



Connecting Counties Playbook

Expanding Broadband Across
North Carolina Counties

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2 Introduction
- 3 A Letter from President Tracey Johnson
- 4 Meet the Task Force

FOUNDATIONAL RESOURCES

- 5 Broadband Definitions
- 7 North Carolina's Major Broadband Funding Programs
- 18 How Counties Can Fund Broadband in North Carolina

TECHNICAL RESOURCES

- 21 Using Broadband Maps
- 27 County-Community Impact Steps

PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP RESOURCES

- 30 Great Grants in NC Counties
- 30 Active Internet Service Providers (ISPs)
- 31 Hosting a Provider Round Table

PUBLIC AWARENESS RESOURCES

- 33 Broadband Town Hall Toolkit
- 35 Public Awareness Campaign for FCC Challenges Process
- 37 Public Awareness Campaign to Continue Funding the Affordable Connectivity Program
- 38 Key Contacts

INTRODUCTION

North Carolina counties have never been in a better position to expand broadband. Due to the opportunities provided through Completing Access to Broadband (CAB), Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology Grant (GREAT), and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, counties can partner with internet service providers and the NC Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) to help unserved areas and residents.

Historically, counties were limited in their authority regarding investment and expansion. Due to legislation passed in 2011, local governments were restricted from funding broadband projects. Counties were limited to developing partnerships with internet service providers who could choose where broadband expansion occurred. Since this legislation was enacted, counties have been advocating for increased flexibility to fund broadband, particularly in areas where the private sector has been reluctant to invest. Counties have long argued that they are seeking more authority to expand broadband in areas that the private sector has chosen not to invest in, often the most rural areas of the state.

Broadband expansion has been the top advocacy goal of the NCACC for several sessions. There have been many bills filed to allow for greater authority, however, increased authority has been limited until the North Carolina state budget was enacted in November 2021. The budget included provisions to give counties authority to provide grant funding for broadband projects in unserved areas of North Carolina. Counties now have legal authority to use either their direct allocation of federal ARPA dollars, or General Funds. However, counties are precluded from using property tax monies to fund broadband projects.

This expanded authority has given counties more of an opportunity to engage on broadband expansion through state programs and other narrower opportunities for direct partnerships with internet service providers. These new opportunities put counties in a great position to expand broadband across their communities.

A LETTER FROM NCACC PRESIDENT TRACEY JOHNSON

I have been a longtime advocate for expanding broadband access throughout North Carolina. The state's lack of broadband connectivity affects my community in Washington County and it also affects me personally. An estimated 42% of Washington County households have a broadband internet subscription, making it the 5th least connected county in the state. Statewide, the rate of broadband subscribers is 75%, largely due to barriers to access, which lags behind the national average by 10%. Right now, in many places across the state, a child cannot submit their homework online unless they drive to a McDonald's parking lot for internet; and there are grandparents who can't FaceTime with their grandchildren due to lack of connectivity. We are 100 counties strong but not quite connected yet. North Carolina's lack of broadband is unacceptable.

Broadband is the amount of data sent through a connection to access high-speed internet. The more bandwidth or capacity, the more data someone can send or receive. I am blessed to have the opportunity to work with this great Association and passionate county leaders who have the bandwidth to improve their counties' economy, healthcare, and residents' lives. That inspired me to create my presidential initiative, the 100 Counties Connected Task Force, which focused on developing resources for counties to help them explore the opportunities for broadband expansion. The task force, composed of county commissioners and staff, represents regions spanning from Buncombe County to Bertie County.

Broadband is a complex topic. The task force began its work with a deep dive into the history of broadband in North Carolina to understand the current landscape. The task force met regularly with subject matter experts, including leadership and specialists from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) to understand the barriers to broadband expansion, best practices for counties, and opportunities for funding. Additionally, the task force met with some of North Carolina's largest internet service providers to build relationships and establish effective communication channels between providers and commissioners to identify how local governments can engage and be effective partners in the deployment process.

I have traveled across the state and nation representing North Carolina counties' best interests. I have brought the county voice to Washington, D.C. and the national stage by working with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and meeting with U.S. Senators Ted Budd and Thom Tillis.

