) non-profits and community organizations; and (5) residents and the organizations that serve them, with a focus on engaging members of covered populations.

To ensure broad representation, stakeholder engagement will entail a combination of in-person events, virtual events, surveys, and publications. These activities will include continuing quarterly State Agency Working Group meetings, quarterly statewide meetings about broadband deployment and digital equity, and biweekly IBL newsletter updates. At the local level, IOB/ILB will coordinate with regional partners to identify the stakeholder-engagement forums and schedule that best suit each community.

The IOB originally set out to meet four objectives in its engagement of key stakeholders: (1) understanding affected groups' experiences and perspectives to inform the BEAD and State Digital Equity plans; (2) sharing information about the upcoming federal funding opportunity, the work already underway by the Office of Broadband and the Illinois Broadband Lab, and the work ahead; (3) enabling existing partners and forming new partnerships with key stakeholders who are committed to the mission of equitable, inclusive broadband access; and (4) building long-term capacity for all impacted communities and key stakeholders through support, transparency, and feedback. Looking toward the future, engaging stakeholders as an ongoing part of the implementation process will allow a variety of perspectives to be incorporated and will facilitate continued collaboration with the underrepresented communities the IBL seeks to serve.

The IBL plans to partner with local and regional champions to obtain feedback on ongoing digital equity programs, as local or regional champions are likely to have more frequent, in-person contacts with their communities. Many already have developed trusted relationships with practitioners and residents in their regions. In support, the IBL plans to periodically convene local and regional champions to gather feedback that it can use to make regular improvements.

5.1.1.5 Community of Practice

Many digital equity practitioners have already convened to support digital equity ecosystems across the state. Increased funding and programming for digital equity will open up opportunities to build systems in which best practices, lessons learned, and potential improvements can be shared, compiled, enhanced, and disseminated. Respondents to the IOB/IBL's survey of non-profits and community organizations expressed support for building communities of practice. In response to the question, "How can the Illinois Office of Broadband/the State of Illinois support you in creating programs to foster internet connectivity among the residents you serve?", 46% of respondents indicated that they would like the state to create forums where they could connect with other organizations with similar goals. Forty-six

percent of respondents said that they would like the state to share best practices, and 42% of respondents stated that they would like to receive technical support from the state.[369]

To meet this need, the State of Illinois plans to foster partnerships and collaboration between new and existing organizations so that they may expand their impact by sharing knowledge and resources. Creating partnerships with local digital equity champions will strengthen individual programs and benefit the broader digital equity system as a whole. Leaders of different programs across regions will have a venue for learning about what is working and what is being tested in different parts of the state. Over time, as the state gathers these insights on best practices and effective solutions, the resulting findings can shape programs and improve their outcomes.

The IBL anticipates that "communities of practice" can be supported at a regional level and can include members of local organizations, nonprofits, libraries, universities, community governments, and community members. Through quarterly or monthly meetings, these communities could share findings and best practices, build capabilities within and across the community, and leverage local experts and support networks. The state expects to convene periodic, state-wide meetings to strengthen communities of practice through the following activities:

- Providing opportunities to share insights and best practices so that communities' impact can be felt across the state, to include the codification of best practices.
- Highlighting the impact of, and findings from, the ongoing work of libraries and universities, which can serve as hubs for digital equity practitioners and researchers.
- Reviewing feedback received from communities to identify any common needs or additional areas of support required.

[369] IBL's online survey to non-profits and community organizations, analyzed on 09/01/2023, with N = 26.

5.1.2 Measures to ensure a sustainable, effective plan for all state communities

The IOB and IBL aspire to establish a sustainable plan for building and nurturing lasting programs and to create programs that achieve the intended impact, goals, and objectives. The specific activities that IOB/IBL will undertake to reach this goal are summarized below.

Sustainability

To meet goals for sustainability, the IOB will incorporate measures to ensure the effectiveness of (1) the overall State Digital Equity Plan, and (2) the sustainability of individual programs funded by the capacity grant.

