



Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND
JB Pritzker, Governor



Seizing the Broadband Moment

Last year, the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society wrote about our '[Broadband Moment](#)' — that is, the confluence of pandemic-induced need for ubiquitous access to reliable, high-quality, affordable broadband with appropriate policy solutions and the political will to enact meaningful change. “We are facing a digital chasm...if we do not act and the cluster of digital divides gets larger, longer-lasting, and harder to close,” the Benton Institute wrote. “This is the time to invest in, plan for, and engineer High-Performance Broadband for every person in America.”

As we resolve to address important endeavors in the year ahead, the Illinois Office of Broadband is committed to doing what we can to seize this broadband moment — by perfecting our historic Connect Illinois broadband grant program, building out and sustaining meaningful digital equity programming, and doing everything we can to ensure an “all hands-on deck” approach to meeting our state broadband goals and eliminating the digital divide.

Smart policy and targeted investment, including meaningful cross-sector collaborations and strong partnerships across all levels of government, will be required. To this end, we resolve to support local organizations and communities, and to leverage federal funding opportunities to the fullest.

Here's to seizing the broadband moment — and continuing our important work together!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Schmit".

Federal Funding Opportunities for Broadband in Illinois

On January 22, the Illinois Office of Broadband conducted a webinar on [Federal Funding Opportunities for Community Broadband](#). Molly Hammond, Illinois Associate Director for U.S.

Department of Agriculture Rural Development, discussed a variety of rural broadband programs administered by the federal government, specifically [Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grants](#), the [ReConnect Loan and Grant Program](#), the [Community Connect Grant](#) program, and [Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans & Loan Guarantees](#).

Matt Schmit, Director of the Illinois Office of Broadband, spoke about the Connect Illinois [Fedcelerator Framework](#), which offers guidance for Connect Illinois applicants seeking to leverage federal, state, and local funding to deploy broadband networks. This effort is designed to help maximize federal funding for Illinois deployment.

For a Connect Illinois grantee to include federal funding as the required nonstate match contribution to the Connect Illinois program, the grantee must expand the project area and number of new connections to homes, businesses, or community anchor institutions included in its federal award.

In general, the Illinois Office of Broadband may contribute up to one-third of total project costs for Connect Illinois projects that include a federal broadband award provided the:

- total Connect Illinois nonstate match is 67% or more,
- Federal award comprises no more than 50% of the Connect Illinois nonstate match,
- expanded project area includes un/underserved contiguous locations/census blocks,
- technology is scalable to at least 100/100 Mbps, and
- deployment is completed within three years.

Helpful Resources:

[Connect Illinois Fedcelerator Framework](#)

[Federal Funding Opportunities Webinar Presentation](#)

[Our Jan. 11 newsletter featuring Consolidated Appropriations Act opportunities](#)

[View the Jan. 22 Webinar](#)

Spotlight on Illinois Connected Communities

Over the next several newsletters, we will be highlighting communities participating in the first cohort of the Illinois Connected Communities (ICC) program. ICC is a year-long program comprising best practice curriculum, expert consultation, and a state grant of up to \$15,000 to assist communities in creating a broadband strategic plan to improve broadband access, adoption, and/or use.

*The Illinois Office of Broadband is currently accepting grant applications for ICC Round 2. **The application deadline has been extended 2 weeks, from January 25 to February 8, 2021.** View the [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#), or review the Jan. 14 webinar [Illinois Connected Communities Round 1 Report Out \(Tips for Round 2\)](#).*

Do you know a community that would benefit from participating in ICC Round 2? Forward them this email!

[Apply for ICC Round 2 | Deadline Feb. 8](#)

Mercer County

Mercer County, Illinois, is located along the Mississippi River just South of the Quad Cities. Access is a big challenge; large portions of the county are unable to receive broadband service. The nonprofit community and economic development organization, Mercer County Better Together, and its executive director Kyle McEwen, have helped mobilize a strong and effective steering committee. Composed of school superintendents, business and tech leaders, internet service provider representatives, and other community partners, the steering committee is in the process of engaging residents to take a speed test to measure broadband service and an internet survey to identify where access and adoption gaps exist. A number of communications strategies, including robocalls, zoom town halls, talking with parents at school pick-ups, and even radio interviews, are on the schedule to help get the word out about taking the speed test. After Mercer County better understands its digital divide, the steering committee hopes to expand a middle-mile “fiber hub” to connect public access points at community anchor institutions. This will create a platform for county-wide broadband services, including the possibility of supporting a fixed wireless network.

Palatine

Palatine is another Illinois Connected Community that has its school district at the center of its efforts. This northwest suburb of Chicago is home to Palatine School District 15, which found itself face-to-face with connectivity challenges as many students and families tried to transition to remote learning in the wake of COVID-19. Though broadband service is generally available throughout the Village, Palatine residents experience inadequate speeds, and lack of devices and digital literacy skills mean the digital divide is affecting educational attainment. In the spring, the district distributed about 500 hotspots to families, and used CARES Act funds to purchase devices to achieve a 1:1 student to device ratio.

The Village of Palatine is also stepping up to help with connectivity efforts; the United Palatine (UP) Coalition, the community organization, Partners for Our Communities, and local libraries are assisting with the efforts to increase digital equity, continuing Palatine's strong history of working together to address community issues. All are working with Comcast, T-Mobile, and other internet service providers to amplify the availability and simplify the subscription process for low-cost broadband programs. The community is targeting a set of apartment buildings to increase connectivity options for residents, and planning on using high school and college students to provide technical assistance and training to community residents.

Jan 21 Webinar on Commercial and Apartment Buildings

We continue to offer special programming to our ICC cohort. On January 21, SilverIP [led a discussion](#) on connecting commercial and apartment buildings with plans starting at \$35 per month for packages available up to 1000 mbps (gigabit speed). SilverIP was established in Champaign, Illinois, in 2001, and has a notable footprint including providing Wi-Fi in Chicago's Millennium Park and the John Hancock building in Chicago. Farzad Moeinzadah from SilverIP spoke about their business model and how "one size does not fit all" in the 400 residential buildings they serve (with as few as 50 units and as many as 1500 units).

For more, see the Benton Institutes, "[America's Broadband Moment: Facilitating Competition in Apartment Buildings.](#)"

News and Resources

Jan 22 | [Biden's \(Acting\) Team Broadband](#) (Benton Institute)

Jan 15 | [How's Your Internet, South Shore? Residents Asked To Weigh In As Organizers Work To Bridge 'Digital Divide'](#) (Block Club Chicago)

Jan 15 | [The Last Broadband Gifts From the 116th Congress](#) (Benton Institute)

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