

NEXT CENTURY CITIES
OCTOBER 7, 2020

**DIGITAL
EQUITY
AND
INCLUSION**

Ensuring that all communities have access to and the ability to use information and communications technologies.

**CELEBRATING
HISPANIC
HERITAGE
MONTH**

Recognizing the contributions and influence of Hispanic Americans, especially those working to expand broadband access.



**MICHIGAN
MOONSHOT**

Connecting Michiganders Statewide



Connecting Michiganders Through **MICHIGAN MOONSHOT**

We sat down with **Megan Martin, the Marketing Coordinator for Merit Network**, to discuss Michigan's broadband landscape and the role that the Michigan Moonshot Project plays in helping to educate and advocate for resident connectivity.

NCC: How was Michigan Moonshot formed?

MM: In 2018, Merit's President and CEO Joe Sawasky was conducting a member-visit in northern Michigan. Along his route he passed a library. It was late in the evening, far outside of typical operating hours, so he was surprised to see that the parking lot was full. The cars were packed with students using the library's WiFi to complete their homework assignments. Motivated by Merit's commitment to provide networking, security and community services to members across Michigan, Joe was compelled to take action.

In March of 2018, Merit participated in the Michigan Consortium of Advanced Networks. Joe joined like-minded partners from across the state to develop a broadband roadmap. Interacting within this community provided Merit with the necessary exposure to impact the connectivity landscape. Overwhelming community support inspired Merit to build a community of public/private partners which seeks to assess and address the homework gap in Michigan. This effort was named the Michigan Moonshot.

NCC: 380,000 Michigan homes lack at-home broadband access. Why? Where are some of the most disconnected communities located? What are their challenges?

MM: A great number of unserved households are found in areas defined as rural by the U.S. Census, particularly in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and areas outside of major metropolitan areas and their suburbs. Complicating matters is that the solution is not one-size-fits-all. In rural areas, improving internet access means surmounting barriers of climate, distance and population density. Installing infrastructure is difficult and costly. In urban areas, the problem is affordability—an end-of-the-month question of "Am I putting food on the table, or am I buying an internet subscription?" That said, infrastructure and affordability challenges exist in ALL areas of Michigan. Many of these fallow areas can also be found in larger urban Michigan communities, such as Detroit.

NCC: What role has Michigan Moonshot played in educating citizens, advocates, and leaders about broadband connectivity?

MM: The Michigan Moonshot is a statewide call to action, led by Merit, which aims to close the digital divide for Michigan communities. This initiative addresses three key pillar areas: (1) Data and Mapping, (2) Policy and Funding, and (3) Education and Resources. Our focus is to help communities take action to move past key obstacles, ultimately achieving tangible and measurable success in broadband expansion.

Connecting Michiganders is an effort carried out by leaders statewide. We spoke with some members of the Moonshot network about the work that they are doing in their respective communities.

"We surveyed 33,000 parcels in 15 townships through online and mailed surveys. We were able to draw new maps to assert that the area is grant eligible. We did the survey in partnership with Merit Network in Ann Arbor. A pre-engineering study was conducted to determine where fiber would need to be installed across the 15 townships based upon where fiber exists and where it does not." -- **Commissioner Barbara Fuller, Washtenaw County**



"Michigan Moonshot has been incredibly helpful for coordinating partnerships with advocates and critical stakeholders statewide. Recently the Connect 313 was awarded \$4 million in CARES Act Funding for telehealth initiatives, and I know that the relationships garnered at the state level through Michigan Moonshot were instrumental in helping us to secure that funding." -- **Joshua Edmonds, Director of Digital Inclusion, City of Detroit**

"We built a Township-wide fiber optic network that's publicly owned, and partnered with a private operator to provide service. Since then we have been working to bring that to other parts of the county. We founded a nonprofit called the Michigan Broadband Cooperative with the intention of helping communities move along this path at a [statehood] level. Since then Merit has picked up the ball with Michigan Moonshot, and we've been cooperating with them to try to focus the Michigan conversation through their program." -- **Benjamin Fineman, President, Michigan Broadband Cooperative**



"In Holland, Michigan, we have operated a fiber network for over 25 years. In that time, we have learned much about running a community-owned open-access broadband service to make our town a better place. Merit reached out to share our experience and provide insight for communities that want to develop a similar system. The Moonshot is a framework that helps cities and towns start with the "why" of broadband. The framework explores the value of great broadband for education – which has become even more impactful with the pandemic. By starting with "why," an excellent foundation can be built for future-ready broadband infrastructure. The Moonshot Framework also provides details on the "whats" and "hows" of broadband development.." -- **Pete Hoffswell, Superintendent of Broadband Services, Holland Board of Public Works**

Broadband Access to Survive. Digital Inclusion to Thrive.