For the State Digital Equity Plan, the IOB plans to take the following measures:

1. Secure annual federal funding for the state: The IOB/ILB will ensure that the requirements of the Digital Equity Capacity Grant program are fulfilled annually so that Illinois can obtain its fair share of federal funding for digital equity.
2. Identify and apply for other federal grants: Additional funding sources will enable the IOB to expand its impact and to build programs that last beyond the implementation activities funded by the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant.
3. Choose local partners that have established relationships with covered populations: The IOB understands that fostering digital equity in communities requires trust-based relationships, which are built over time. To evaluate programs for potential funding, the IOB must determine whether applicants have trusted relationships with the populations they seek to serve.
4. Work with local digital equity leaders to support action: The work of digital equity has gone on for many years. Obtaining the insight of experienced experts is critical to ensuring that funds are invested well, and that programs have impact.
5. Maintain and grow public-private partnerships: Partnerships with non-profits, corporates, and philanthropic entities will expand available resourcing and enhance the potential impact of the state's digital equity efforts.

To ensure the sustainability of individual programs that are funded by the capacity grant, the IOB plans to:

1. **Encourage partners to provide matching funds in grant applications:** External matching funds can help to ensure the longevity of individual programs by expanding the number of entities that have an interest in the program's success.
2. **Consider offering low-interest loans:** The IOB is considering this financing structure in addition to traditional grant awards. This approach could provide regenerative funding to support even more programs across the state.
3. **Provide technical assistance to grantees:** This assistance would support regional groups of grantees in troubleshooting and addressing the typical challenges community organizations face in delivering digital equity programs. The state hopes that such support will improve execution and outcomes, enabling programs to have greater impact over time.

Effectiveness

To meet these goals, the IOB will incorporate measures to ensure the effectiveness of (1) the overall State Digital Equity Plan, and (2) individual programs funded by the capacity grant.

To enhance the effectiveness of the State Digital Equity Plan, the IOB will take the following five measures:

1. **Assess overall progress toward targets and objectives across programs:** The IOB will measure progress toward original targets to ensure that efforts align with originally stated objectives.
2. **Assess progress over time toward targeted impact:** Beyond the specifically outlined objectives, the state is committed to realizing the overarching vision of deploying broadband and equity programs. To this end, the IOB may form research partnerships with universities to capture the long-term impacts of funded programming on the state's digital equity goals.
3. **Audit financial plans and compare them to actual funding allocation across programs:** Performing periodic audits to compare the planned use of funds to their actual use will help to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse.

4. Collect feedback for ongoing program updates: Through core activities like engaging stakeholders and creating communities of practice, the IOB will obtain critical input for shaping the digital equity program.
5. Incorporation of feedback from stakeholders: The IOB will ensure that feedback received from stakeholders on the program and plan is incorporated into decision-making on programming priorities and goals.

To ensure the effectiveness of individual programs funded through the capacity grant, the IOB will take four measures:

1. Understand eligible subgrantee qualifications: Understanding their qualifications will ensure that eventual subgrantees are well-equipped to carry out the programs for which they have received grants.
2. Select subgrantees that lay out comparatively compelling plans: When selecting subgrantees, the IOB will publish the criteria it will use to assess applications for digital equity funding. Choosing the most compelling plans will assure progress toward achieving digital equity.
3. Assess progress and impact using key performance indicators (KPIs) and financial information: Ongoing assessment of key program targets will ensure that each program continually prioritizes the most effective approaches.
4. Conduct oversight and audit activities: The IOB plans to deploy mechanisms like periodic reporting and site visits to gain comprehensive understanding of grantees' work and how it aligns with the state's overall objectives.

5.1.3 Mechanisms to ensure the plan is regularly evaluated and updated

Critical to the State Digital Equity Plan's overall success—which depends on making measurable progress toward our objectives and goals—is the state's ability to understand the funded programs' outcomes and impact, and then to correct and/or update programs and plans based on those findings.

To accomplish this goal, the IOB will incorporate the following mechanisms to regularly evaluate and update the plan.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the IL SDEP and individual program performance is based on the following assessments:

1. **The trajectory of KPIs that measure the long-term outcomes of digital equity programs:** For operational, leading, impact, and lagging metrics, the state will partner with higher educational entities to assess the impact of state programs on long-term outcomes. By taking this approach, the SDEP aims to assess the impact of both direct and indirect variables on program participants and target populations.
2. **Aggregated performance and/or outputs of the plan with respect to measured goals:** The state will apply a similar approach to ensure that the program is meeting short- and long-term KPI targets. KPI targets may vary for programs taking an innovative approach, and grantees will be asked to provide whole-group statistics and subgroup statistics (e.g., performance specific to groups of shared socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic minorities, etc.) where possible. The state plans to use review panels that include various stakeholder groups when analyzing performance data.
3. **Performance versus plan/target for individual, funded projects:** A review committee will assess each program against impact criteria. The committee will account for the relevant cultural context of each program. Data collection instruments and parameters for acceptable evidence will be reviewed in advance of program implementation to ensure accuracy and alignment.