Through numerous Connecting Counties Task Force meetings and learning from the nation's foremost leaders on broadband, we have gathered the most important information, considerations, and best practices we have learned into a "Broadband Playbook" for counties to use as a comprehensive resource.

I am grateful to my task force co-chairs, Cabarrus County Board Chair Steve Morris and Bertie County Board Chair Ron Wesson, as well as all the task force members for their dedication and hard work. We're also grateful for the partnerships with NCDIT and state and federal partners. I hope that this resource serves North Carolina counties well and assists them in connecting our great state.

Tracey Johnson
NCACC President and Washington County Commissioner



IN AUGUST 2022, NCACC PRESIDENT TRACEY JOHNSON ANNOUNCED HER PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVE.

As a champion of rural broadband access, President Johnson spent her year as NCACC President maximizing the funding available to make sure that all counties are able to expand broadband access to the underserved and unserved.

MEET THE TASK FORCE

NCACC President Tracey Johnson, Washington Co., Commissioner
Co-Chair Ron Wesson, Bertie Co., Commissioner
Co-Chair Steve Morris, Cabarrus Co., Commissioner
Johnnie Carswell, Burke Co., Commissioner
Randy Cress, Rowan Co., Asst. County Manager
Jesse Dowe, Duplin Co., Commissioner

Keith Elmore, Wilkes County, Commissioner
Nina Griswell, Tyrrell Co., Commissioner
Tim Love, Buncombe Co., Asst. County Manager
Bryan Miller, Caswell Co., County Manager
Shinica Thomas, Wake Co., Commissioner
Charlie Wallin, Watauga Co., Commissioner
Ralph Webb, Edgecombe Co., Commissioner
Terri Wells, Buncombe Co., Commissioner

FOUNDATIONAL RESOURCES

This section is meant to provide a basic foundation of information about broadband, particularly focused on the state of broadband in North Carolina, how counties play a role on broadband projects and how counties can fund broadband projects. This section is meant for county officials, staff, and other stakeholders who may be new to the issue and want to understand what the county role is in broadband and how they can work on this issue. It also includes a definitions guide for commonly used words and acronyms in the broadband sector.

BROADBAND DEFINITIONS

BROADBAND 101

Broadband: Internet access that is always on and faster than dial-up, most commonly defined by a speed of at least 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload.

Broadband Adoption: Subscription to a broadband service in a person's home.

Cable Modem (Coax or DOCSIS): Transmits data through the same cables that generate pictures and sounds from someone's TV set.

Data Limits: The amount of data you can download and/or upload based on an ISP's standard.

Digital Divide: The gap between those who have access to technology, the internet, and digital literacy training and those who do not.

Digital Equity: A condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. This is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

Digital Inclusion: The activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This includes five elements:

1. Affordable, [robust broadband internet service](#);
2. Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;

3. Access to digital literacy training;
4. Quality technical support; and
5. Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.

Digital inclusion must evolve as technology advances and requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional, and structural barriers to access technology.

Digital Literacy: Digital literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.

Digital Subscriber Line (DSL): Runs over traditional copper phone lines, speed dependent technology and distance. DSL speeds range from 1.5 Mbps to 80 Mbps.

Download Speed: Speed of getting information from the web to your device.

Fiber-Optic Cable (Fiber): Converts electrical signals carrying data to light and sends the light through transparent glass fibers about the diameter of a human hair. Fiber transmits data at speeds much faster than DSL or cable, typically by tens or even hundreds of Mbps.

Latency: The delay in time (lag) it takes data to transfer data from the web to your device.

Megabits per second (Mbps): Speed in which small pieces of data (images and video) come from the web to your device.

Satellite: Speeds up to 25 Mbps, but is typically more expensive, may have data caps or latency issues.

Unserved: A project area without access to wireline or fixed wireless broadband internet services of speeds of at least 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload.

Upload Speed: Speed at which you can send information from your device to the web.

Wireless: Can be mobile or fixed. Fixed wireless involves the wireless transmission of data from a local antenna to a permanent location such as a home or business. The service is similar to what is delivered over DSL or a cable modem, but the transmission is wireless. Mobile wireless connects users who are in temporary locations, such as coffee shops. Mobile broadband is transmitted through technologies such as portable modems and mobile phones.