Alejandro Roark is the Executive Director of the Hispanic Technology and Telecommunications Partnership (HTTP). He wrote the following reflection in recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month, which takes place from September 15, 2020 to October 15, 2020.

Latino technologists have a long history of leading through innovation. From med tech, to the invention of the first color TV to hydrogen peroxide propulsion jetpacks, Latino ingenuity has solved some of the world's most important problems. During this observance of Hispanic Heritage Month, it is particularly poignant to think about these trailblazers, the benefits of technology they made possible and how they transformed American life.

Sadly, despite these contributions to early information and communications technology, Latinos, like most communities of color, have not fully benefited from our new digital economy. While it has opened new domains of opportunity for some, it has opened new domains of exclusion for others. As cities and local leaders look for solutions to close this digital divide, consider the following factors.

- **Connectivity.** According to the FCC, at least 18 million Americans lack access to broadband networks, a figure that includes at least one-fifth of rural Americans. Latinos are among the most disconnected populations.
- **Affordability.** In areas where broadband connectivity is available, many Latinos simply cannot pay the monthly subscription costs.
- **Digital Literacy.** The internet is not easy to navigate and makes Latino users vulnerable to discriminatory data practices and other online threats. Users cannot fully benefit from something they do not fully know how to use.
- **Lack of Cultural Competency/Understanding.** Technology solutions and products, particularly algorithms and data that underlie artificial intelligence, are rife with bias and discrimination, mirroring real world inequalities. Solutions should be tailored to meet the needs of communities with varying degrees of digital literacy.

Continue reading Alejandro's feature [here](#).



Grooming Tech Talent in One of the Most Disconnected Neighborhoods in NYC

By Francella Ochillo, Executive Director

For residents of the Bronx, a borough of New York City, struggling with access to reliable and affordable broadband is commonplace. Affectionately known for being home to Yankee Stadium and the birthplace of hip hop music, the Bronx also has the lowest broadband adoption rates of any other borough. Poverty keeps too many of its residents locked out of digital opportunities.

In neighborhoods like Highbridge, for instance, where over 60% of residents identify as Hispanic and the poverty rate is almost double the citywide average, gaps in broadband access reflect well-documented nationwide disparities. Approximately [38% of households](#) do not have access to broadband at home, limiting their ability to apply for jobs, complete remote learning mandates, benefit from community resources, or access public health information.

The digital divide is alive and well in the Bronx, but there is a community center that is changing connectivity options for residents. And its technology training program is providing students with an opportunity to learn how to build the technology that allows their neighbors to get online.

[The Point](#) is a non-profit organization dedicated to youth development as well as the cultural and economic revitalization of the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx. Known for its arts and music programming, digital steward training is core to its portfolio.

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In an effort to build a more resilient community, the Point collaborated with New America to create the [Hunts Point Free WiFi Network](#) which provides free communication pathways, resistant to power and internet outages. The wireless mesh network relies on a series of small devices ("nodes") placed on top of buildings or in windows to send and receive data and WiFi signals to one another without an internet connection.

Due to elevation and proximity of the waterfront, various areas of Hunts Point have greater potential for flooding, putting business and residents at risk. The network serves as a critical resource for neighbors, businesses, and community leaders who need to communicate vital information during an emergency.