The IOB recognizes that some approaches to evaluation may not be sensitive to the needs, perspectives and circumstances of ethnic communities. With the support of the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA), which is part of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's College of Education, the IOB/IBL plans to select and apply a culturally

responsive framework to its assessment processes.[370] The state plans to implement these principles at each phase of the evaluation and/or assessment processes outlined below. Note that descriptions of each stage of the process are drawn from the framework but are not direct quotes.

Nine phases of culturally relevant assessments can be applied[371]:

1. Preparing for the assessment:
    a. Build a diverse selection of grantees and evaluation committees, with careful consideration of the digital equity program's sociocultural context.
    b. Ensure that team members understand and commit to accounting for the cultural context of all Illinoisians.
2. Engaging stakeholders:
    a. Ensure that engaged stakeholders are representative of the underrepresented communities the grant program seeks to serve so that individuals from all sectors can offer input.
    b. Encourage grantees to share how they would engage with underrepresented communities over the course of the program.
3. Identifying the assessment's purpose and intent:
    c. Evaluate the grant process periodically to ensure that cultural nuances are captured and used to interpret progress and conduct summative evaluations.
    d. Evaluate progress inspired by the grants to determine whether goals and program parameters are appropriate for the target population.

[371] Source: *A Guide To Conducting Culturally Responsive Evaluations* by Henry T. Frierson, Stafford Hood, and Gerunda B. Hughes, as published in 2002 User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation by Division of Research, Evaluation and Communication National Science Foundation

4. Framing the right questions:
    a. Employ mechanisms for responding to concerns raised by key stakeholders regarding the suitability of particular inquiries.
    b. Publish a definition of "acceptable evidence" for public comment on evaluation criteria prior to implementation.
5. Designing the assessment:
    a. Consider quantitative and qualitative formats and how responses to an intervention will be measured before and after testing.
    b. Measure the impact of an intervention based on benchmarks outlined in published evaluation criteria.
6. Selecting and adapting instrumentation:
    a. Refine and adapt data collection instruments—even if previously used—to ensure that they accurately relay information about the population.
    b. Address unforeseen reporting challenges as part of mid-year reporting.
7. Collecting data:
    a. Leverage different channels—like surveys—for distribution of data collection instruments.
    b. Provide space in applications for general comments and anecdotal or contextually relevant information.
    c. Institute mechanisms for flagging potential barriers to engagement in applications.
8. Analyzing data:
    a. Convene review panels that include various stakeholder groups to generate fresh findings.
    b. Disaggregate datasets to uncover findings that are buried among whole-group statistics.
    c. Ensure that the internal review committee is committed to responding to cultural context.

9. **Disseminating and using the results**:
    a. Publish grant awardees' names with an explanation of the process and results.
    b. Establish an ongoing public reporting schedule to give the public access to grantees' work.

Updating the plan

To ensure the plan is regularly updated, the IOB will incorporate the following mechanisms:

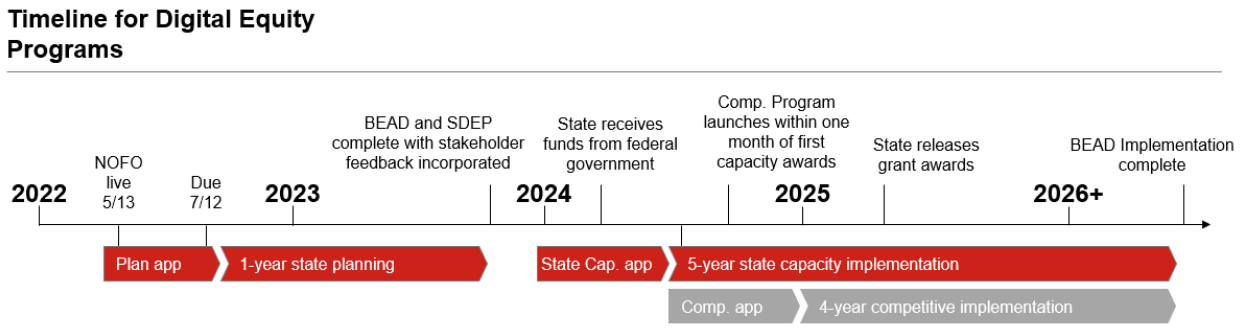
1. **Require multi-year subgrantees to submit periodic reports, including any project/program modifications:** These reports will be incorporated into the state's revisions to its plan and will allow the IBL to update plans to reflect component programs' anticipated trajectory.
2. **Seek and incorporate feedback for plan updates:** The IBL expects to pair plan updates with stakeholder engagement to allow for public comment on proposed plan updates.
3. **Revise SDEP to reflect new information and ideas:** The IBL will incorporate identified needs, updates on progress, stakeholder feedback, and revised approaches and goals to ensure that plan updates are both comprehensive and aspirational.