ELIGIBLE CAB PROJECT AREAS

Unserved or underserved: A location within a county that has no deployment of broadband service or that has internet access service that does not meet the definition of broadband service. Areas where a private provider has been designated to receive funds through other state or federally funded programs designed specifically for broadband deployment shall be considered served if such funding is intended to result in construction of broadband in the area within 18 months or for the duration of the federal funding program for that area, or if the funding recipient is otherwise in good standing with the funding agency's regulations governing the funding program.

Infrastructure: Existing facilities, equipment, materials and structures that an entity has installed either for its core business or public enterprise purposes.

Infrastructure Costs: Costs directly related to the construction of broadband infrastructure for the extension of broadband service for an eligible project. The term also includes engineering and any other costs associated with securing a lease to locate or collocate infrastructure on public or private property or structures, but not including actual monthly lease payment. The term does not include overhead or administrative costs.

INTERNET INFRASTRUCTURE

Backbone: Large-capacity fiber.

Last Mile: Fiber network connections to end user.

Middle Mile: Segment of fiber linking core network to the local fiber.

PARTNERS AND ENTITIES

Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP):

Administered by the Federal Communications Commission, and gives qualifying households a discount on internet services.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC):

The FCC regulates interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. They are responsible for collecting and publishing internet access data.

Internet Service Provider (ISP): A company that provides access to the internet to both personal and business customers.

National Telecommunications and Information

Administration (NTIA): The Executive Branch agency that is principally responsible for advising the President on telecommunications and information policy issues.

North Carolina Department of Information

Technology (NCDIT): The state agency responsible for issuing grant programs and guidance for broadband expansion across the state, as well as digital equity, inclusion and literacy efforts.

NORTH CAROLINA'S MAJOR BROADBAND FUNDING PROGRAMS

North Carolina counties may participate in certain state-administered broadband infrastructure programs by investing matching funds in projects supported by the Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology, also known as the GREAT Grant program, and the Completing Access to Broadband program, also known as CAB. Below is a summary of the GREAT Grant and CAB programs and other major broadband programs in North Carolina.

As of April 2024, 79 counties provided matching funds for GREAT Grant projects and 36 counties committed to providing a matching contribution for CAB projects. NCACC worked closely with the North Carolina Department of Information Technology to advocate for waiving the county match requirement for CAB projects. The removal of the county match requirement will help counties that made early investments in GREAT grant projects to participate in CAB. It will also remove barriers to CAB participation for counties with lower populations. These less populated counties received a lower allocation of ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds and had to balance urgent and other pandemic recovery needs within their communities. As part of coordinated advocacy efforts, NCACC wrote a letter ([linked here](#)) to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Information Technology (JLOC) expressing support for waiving the county CAB match.

GREAT GRANTS (\$350M)

Read more below and on page 8.

COMPLETING ACCESS TO BROADBAND (CAB) (\$400M)

Read more on pages 9–12.

BEAD AND DIGITAL EQUITY (\$1.5B TO NC)

Read more on page 13.

The Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) grant program is a competitive grant program, administered by the North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT), which provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas of North Carolina. The state offers broadband planning maps to determine if an area meets the definition of “unserved” as outlined in NC G.S. 143B-1373(a)(14).

Click [here](#) to access the GREAT Grant Mapping Tool and [Help Document](#).

In 2021, counties were granted authority in [N.C. Session Law 2021-180](#) to participate in the GREAT Grant program by contributing matching funds to internet service providers that receive a GREAT grant award from the state. The state appropriated \$350 million to the GREAT Grant program from North Carolina’s allocation of American Rescue Plan Act funds. The legislation also stipulated that county matching funds must come from federal funds the county received directly from U.S. Treasury under P.L. 117-2 – the American Rescue Plan Act, or from unrestricted general funds (see section on Eligible Sources of Matching Funds for Counties).

Click [here](#) for more information on the GREAT Grant program from NCDIT. If you have questions about the GREAT Grant program, email greatgrant@nc.gov.

GREAT GRANTS TIMELINE

• 2022

- **JANUARY 31, 2022**
Applications opened for GREAT grants.
- **MAY 4, 2022**
Application deadline for GREAT grants.

