Counties play a critical decision-making role in the economic development, public safety, and government service programs that keep communities strong. It is incumbent on county leaders to treat broadband as a vital and ever-evolving part of its infrastructure because high-speed connectivity has the potential to increase revenue, expand job opportunities, improve emergency response efforts, and expedite service delivery while cutting costs.

The availability of broadband does not guarantee prosperity. However, counties that are unable to provide its residents with affordable and reliable access will be excluded from many economic, educational, and public health benefits that could improve overall quality of life. County boards can take a leadership role in learning about the challenges associated with broadband access and adoption, then setting specific goals for improving service quality and choice for businesses, community institutions, and residents.
NCC COUNTIES ARE INNOVATIVE

Arlington County, Virginia: Arlington connects government buildings, schools, and select community institutions with ConnectArlington, a county owned and operated fiber network that ensures reliable and high-speed connections for this important infrastructure. The county plans to extend this network and provide service to other parts of the county in the future.

Larimer County, Colorado: Officials in Larimer are preparing to roll out a customized speed test for residents as the county continues to explore municipal broadband options. The county is currently considering moving beyond the role of a “convener” and evaluating ways to make broadband improvements on their own.

Letcher County, Kentucky: The Letcher County Broadband Board continues to work for their community members by partnering with local internet service providers and the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Even in a time of social distancing, they continue to provide opportunities for homes to get connected and for citizens to speak directly to their ISPs.

Martin County, Florida: Martin County is home to a municipal network that the county created after realizing that private internet service providers would not offer affordable broadband. After saving tens of millions of dollars, the county was proud to bring their network online and offer affordable and reliable broadband.

Medina County, Ohio: When multiple studies revealed potential for enormous economic growth, Medina County took it upon themselves to deploy Medina Fiber, a fiber optic network. Originally only available to government buildings and businesses, it is now available to residences across the county.
Mendocino County, California: Last year, county officials and community partners unveiled their new broadband strategic plan. It outlined how they planned to connect 98% of homes and businesses in their community to high speed fiber optic broadband by 2025. They say that the goal is ambitious but necessary for the future of Mendocino County.

Montgomery County, Maryland: In Montgomery County, officials established ultraMontgomery, a program that supports public-private partnerships through leasing county fiber capacity and other economic development projects.

Pasco County, Florida: Pasco County is home to a community that is being built from the ground up as a Connected City Corridor. This development, the product of a partnership between Pasco County and Metro Development, will be a smart city with some of the fastest broadband speeds in the country and more smart city technology than the county has ever seen.

Riverside County, California: Through their Rivco Connect program, Riverside has been studying their own digital divide within the county and implementing programs to help all of their residents. Programs have ranged from providing refurbished computers to county students, providing digital equity workshops, and more.

Santa Cruz, California: The county has taken steps to ensure they are prepared for a digital future including adopting a dig once policy, implementing standardized design policies for broadband infrastructure, and creating a Fiber Initiative Team. The team includes local officials and business leaders who are laying the framework for future projects.

Sonoma County, California: The County's Economic Development Board established Access Sonoma, a program dedicated to creating and implementing connectivity projects. The program connects communities with internet service providers, promotes training and non-profit support, and advocates for rural broadband access.
Chula Vista, California. The Chula Vista City Council adopted a Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan outlining a multi-layered process for addressing the City’s digital inequities. The plan highlights the areas of the City with the greatest need. *(KUSI)*

Georgia. Governor Brian Kemp announced the launch of an interactive broadband availability map through the Georgia Broadband Map Project. The map, which is viewable by county, identifies homes and businesses that do not have broadband access, and will be updated frequently for accuracy in reporting. Four NCC member municipalities including Dahlonega, Fairburn, Jefferson, and Rome stand to benefit from this data collection initiative. *(The Tifton Gazette)*

Illinois. Governor J.B. Pritzker announced that Illinois will spend an additional $50 million on training educators and families on using technology and launching a student care department within the State Board of Education. NCC member communities Carbondale, Champaign, Highland, and Jacksonville may be eligible for support. *(Chicago Sun Times)*

Kansas City, Missouri. The Perkins Public Library in Kansas City serves as a digital lifeline for residents in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing parking lot accessible WiFi. Residents can also rent laptops for daily use. *(The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City)*

Opelika, Alabama. The Opelika Housing Authority passed a resolution to provide internet access to residents in all ten of the city’s affordable housing communities, helping upwards of 600 families. *(OANow.com)*

Portland, Oregon. Portland launched the Digital Divide PDX initiative to assist 32,000 households with broadband adoption. With assistance from partner organizations, the effort has provided internet access for ten organizations and dispersed 100 laptops. *(KGW8)*
Mayor Lori Lightfoot Announced an Initiative with CPS and Philanthropic Partners to Tackle Chicago’s Digital Divide. Chicago Connected will provide free, high-speed internet for approximately 100,000 students who lack broadband access, particularly in the city’s South and West Sides. According to the Mayor, expanding access is a critical component of the city’s efforts to end poverty and improve academic outcomes. It also “allows families to build career skills, apply for jobs, register to vote and stay up-to-date on current events.” (The City of Chicago)

Mayor Bill de Blasio Announced New York City’s $157 Million Commitment to Bridging Its Digital Divide. New York City has renewed its commitment to digital equity across all five of the City’s boroughs with special focus on unserved and underserved neighborhoods. The funding is expected to benefit 600,000 New Yorkers and will be used to install broadband network infrastructure. Adults and youth will receive jobs and training to assist with the buildout. (The City of New York)

Western Governors’ Association releases Broadband Connectivity Policy. Acknowledging the importance of high-speed internet for rural economies and communities, WGA released policy recommendations to address broadband data and mapping, investments in scalable infrastructure, and strategies to help connect tribal communities. Communities in WGA member states share common infrastructure challenges – vast distances, unforgiving terrain, and multi-jurisdictional permitting – that complicate broadband deployment projects in their states. (Western Governors’ Association)
House Committee Hosts Hearing on Tribal Needs. The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce held a full-committee remote hearing entitled “Address the Urgent Needs of Our Tribal Communities”. Witnesses included Dr. Charles Grimm, Secretary of the Chickasaw Nation Department of Health; Jonathan Nez, President of the Navajo Nation; The Honorable Christine Sage, Chairman of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe; Fawn Sharp, President of the National Congress of American Indian; and Pilar M. Thomas, Partner of Quarles & Brady LLP. The hearing can be viewed in its entirety here.