These principles for program evaluations and updates ensure that programs remain aligned with the state's goals and objectives for the IL SDEP.

5.2 Timeline

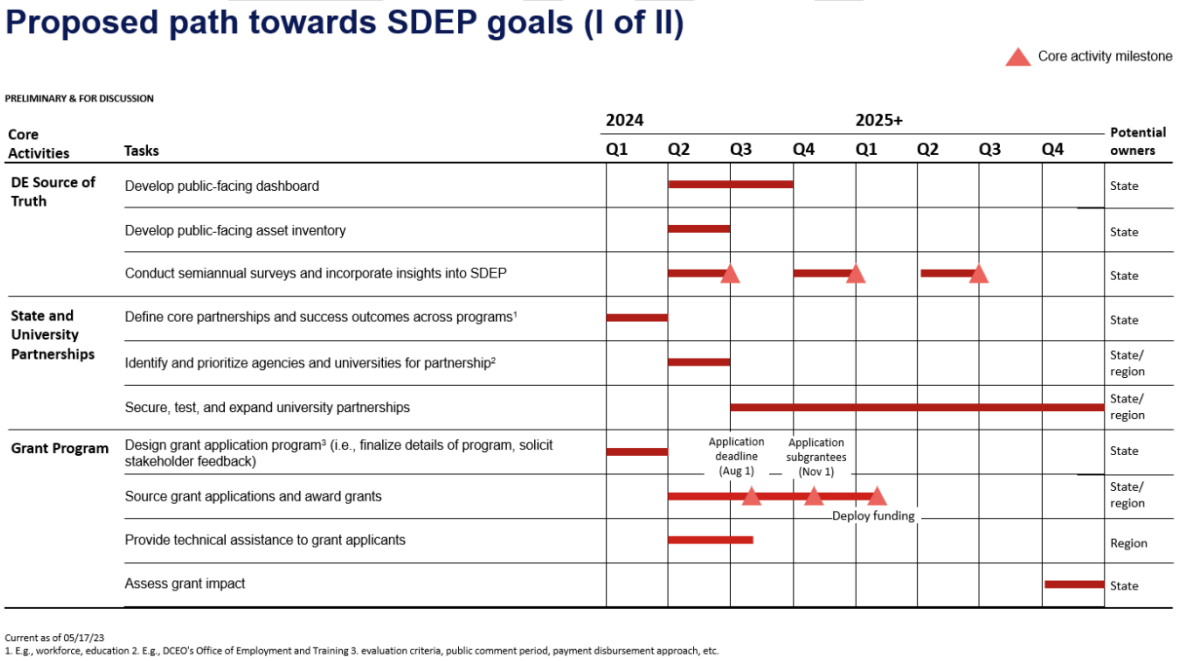
The State of Illinois has begun to map out the timeline for implementing the IL SDEP (: 20). The submission of the IL SDEP completes one year of state planning after receiving the State Digital Equity Planning Grant. The state plans to complete the application for the Digital Equity Capacity-Building Grant Program in early 2024 and to initiate a yearly subgrantee process that aligns with the yearly release of capacity funds over five years. Currently, little information has been made public about the timeline of the Digital Equity Capacity-Building Grant Program NOFO. Any delays in this process could impact the estimated timeline of the IL SDEP.

Figure 37: High-level timeline of acquisition and deployment of Digital Equity Program funding.



To deliver on this overall timing, the state has assigned an execution timeline and milestone dates to key tasks under each of the core activities, as shown in Figure 21. The timeline includes tasks led by the state, the region, or both.

Figure 38: Timeline of proposed path forward for delivery of Digital Equity Program.



6 Conclusion

The IL SDEP outlines the State of Illinois' priorities and goals for improving broadband adoption by all Illinoisans through broadband availability and affordability, online accessibility and inclusivity, digital literacy, online privacy and cybersecurity, and device availability and affordability.