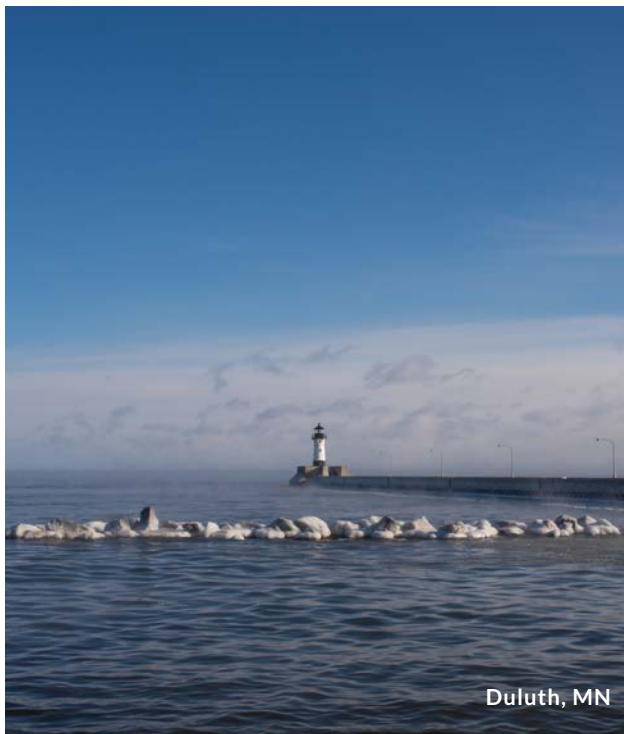
There are very few places where students in low-income neighborhoods can get hands-on training to build their own mesh networks. There are even fewer that provide bilingual technology training for digital stewards like the Point continues to provide for residents.

Broadband Headlines



Kansas City, Missouri. Mayor Quinton Lucas proclaimed the week of October 5, 2020, as Kansas City Digital Inclusion Week. Mayor Lucas made the proclamation during the October 1st Council Legislation. The full proclamation can be viewed [here](#).

Michigan. The State of Michigan partnered with Connected Michigan Nation to release a map displaying public Wi-Fi hotspot locations. Users were able to submit locations for inclusion on the map. Tremaine Phillips from the Michigan Public Service Commission said, "The long-term solution is having a fixed broadband connection to households that allows them to not have to go beyond their house, but temporarily, this is a solution that can help to be a bridge." The interactive map stands to benefit residents in five NCC member municipalities including **Ann Arbor, Detroit, Holland, Sebawaing, and St. James Township**. The map can be accessed [here](#). ([WWMT](#))



Minnesota. Nonprofit organizations like Nandi work to provide much-needed resources for students schooling from home in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to digital devices and internet access, community leaders like Ini Augustine donate items such as comfortable desk chairs and laptop covers, so that scholars have comfortable, welcoming at-home classroom spaces. Minnesota is home to several NCC member municipalities including **Duluth, Gaylord, LeRoy, Monticello, Windom, and Winthrop**. ([Minnesota Public Radio](#))

Missouri. The Missouri State library announced plans to distribute CARES Act funding to 62 libraries across the state. The funds will be used to expand internet and technology services in addition to purchasing personal protective equipment to ensure safe use. NCC member municipalities **Carl Junction, Grandview, and Kansas City** stand to benefit from the one million dollar grant. ([KY3 Missouri](#))



Traverse City, MI

Sacramento, CA. Mayor Darrell Steinberg piloted Sacramento's newly-implemented digital equity program this week. Ten thousand households with seniors and school-aged youth are expected to receive free high-speed internet through January 2021. The City will also provide free digital devices for 1,000 residents. ([State Scoop](#))

Traverse City, Michigan. Residents known to experience slow connectivity will soon have access to symmetrical gigabit internet service. Traverse City Light & Power is launching the first phase of its all-fiber network, TCLPfiber, in the city's downtown area to 1900 of its 12,700 residential and commercial customers with hopes of extending service to the entire city and surrounding areas. ([Broadband Communities](#))

Wisconsin. Governor Tony Evers announced \$5 million in CARES Act funding will be used to fund broadband expansion projects across the state, starting in October. Funding recipients are expected to utilize funding by the federally established December 30th deadline. NCC member cities **Madison** and **River Falls** could potentially benefit from project funding. ([Channel 3000](#))



AGING CONNECTED: MAYORS' PLEDGE FOR DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT OF SENIORS

Founded in 2004 in New York City, Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) is an award-winning social impact organization that's changing the way we age. OATS' flagship Senior Planet program offers cutting-edge technology training programs and digital resources to help people over 60 use technology to improve their health, strengthen their financial security, increase their social connections, and boost their civic engagement in a digital world. OATS offers programming online, at Senior Planet Centers in New York, Denver, and Palo Alto, and through partnerships with over 150 community institutions in California, Colorado, Florida, New York, Maryland and Texas. Since 2004, OATS has served more than 35,000 older adults across America and received numerous awards and extensive press coverage from PBS, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the TODAY Show, NPR, The Economist and many other local, national, and international media outlets.