The Moving Forward Act Passes the House. On July 1, 2020, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act. The expansive $1.5 trillion bill covers many aspects of the country’s infrastructure. If enacted, the law would implement measures to nationally address the digital divide. Lukas Pietrzak, NCC’s Policy Associate, provided a detailed breakdown of the Bill here.

U.S. Senators to Introduce Bipartisan HOTSPOTS Act. United States Senators Joe Manchin (West Virginia) and Susan Collins (Maine) plan to introduce the Hotspots and Online Technology and Services Procurement for our Tribes and States (HOTSPOTS) Act during the next Senate Session. The Bill would provide funding for states, Tribes, and territories to purchase and distribute hotspots to libraries in rural and low-income communities. (WVNS-TV)
NCC Files Comments on Establishing a 5G Fund for Rural America. On July 5, 2020, NCC filed comments supporting the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) plans to deploy wireless technologies to areas of the country that have historically struggled with high-speed connectivity. However, as noted in the filing, residents in rural areas and otherwise are now required to participate in the digital ecosystem in ways that they have not previously been required to do so. The agency should increase the 25/3 Mbps minimum broadband speeds to accommodate increased demand. Moreover, setting clear definitions for which areas should be eligible for support depends on accurate mapping data which is not currently available. Review the filing here.

NCC Signs On to a Letter Urging the FCC to Open a Rulemaking on 12 GHz Spectrum. On July 9, 2020, NCC signed on to a letter with other allied organizations asking the FCC to undertake a rulemaking to make available spectrum between 12.2 and 12.7 GHz (“12 GHz Band”). Opening this spectrum for use will allow 500 megahertz of contiguous spectrum to support two-way fixed and mobile 5G broadband services. The letter highlights the impacts this spectrum could have on increasing competition in the mobile and satellite markets as well as the impacts it could have on closing the digital divide in rural areas, Tribal lands, and underserved communities. Read the filed letter here.

Have you Registered for the IGF-USA Conference? NCC serves on the steering committee for the Internet Governance Forum-USA. This year’s two day conference on July 22nd and 23rd will explore the immense value that the Internet brings to society, while raising awareness of the gaps and concerns about the implications for privacy, security, and more. Participants can choose from panels, debates, roundtables, and interactive sessions. Register here.
US Ignite and Altman Solon released a report titled “Broadband Models for Unserved and Underserved Communities.” It was developed from a study conducted on municipally enabled broadband deployment. The report examines models in NCC member municipalities Boston, MA; Chattanooga, TN; Lincoln, NE; Westminster, MD, among others, to illustrate five successful network variations, each requiring a different level of investment and engagement from the community. A summary whitepaper with key takeaways from the study can be found here.


FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel & Dr. Nicol Turner Lee. Commissioner Rosenworcel released a new episode of her podcast, Broadband Conversations, featuring Dr. Nicol Turner Lee, the new Director of the Center for Technology Innovation at the Brookings Institution. Broadband Conversations was created to amplify the voices of women doing important work to move our country forward. In this episode, they discuss building a technology ecosystem that is focused on service, connecting people, and fostering innovation. Access the podcast here.
A MEMBER REQUEST FOR HELP FROM KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

Kansas City invites members of the technological community to offer feedback on their drafted Digital Equity Services Request for Quote (RFQ), specifically edits for language and content. The most up-to-date version of the document can be accessed and edited here. The deadline for revisions is July 31, 2020. Questions, comments, and concerns can be directed to Keely Golden, Procurement Manager.

NETWORK FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Colorado Broadband Fund. Applications for Colorado’s Broadband Fund are due on July 15, 2020. Visit the DORA Broadband Fund website for more information on the application process and eligibility requirements.

Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Phase I of the FCC’s Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) is scheduled to begin on October 29, 2020. The FCC will auction up to $16 billion in funding. The notice and filing requirements are detailed in this public notice. All entities interested in participating in Auction 904 must file a short-form application (FCC Form 183) by July 15, 2020.

LET’S STAY CONNECTED

Tell us how we’re doing. Your feedback is important to us. Share your comments here.

Send us photos of your community and your next-generation broadband successes. We want to share your good news and photos of our member communities. If you have photos you would like to include in our next newsletter, please send them to Brittany-Rae Gregory.

Does your city, town, or county have a new mayor, commissioner, or supervisor? If so, please email Lukas Pietrzak so we can update our records.

Send us your Requests for Proposals (RFPs). Our website includes a subscription box that allows individuals to sign up for an alert whenever a new RFP is announced. Our goal is to get your RFP more attention, giving you better options during the selection process. We have already received dozens of subscriptions from a wide variety of vendors, so please be sure to send us your RFPs. You can visit this page to read current and past RFPs from other cities as well.

Is your city currently involved in civic engagement projects that leverage technology to benefit the community? Let us know! We would like to feature your community in upcoming blog posts and reports.

Is there someone from your community that you think should be added to this list? Send us their contact information.