This plan has been informed by direct engagement with stakeholders throughout Illinois, including residents, community organizations, internet service providers, local governments, and state agency representatives. Insights gained from stakeholder engagement and statewide research efforts have laid bare the digital divide in the state of Illinois and its disproportionate

effect on residents who belong to covered populations. The goal of this plan is to enable populations with the education and tools necessary to fully leverage digital assets that are powered by reliable, high-speed internet, so that all Illinoisians can fully participate in the digital economy and the digital ecosystem.

7 Appendix

7.1 Statewide internet use residential phone survey

The statewide internet use residential phone survey was conducted from 05/01/2023 to 07/28/2023. Participants are randomly selected, and the state collected 1907 responses over the three-month period. Weighting is applied to the sample to match the demographics of respondents to the demographics of Illinois, accounting for the distribution of region (i.e., Chicagoland, urban, and rural), age, income, and ethnicity. See Figure 40 below for the demographic breakdown post weighting. See Figure 40 for the list of questions asked in the phone survey.

Figure 39: Demographics of respondents of residential phone survey.

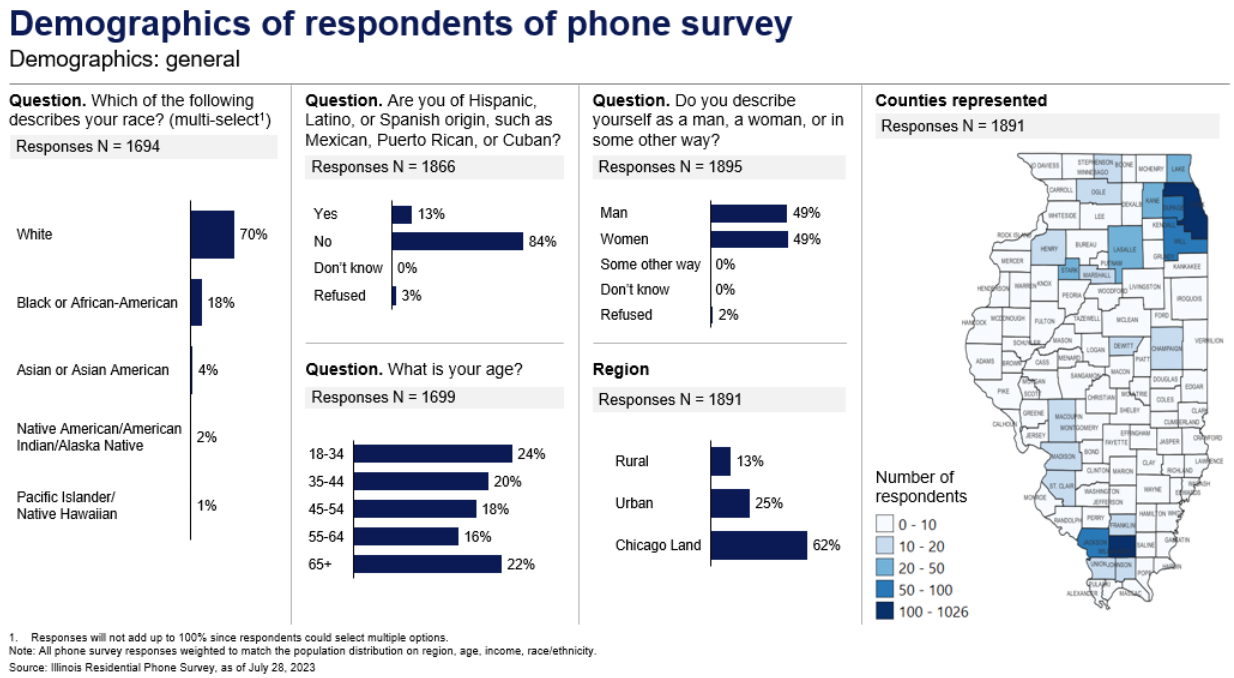
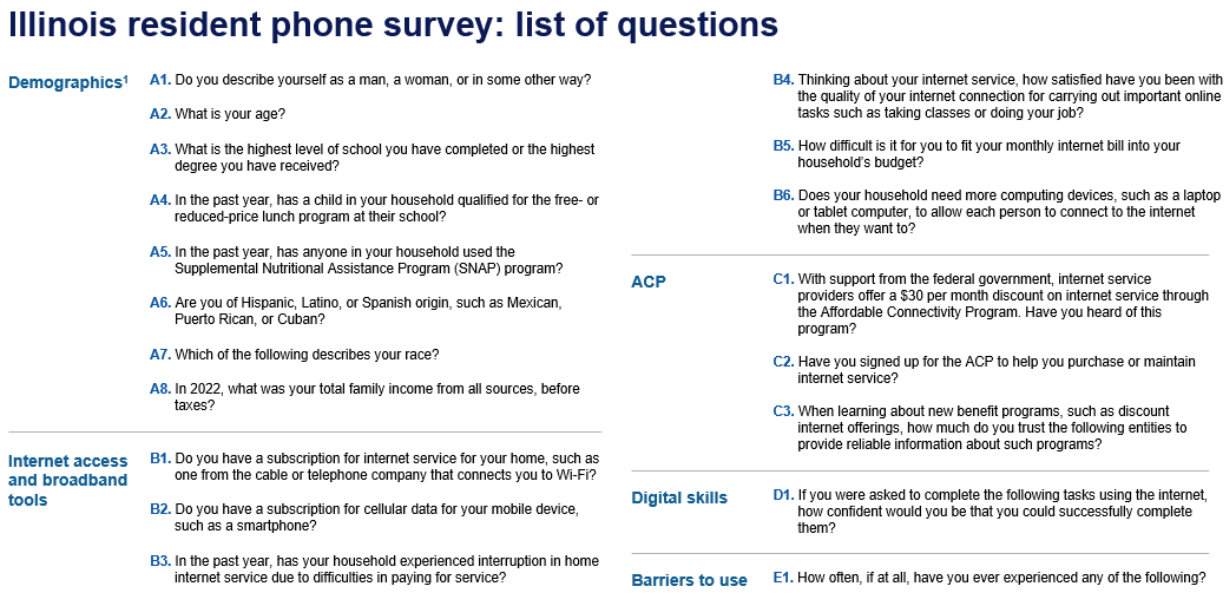


