



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



Federal Emergency Broadband Benefit Program to Launch by May 1

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is launching the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program for which Congress recently appropriated \$3.2 billion. The EBB Program provides eligible households with discounts off of their monthly broadband bills and certain connected devices during the COVID-19 emergency period. The FCC is aiming to launch the program by May 1.

Eligibility for Participants

The FCC engaged the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) to implement the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, using the framework of the Lifeline program, an existing FCC program to help provide affordable voice and broadband service to low-income consumers. The EBB Program will leverage Lifeline systems like the Lifeline National Eligibility Verifier, the National Lifeline Accountability Database, and the Lifeline Claims System for subscriber eligibility, enrollment, and service provider reimbursement.

People already enrolled in the FCC's Lifeline program are automatically eligible for the EBB Program, but must affirmatively opt-in to a broadband plan provided through the new program.

People can apply for the Lifeline program online by going to [CheckLifeline.org](https://www.CheckLifeline.org) and creating an account. They may find out if they qualify through the website immediately after applying online. If the National Verifier cannot prove their eligibility automatically, they will need to upload more documents. A broadband provider will be able to help with the application.

[For more information: www.lifelinesupport.org/national-verifier]

Eligibility for Providers

Just about any broadband internet access service provider can offer Emergency Broadband Benefit Program-supported services, including telephone companies, cable operators, wireless carriers, community-owned networks, electric cooperatives, and municipal governments. Currently, providers are reviewing the program rules and deciding if they will participate.

If a broadband provider already participates in a federal assistance program — like Lifeline — they just need to tell the FCC that they also want to participate in the EBB Program. Other providers can

still participate, but they have to apply to do so. Providers that already offer their own discount programs or that participated in the FCC's Keep Americans Connected Pledge to help low-income households or people during COVID, will have their application approved automatically.

The providers need to tell the FCC where they will provide service, whether they plan to offer discounted devices, a description of the internet services they plan to offer, and how much they usually charge people for those services.

Beginning March 11, providers can submit their forms and required attachments via email to EBBElection@usac.org. A portal for applications opens on March 8.

FCC Adopts Key Benton Institute, Office of Broadband Recommendations

Both the [Benton Institute for Broadband & Society](#) and the [Illinois Office of Broadband](#) provided the FCC with key recommendations on how to craft the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program. Benton stressed that the program should facilitate as many providers competing to connect as many eligible households as quickly as possible.

The Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB) highlighted the ways that state broadband authorities can be natural partners with the FCC and USAC to bring low-income households online because states can:

- marshal resources to fill any gaps in Emergency Broadband Benefit availability,
- promote awareness of the Emergency Broadband Benefit, and
- advance access to broadband devices and digital literacy training.

IOB further recommended that the FCC create a bandwidth minimum for EBB support that will truly meet the needs of low-income households. Finally, IOB asked the FCC to create an efficient authorization process for service providers and participating low-income households.

Opportunity for Illinois Communities: Raising Awareness

One of the biggest challenges for the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program will be ensuring low-income households are clearly informed about the program. In addition, broadband providers — some of whom have no prior experience with FCC programs and USAC and its processes — will also require information. The success of the program will depend on buy-in from both recipients and providers.

This newsletter, Illinois Broadband Connections, will continue to monitor and review the implementation of the EBB Program. And you can keep an eye out for further developments through the Benton Institute's [weekly](#) and [daily](#) newsletters.

EBB Resources

[FCC Site](#)

[Fact Sheet](#)

[USAC Site](#)

EBB Summaries from the Benton Institute

Feb 27 | [Introducing the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program](#)

March 5 | [Emergency Broadband Benefit Program: From Here to Launch in 60 Days](#)

Close-up on Connect Illinois Round 1 Projects

Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced the first \$50 million in Connect Illinois broadband infrastructure awards in June 2020, which included 28 projects extending fiber connectivity to over 26,000 locations throughout Illinois. Many Connect Illinois Round 1 Projects are underway, with others gearing up for the 2021 construction season.