We at OATS are reaching out today to ask for your support in promoting the Aging Connected Mayors' Pledge, launching during Digital Inclusion Week 2020. Aging Connected is a national campaign to promote digital engagement for older adults, made more urgent by the Covid-19 crisis. We have a goal of reaching one million seniors by June 2022, working with the technology providers, health care industry, senior service providers, and our country's mayors.

We hope the pledge will encourage our leaders to become aware of the challenges around older adults being online and commit to some actions to help improve the situation. The five points of the pledge are:

Leadership: Appoint a "Connectivity Champion" for older adults in my city to create and support opportunities to bring seniors online, and provide them support from the mayor's office to ensure progress. Designate this individual to participate in Aging Connected meetings and events.

Communication: Use communications channels available to city government to raise awareness among older adults of the importance of digital engagement and the availability of public and private resources to help them.

Support: Examine funding patterns for aging services and pursue local, state, and federal public resources to support full digital inclusivity, including connectivity and training, for older adults.

Equity: Ensure that seniors are included in the range of municipal programs to promote digital engagement.

Accountability: Gather data to assess progress on digital participation by older adults in our community, and share with Aging Connected to support our national tracking efforts.

NCC is Working to Connect Members



Study Shows That State Funding Programs and Laws That Allow for Municipal Broadband Can Improve Access in Rural Areas By Five Percent. NCC's Policy Counsel, Corian Zacher, summarized the report findings. Overall, the study found that state-level funding mechanisms improved broadband connectivity, while statewide restrictions on community-owned networks hinder expansion in rural areas. Read the detailed summary [here](#).

NCC Sent Letter to California Governor Urging Support of Local Governments and Broadband Expansion. Supporting calls from member municipalities and broadband advocates, NCC drafted a letter urging the Governor Gavin Newsom to reconvene the California legislature to evaluate how SB1130 could help local governments across the state that are working to meet their communities' broadband needs. The letter explains how increasing connectivity options would help to ensure that California residents have the requisite connectivity to remain safe and fully recover from the pandemic. It also includes testimonials from local officials in Santa Cruz County.

NCC Filed 706 Reply Comments Reiterating the Importance of Accurate Broadband Availability Data. NCC submitted reply comments in collaboration with Common Cause and Public Knowledge in the FCC's proceeding on whether broadband is being deployed to all Americans in a timely fashion. The agency's findings will be distilled into its 2021 Broadband Deployment Report. As stated by Ryan Johnston, NCC Policy Counsel, "Current mapping vastly overestimates the availability of broadband services, especially in rural and low income areas. If the Commission ... must put in place protocols that help to ensure that the proper resources are made available to the communities that need them the most."

Fact Sheet on Lifeline, an Underutilized Tool for Local Officials. Lifeline is the only federal telecommunications program that helps ensure that low income households have access to broadband. Households at 135% or less of the federal poverty line are eligible for a Lifeline benefit. Click [here](#) to find out more about Lifeline Program goals and how participation can support local broadband connectivity strategies. Please contact [Ryan Johnston](#) about opportunities for your municipality to advocate for Lifeline.



Policy Note

Honolulu, HI

Concern. Skepticism. Optimism.

Three takeaways from Recent Meetings with Local Officials

By Corian Zacher, Policy Counsel, Local & State Initiatives

During the last month, we spoke to local officials from five states: Arkansas, California, Ohio, Oregon, and Tennessee. They discussed their goals for expanding broadband in their community and explained their main concerns for meeting those objectives.