Figure 40: List of questions asked in the residential phone survey.



Illinois resident phone survey: list of questions

Demographics[1]

- **A1.** Do you describe yourself as a man, a woman, or in some other way?
- **A2.** What is your age?
- **A3.** What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
- **A4.** In the past year, has a child in your household qualified for the free- or reduced-price lunch program at their school?
- **A5.** In the past year, has anyone in your household used the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) program?
- **A6.** Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban?
- **A7.** Which of the following describes your race?
- **A8.** In 2022, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?

Internet access and broadband tools

- **B1.** Do you have a subscription for internet service for your home, such as one from the cable or telephone company that connects you to Wi-Fi?
- **B2.** Do you have a subscription for cellular data for your mobile device, such as a smartphone?
- **B3.** In the past year, has your household experienced interruption in home internet service due to difficulties in paying for service?
- **B4.** Thinking about your internet service, how satisfied have you been with the quality of your internet connection for carrying out important online tasks such as taking classes or doing your job?
- **B5.** How difficult is it for you to fit your monthly internet bill into your household's budget?
- **B6.** Does your household need more computing devices, such as a laptop or tablet computer, to allow each person to connect to the internet when they want to?

ACP

- **C1.** With support from the federal government, internet service providers offer a $30 per month discount on internet service through the Affordable Connectivity Program. Have you heard of this program?
- **C2.** Have you signed up for the ACP to help you purchase or maintain internet service?
- **C3.** When learning about new benefit programs, such as discount internet offerings, how much do you trust the following entities to provide reliable information about such programs?

Digital skills

- **D1.** If you were asked to complete the following tasks using the internet, how confident would you be that you could successfully complete them?

Barriers to use

- **E1.** How often, if at all, have you ever experienced any of the following?

7.2 Statewide internet use residential web survey

The statewide internet use residential web survey was conducted from 05/01/2023 to 09/01/2023. Link to the survey was distributed to residents through multiple stakeholder engagement channels, including state-wide listening tour, IBL bi-weekly newsletter, and outreach emails to partnering organizations to share with residents. Over the four-month period, 7,593 residents participated in the web survey. No weighting is applied to the survey result, and demographics of the respondents reflect the demographics of residents who chose to participate in the survey. See Figure 42 below for the demographic breakdown and Figure 42 for the list of questions asked in the web survey.

Figure 41: Demographics of respondents of residential web survey.