Cook County

Cook County's project will expand the existing fiber footprint of the Chicago Southland Fiber Network (CSFN) throughout the Chicago Southland area to municipalities with no fiber assets and key regional education campus facilities with limited connectivity.

The middle-mile network, managed and operated in cooperation with the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, currently consists of more than 60 miles of high-speed fiber optic backbone infrastructure along the I-57 corridor, linking Southland Chicago government buildings, colleges, hospitals, libraries, schools, and commercial enterprise customers. The goal is to focus on fiber paths that will provide distribution and host last-mile service platforms for those communities with the greatest need.

Edgewood and Franklin

Broadband provider Mediacom was the recipient of two broadband deployment grants. In Edgewood, the last-mile deployment will serve 234 unserved households, 11 businesses, and three community anchor institutions. The Franklin last-mile deployment will serve 224 unserved households, 13 businesses, and three community anchor institutions.

Mediacom will construct broadband in unserved/underserved areas capable of supporting download and upload speeds of 1 Gigabit per second (Gbps) or greater to residential and business customers. This will help drive economic development in the project areas and allow residents to work from home, engage in e-commerce, study online, and more.

Round 2 of the Connect Illinois is accepting applications through April 12, with an additional \$50 million in state funding available.

On Friday, March 5, Illinois Office of Broadband Director Matt Schmit [presented](#) an overview of the program, the application process, and future grantee requirements. Attendees also learned more about the state's recent mapping efforts and an '[Office Hour](#)' opportunity for potential applicants to seek one-on-one guidance with Matt and his colleagues. To learn more see:

[Connect Illinois Round 2](#)

Connect Illinois Computer Equity Network Distribution Events

Curious about upcoming curbside computer distribution events? Want to host your own? Visit PCsforPeople.Org/Illinois to learn how individuals can make donations or recycle computers, how businesses can start their own recycling process, and how nonprofits can partner with PCs for People to host a donation drive or distribution event.

[PCs for People](#)

ICC Spotlight

Over the past several newsletters, we have been 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.

Illinois Connected Communities applicants included school districts, nonprofit and economic development organizations, urban neighborhood associations, rural planning committees, and more.

Region 1 Planning Council/Winnebago County

The final profile in the first cohort of our Illinois Connected Communities program is the Region 1 Planning Council, which is a special-purpose, regional government agency. There is strong interest in working to promote both access and adoption in Winnebago County and in Rockford, its biggest city. County priorities for economic development include pursuing data center projects and smart agriculture.

There is no shortage of middle-mile, backbone fiber in Rockford and other parts of Winnebago County in addition to fiber owned by Comcast and Frontier. However, local leaders say they lack

quality information about existing telecommunications infrastructure and services across the county and the best way to improve any shortcomings.

Region 1 is in the process of gathering more information about its available internet assets and interviewing regional providers to better understand their infrastructure capabilities and business priorities. Region 1 is hoping to expand access by working with recipients of the FCC's recent Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction. Members of Region 1 also participated in the Feb 19 Broadband Regional Engagement for Adoption and Digital Equity (READY) Program kickoff webinar.

The steering committee is taking steps to ensure these digital equity efforts are targeted at all demographic segments. Region 1 is working to increase digital equity by partnering with the Housing Authority and area libraries to help with the distribution of CARES Act funding and promotion of discount programs including Comcast's Internet Essentials and T-Mobile's EmpowerEd.

News and Resources

Mar 8 | [Whatever Happened to the "Magnet Cities?"](#) (Benton Institute)

Feb 26 | [Net Neutrality! \(Just in California\)](#) (Benton Institute)

Feb 22 | [Chicago region emerges as a draw for data centers](#) (Chicago Sun-Times)

Feb 22 | [Cooperatives: The Unsung Heroes of Broadband](#) (Benton Institute)

Feb 21 | [An Evanston Teen Saw How Hard It Was For The Elderly To Find Vaccines. So He Built A Website To Help](#) (WBEZ)

Looking for more broadband policy news? The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society offers a free, reliable, and non-partisan daily digest that curates and distributes news related to universal broadband. You can [subscribe to this service here](#) to learn how broadband delivers opportunities and strengthens communities.

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