Concern. Across municipalities, local officials worry about not having the resources needed to meet their goals. Each community needs adequate funding to address unique challenges for all residents to have reliable broadband access at home. For some, wireless solutions are the best way to connect people living in remote areas. Other communities have high levels of broadband connectivity, but need resources to expand their digital inclusion plans and increase adoption rates, by offering more affordable service options or expanding digital literacy programs that provide the tools and training needed to get online.

Skepticism. Another main concern that runs hand-in-hand with the first is the unfortunate reality that states might not support community-based broadband solutions. Further, incumbent providers in the area have exponentially more resources to vigorously oppose related efforts. It is well-known that incumbent providers work to eliminate community-based broadband network options. The legal and political opposition require extensive resources for local officials to counter. In particular, opposition based on restricting the resources available to locally-based connectivity solutions, such as by targeting whether community-owned networks may access broadband funding, only adds an often insurmountable hurdle for under-resourced local governments. Still, the community leaders behind these movements are accustomed to developing innovative and adaptable solutions despite a lack of external support.

Optimism. Even though funding obstacles coupled with restrictive state laws and targeted opposition are enormous concerns, local leaders remain optimistic that gaps in connectivity can be solved. A [recent study](#) shows that state-level broadband funding programs and removing statewide restrictions on municipal networks triggers a measurable increase in broadband connectivity. Both are essential for bringing broadband within reach for disconnected communities.

An aerial photograph of Lexington, Kentucky, showing a dense urban landscape with various skyscrapers and buildings. The sky is clear and blue.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

FILING | Benton's Analysis on the FCC's Mandate to Close the Digital Divide. Citing statistics from NCC member municipalities such as **Arlington County, VA; Baltimore, MD; Boston, MA; Centennial, CO; Detroit, MI; Los Angeles, CA; Louisville, KY; and San Antonio, TX**, Benton Institute for Broadband & Society filed reply comments before the FCC reiterating the agency's responsibility to close the digital divide. Executive Editor Kevin Taglang [stated](#), "As these stories from around the country demonstrate, the FCC must find that continuing shortcomings in broadband deployment and affordability cause grievous harm to individuals as well as to the nation as a whole and that broadband is being not deployed to all Americans in a reasonable and timely fashion."

RECOGNITION | FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks Recognizes Broadband Advocates During Inaugural DOER Awards Reception. On October 1, 2020, Commissioner Starks and the DOER Advisory Board Committee held a virtual reception to recognize leaders who are committed to closing the digital divide in their respective communities. Several award winners are working to support NCC member municipalities in the State of Washington and **Detroit, Michigan**. The virtual reception can be viewed in its entirety [here](#).

NEW REPORT | AT&T's Digital Redlining: Leaving Communities Behind for Profit. National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) and the Communications Workers of America (CWA) concluded that "AT&T is making the digital divide worse and failing its customers and workers by not investing in crucial fiber-optic buildout that is the standard for broadband networks worldwide." Among the key findings:

- AT&T has made fiber-to-the-home available to fewer than a third of the households in its footprint.
- Across rural counties in AT&T's footprint, only 5 percent of households have access to fiber.
- For 28 percent of the households in its network footprint, AT&T's internet service does not meet the FCC's 25/3 Mbps benchmark to be considered broadband.

MEMBER OPPORTUNITIES

US Ignite Launches Project OVERCOME, a 1.5 Million Grant Program Designed to Accelerate Novel Broadband Deployments in Underserved Communities. Funded by a \$1.945 million National Science Foundation Grant, Project OVERCOME will support the selection and buildout of five proof-of-concept network deployments designed to connect both rural and urban communities in novel ways. US Ignite will oversee the selection process as well as the build-out phase of the winning concept proposals. Project teams will be chosen based on the use of innovative technologies, such as mesh networks and new spectrum access solutions, as well as creative deployment models that leverage both public and private sector partners. **NCC Member municipalities are encouraged to apply.** Review the press release [here](#). The solicitation guidelines for grant proposals will tentatively be available by October 22, 2020.

Georgetown Fellowship in Technology Law and Policy. Georgetown University's Law Center opened applications for a post doctoral fellow in Technology Law and Policy as part of the Fritz Family Fellowship Program. The fellow will be responsible for conducting research on the intersection of law and technology, with a focus on privacy. The fellow will also supervise students in the University's Masters of Law and Technology program. Learn more about this opportunity [here](#).