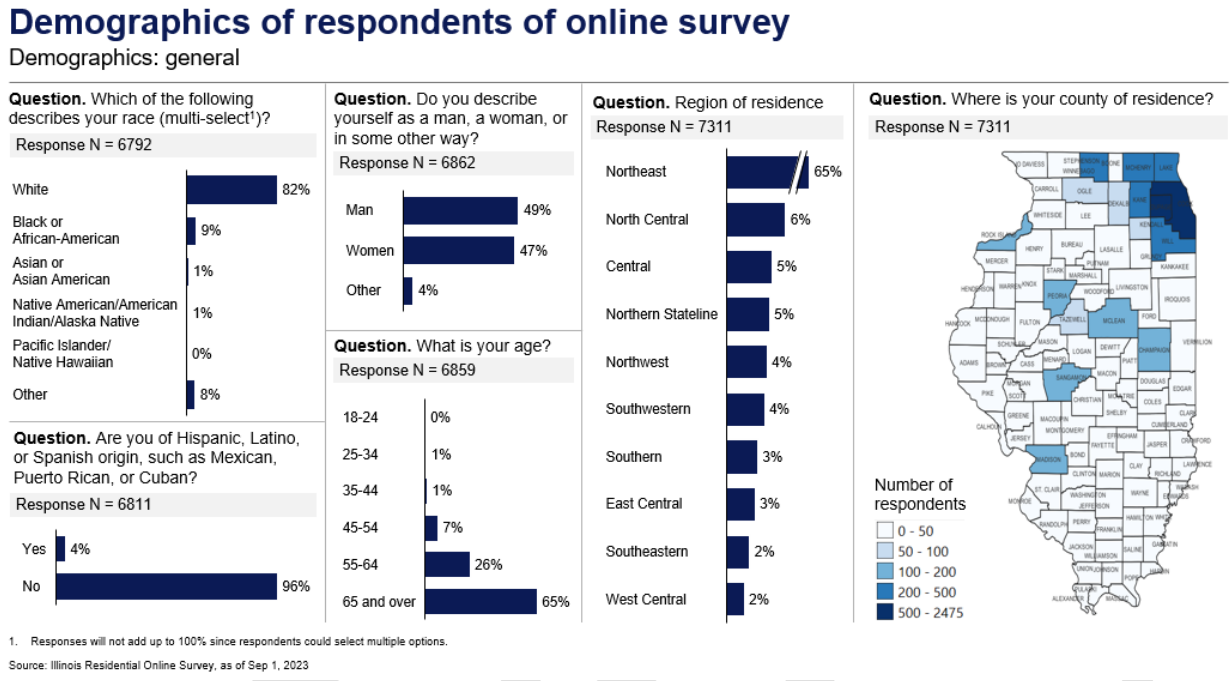
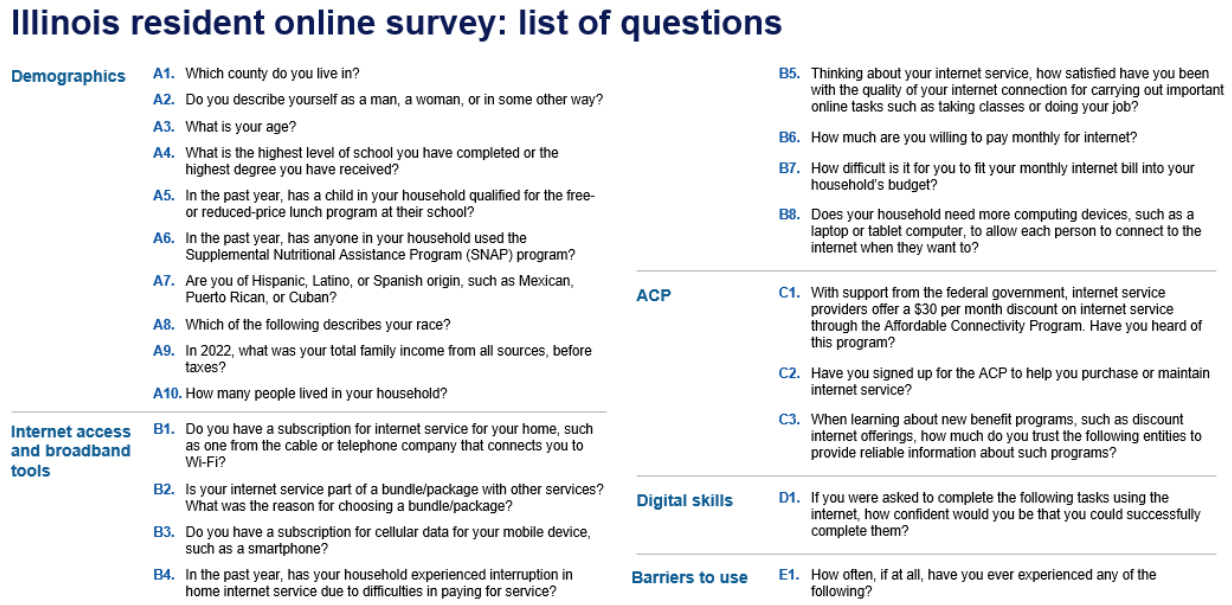


Figure 42: List of questions asked in the residential web survey.



