Increase Access to Broadband
NCACC Advocacy Brief

> *Seek legislation, funding, and other efforts to expand digital infrastructure/broadband capability to the unserved and under-served areas and residents of the state.*

Issue At-A-Glance

- Reliable, high-speed broadband is not available or affordable, or both, to certain unserved and under-served areas of the state; concentrated in the rural parts of North Carolina including the west, northeast, and southeast regions of the state, creating a "digital divide". In recent years, the General Assembly appropriated nearly $1 billion into three tiered programs aimed at improving broadband access and affordability across the state.
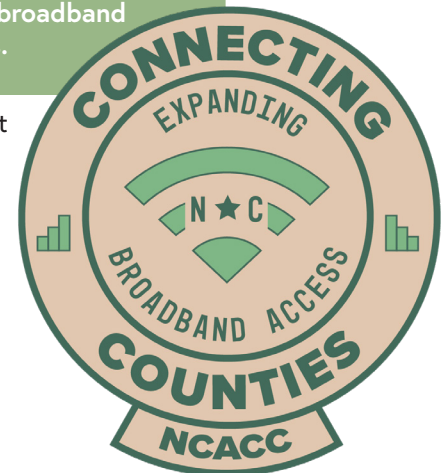
Issue Background

Increasing access to broadband is consistently a top priority for NC counties, and continues to be the number one legislative goal for NCACC. Surveys conducted by counties and N.C. Broadband Infrastructure Office indicate that lack of broadband access significantly limits advancement in education, healthcare and economic development. Through grant programs within the Department of Technology, counties are leveraging American Rescue Plan (ARPA) dollars to partner with internet service providers and increase the types of technology available to residents.

Despite these significant investments, counties and providers have find themselves challenged by requirements laid out the by the General Assembly and federal government on these partnerships. They are requesting:

- regulatory relief on contract requirements,
- additional transparency by providers;
- that future funds from federal programs aimed at increasing broadband go into those grant programs that give counties maximum authority over spending and;
- an extension from Congress on ARP spending as the grant process, supply chain demands and other factors cause delays in building necessary infrastructure

The Connecting Counties initiative, established and led by NCACC President Tracey Johnson, has commissioned a task force of county leaders to facilitate conversations about how counties can work with partners to expand broadband in their communities.

To learn more about this initiative, visit www.ncacc.org/connectingcounties.

County Recommendation

Provide counties with flexibility and regulatory relief as they navigate the broadband grants process.