• 2023

- **JUNE 23, 2023**
78 counties committed matching funds for GREAT grant projects, which were awarded in 2022.
- **LATE JUNE 2023**
NCDIT plans to announce the final round of GREAT grant awards, totaling \$140M in last mile broadband infrastructure projects.
- **JULY 2023**
NCDIT awarded the second and final round of GREAT grants, totaling \$80M to 33 counties. All GREAT grants have been awarded.

• 2024

- **DECEMBER 31, 2024**
All SLFRF funds must be obligated.

• 2026

- **DECEMBER 31, 2026**
All SLFRF funds must be fully expended.

GREAT Grant projects that utilize federal American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund Program (ARPA SLFRF) funds are subject to the SLFRF deadlines and other compliance and reporting deadlines.



GREAT GRANTS (\$350M)

Read more on page 7–8.

COMPLETING ACCESS TO BROADBAND (CAB) (\$400M)

*Read more below and on
pages 10–12.*

BEAD AND DIGITAL EQUITY (\$1.5B TO NC)

Read more on page 13.

The Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Program is a new, state administered broadband infrastructure program, established by Section 38.6 of [Session Law 2021-180](#).¹ The General Assembly appropriated \$400 million for CAB from the state’s allocation of American Rescue Plan Act funds. CAB gives individual county governments an unprecedented opportunity to partner with the NC Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) to mutually identify unserved and underserved areas for broadband infrastructure projects. The CAB Program complements the GREAT Grant program to provide solutions to areas not served by the GREAT Grant. As outlined in legislation, projects applied for and not funded under the GREAT Grant can be considered for funding under the CAB Program.

Matching fund requirements for the CAB Program are not related to scoring as they are under the GREAT Grant Program. The percentage of matching funds required for the broadband provider and for the county varies depending on the amount of federal ARPA funds allocated from the federal government directly to the participating county.

The CAB legislation requires NCDIT to give funding priority to counties receiving less than an aggregate of \$8 million in ARPA funds allocated from the federal government directly to the participating county. No county may receive more than \$4 million in aggregate funding from the CAB Fund in any single fiscal year. In the event CAB Fund monies are insufficient to fund a project, a county may increase its share of the total estimated project cost, or the office may adjust the scope of the project to meet the level of available funding.

Click [here](#) for more information on the CAB Program. Click [here](#) to access the CAB Planning Tool. Email cabprogram@nc.gov with any questions about the CAB program.

¹ The CAB Program is codified in N.C.G.S. § 143B-1373.1, established by S.L. 2021-180, and amended by S.L. 2022-6.

ELIGIBLE CAB PROJECT AREAS AND SPEED REQUIREMENTS

Participating counties will work with NCDIT to identify eligible project areas that address “unserved or underserved” locations and the county will provide matching funds to the state for eligible construction, installation, and operational costs for broadband deployment targeting a mutually agreed and eligible project area.

- Eligible CAB project areas must address “unserved or underserved” locations. (See page 6 for definitions.)
- Eligible expenses for CAB include “infrastructure” and “infrastructure costs.” (See page 6 for definitions.)
- CAB projects must meet all applicable federal speed threshold requirements.

CAB TIMELINE

2022

○ JUNE 24, 2022

PRELIMINARY CAB PROGRAM GUIDANCE PUBLISHED

NCDIT published preliminary CAB program guidance - Part 1, which is based on the enabling legislation for the CAB Program and applicable federal guidance. Part 1 guidance outlines the general parameters of the program for county governments and broadband service providers that are interested in participating. Part II of the guidance is forthcoming and NCDIT plans to fully roll out CAB in the fall of 2023, after the final round of GREAT grant awards are fully executed. NCDIT is in the process of identifying interested internet service providers who are eligible to respond to counties' request for service expansion in unserved and underserved areas mutually defined by the counties and NCDIT.

2023

○ JUNE 30, 2023

DRAFT REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The N.C. Department of Information Technology's (NCDIT) Division of Broadband and Digital Equity posted a [request for proposals](#) to prequalify internet service providers to participate in multiple broadband expansion programs, beginning immediately with the \$400 million CAB program.