7.3 Statewide internet use non-profit and community organization web survey

The statewide internet use residential web survey was conducted from 05/01/2023 to 09/01/2023. Link to the survey was distributed to non-profits and community organizations through multiple stakeholder engagement channels, including state-wide listening tour, IBL bi-weekly newsletter, and outreach emails to relevant organizations. Over the four-month period, 43 organizations participated in the web survey. No weighting is applied to the survey result. See Figure 44 below for the information on participating organizations and Figure 44 for the list of questions asked in the web survey.

Figure 43: Information on participants of non-profit and community organization web survey.

Basic information

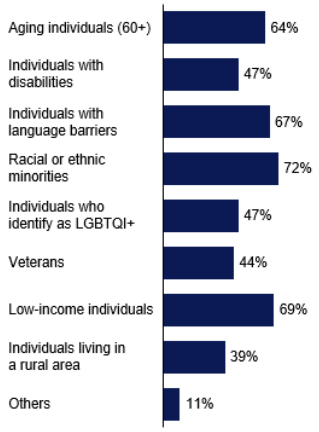
Question. Which non-profit or community organization do you represent?

Response N = 43

- Community Support Organizations (11)
- Economic Development Groups (6)
- Community colleges/schools (5)
- The Literacy Connection (5)
- County Farm Bureau (5)
- Minority Support Groups (5)
- AARP (4)
- Elderly Services (2)

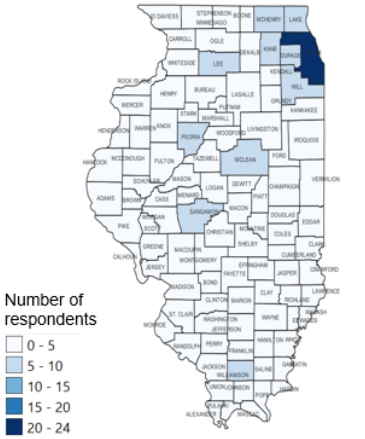
Question. Which of the following Covered Populations does the organization serve?

Response N = 36[1]



Question. Which county/counties does the non-profit or community organization serve?

Response N = 37[1]



1. Responses does not add up to N or 100% since respondents can select multiple options

Source: Illinois Residential Online Survey, as of Sep 1, 2023

Figure 44: List of questions asked in the non-profits and community organizations web survey.

Illinois non-profits and community organizations online survey: list of questions

Basic Information	**A1.** Which non-profit or community organization do you represent?
	A2. At the non-profit or community organization, what is your department or line of work?
	A3. Which county/counties does the non-profit or community organization serve?
	A4. How many Illinois residents does the organization serve in a year?
	A5. Which of the following Covered Populations does the organization serve?
Challenges facing community org.	**B1.** Which of the following challenges to accessing an internet connection does your organization face?
	B2. If the organization and/or the people you serve had better access to internet, what types of additional programming would you run?
	B3. What benefits would you expect to see if the organization and/or the people you serve had better access to internet?
Challenges facing residents	**C1.** To the best of your knowledge, what are the reasons why the residents your organization serves do not have internet connection at home?
	C2. What are the reasons why the residents your organization serves do not effectively or productively use the internet?
Actions and programs to close the divide	**D1.** What actions is the organization currently taking to increase access to affordable internet, internet capable devices, and digital skills?
	D2. What are the biggest challenges faced by the organization when trying to increase access to affordable internet, internet capable devices, and digital skills?
Devices	**E1.** Please list or provide a link to the programs your organization offers that are focused on increasing access to affordable internet, internet capable devices, and digital skills.
	E2. What is the approximate number of people served annually by each of your programs?
	E3. Which programs are the most used by residents?
	E4. What types of devices does your organization share on-site?
	E5. How many devices does your program make available for onsite use?
Partnerships and support from IOB	**F1.** What partners are the organization working with to increase access to affordable internet, internet capable devices, and digital skills?
	F2. How can Illinois Office of Broadband / the State of Illinois support you in creating programs to foster internet connectivity among residents you serve?