- [Broadband Expansion and Access Request for Proposals Form](#)
- [Broadband Expansion and Access RFP Response Form](#)

The application deadline for vendors to submit proposals has been extended from July 31 to August 14. Vendors may submit proposals via the State of North Carolina Interactive Purchasing System at www.ips.state.nc.us/ips. Counties are encouraged to connect with any potential vendors they're interested in working with through CAB so that those vendors can submit an application for prequalification.

○ AUGUST 11, 2023

CAB GUIDANCE UPDATED

NCDIT released updated CAB guidance August 11, 2023. This document replaces the guidance released on June 24, 2022.

○ AUGUST 14, 2023

APPLICATION PERIOD TO PREQUALIFY ENDS

The application period for internet service providers to prequalify for CAB closed August 14, 2023.

○ NOVEMBER 2023

CAB AWARDS ANNOUNCED

NCDIT announced the first round of CAB Awards, serving 14 counties and over 6,000 households. See the awards [here](#).

○ DECEMBER 2023

NEW CAB MAPPING WEBINARS

NCDIT releases new CAB mapping webinars and resources for mapping CAB projects. These updates can be found on the [CAB website](#).

● 2024

○ JANUARY 3, 2024

NEW CAB GUIDANCE

NCDIT released new CAB Program Guidance.

○ JANUARY 2024

CAB COUNTY COMMITMENT TRACKER FORM

NCDIT released a CAB County Commitment Form tracker that tracks commitments completed by and received from counties who plan to contribute county funds to a CAB project. See the County Commitment Tracker form [here](#), which is updated weekly.

○ FEBRUARY 7, 2024

NCDIT PREQUALIFIES VENDORS FOR CAB PROGRAM, BROADBAND POLE REPLACEMENT AND STOP-GAP SOLUTIONS

On February 7, 2024, the NC Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) announced the internet service providers that have been prequalified to participate in multiple state broadband expansion programs, including the [Completing Access to Broadband \(CAB\)](#), [Broadband Pole Replacement](#) and [Stop-Gap Solutions programs](#). The selection of providers for specific projects will be determined by the providers' submissions of detailed proposals and application materials. The CAB Program is a new, state administered broadband infrastructure program, giving individual county governments an unprecedented opportunity to partner with NCDIT to mutually identify unserved and underserved areas for broadband infrastructure projects.

- Click [here](#) to view the press release on prequalified vendors.

○ MARCH 2024

NCDIT PUBLISHES SCOPE OF WORK TEMPLATE AND IMPORTANT CAB PROGRAM INFORMATION

The NC Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) published a Scope of Work Template, which provides detailed project proposal information for the Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) program. The document was provided as a guide to request responses from prequalified broadband providers ("vendors" or "respondents") to build broadband infrastructure and provide broadband service to unserved and underserved locations within the county. Additional documents related to project submission requirements were also added to the CAB Program page.

- Click [here](#) to access the Scope of Work Template.
- Click [here](#) for FAQs on CostQuest Licensing to Map County Priority Areas for CAB Program.

CAB TIMELINE (CONTINUED)

MAY 2024

NCDIT ANNOUNCES ADDITIONAL ROUNDS OF CAB SCOPES OF WORK

The North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) published scopes of work for the Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) program in 35 participating counties, which were announced starting in late March 2024 and are being released on an ongoing basis. The CAB program is a partnership between the State of North Carolina, participating counties, and prequalified internet service providers (ISPs) to expand high-speed internet access to unserved and underserved homes and businesses in North Carolina. After CAB scopes of work are posted, prequalified ISPs may submit proposals to provide broadband to all or a portion of eligible locations within each of the participating counties. After a 45-day period, an ISP will be chosen based on the CAB evaluation criteria.

- Click [here](#) to access the Active CAB Proposals page.
- Click [here](#) for general information about CAB.
- Click [here](#) for additional CAB information for counties.
- Click [here](#) for the CAB Match Calculator Tool.

Stay up to date on current broadband news by visiting www.ncacc.org.



Connecting Counties Task Force Meeting, October 2022

GREAT GRANTS (\$350M)

Read more on page 7–8.

COMPLETING ACCESS TO BROADBAND (CAB) (\$400M)

Read more on pages 9–12.

BEAD AND DIGITAL EQUITY (\$1.5B TO NC)

Read more below and on pages 14–17.

The [Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment \(BEAD\) program](#) was authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, Public Law 117–58, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. BEAD provides federal funding to expand high-speed internet access in all 50 states and U.S. territories. BEAD funding is distributed primarily based on the relative number of “unserved” locations and is provided to assist with broadband planning, infrastructure deployment, mapping, equity, and adoption activities.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law outlines several requirements for BEAD, including public engagement and close and ongoing coordination with a wide range of community stakeholders, including counties. The BEAD program structure consists of nine principal steps in a sequential process involving multiple stages of application review, a robust competitive subgrantee selection process, and ongoing reporting and monitoring. These steps are described in detail in the [Notice of Funding Opportunity \(NOFO\)](#) for the BEAD program. [See “NOFO Process Overview” below for the table from pages 8–10 of the [NOFO document](#).]

In June 2023, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), which administers the BEAD program, awarded North Carolina more than [\\$1.5B in BEAD funding](#). The North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) is leading North Carolina’s BEAD planning and proposal development process to align the state’s programs with BEAD requirements. NCDIT’s efforts incorporate various outreach, engagement, and coordination activities among stakeholders, including counties, to ensure that all North Carolina communities will benefit from broadband expansion and digital equity efforts.

(Continued on page 16)

NOFO PROCESS OVERVIEW

Stage	Description
Letter of Intent	July 18, 2022 is the deadline for an Eligible Entity to submit a Letter of Intent to participate in the Program.
Request for Initial Planning Funds	Either with its Letter of Intent or afterwards, an Eligible Entity that is a State (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) may request up to \$5,000,000 in Initial Planning Funds. American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands each may request up to \$1,250,000. Each Eligible Entity’s Initial Planning Funds will be drawn from that Eligible Entity’s Minimum Initial Allocation. If the Eligible Entity requests Initial Planning <i>(continued)</i>

NOFO PROCESS OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

Stage	Description
Request for Initial Planning Funds (Continued)	Funds, it must submit an application for Initial Planning Funds by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) August 15, 2022, and a Five-Year Action Plan within 270 days of receipt of Initial Planning Funds.
Notice of Available Amounts	On or after the date on which the Broadband DATA Maps are made public, the Assistant Secretary will notify each Eligible Entity of the estimated amount of funding that NTIA will make available to the Eligible Entity under the Program (Notice of Available Amounts) and invite the submission of an initial grant proposal (Initial Proposal) and a final grant proposal (Final Proposal).
Technical Assistance	Leading up to submission of the Initial Proposal and throughout the remainder of the process, NTIA will provide support and technical assistance to help ensure that the Eligible Entity’s proposals fully meet the requirements of the Infrastructure Act and the goals of the Program. This technical assistance will include iterative feedback on draft Initial and Final Proposals.
Initial Proposal	Eligible Entities will have 180 days from receipt of the Notice of Available Amounts to develop and submit an Initial Proposal, which will, among other things, describe the competitive process the Eligible Entity proposes to use to select subgrantees to construct broadband projects. Prior to submission to NTIA, the Initial Proposal must be made available for public comment, and the Initial Proposal must incorporate local coordination feedback for the Assistant Secretary’s review.
Challenge Process	After submission of its Initial Proposal and before allocating BEAD funds received for the deployment of broadband networks to subgrantees, an Eligible Entity must conduct a challenge process. Under this process, a unit of local government, nonprofit organization, or broadband service provider can challenge a determination made by the Eligible Entity in the Initial Proposal as to whether a particular location or community anchor institution within the jurisdiction of the Eligible Entity is eligible for the grant funds, including whether a particular location is unserved or underserved, and Eligible Entities must submit any successful challenges to NTIA for review and approval.
Initial Funding Availability	NTIA will review Initial Proposals as expeditiously as possible. Once an Initial Proposal is approved, NTIA will make available to the Eligible Entity not less than 20 percent of the total grant funds allocated to the Eligible Entity.

Stage	Description
Subgrantee Selection	An Eligible Entity may initiate its competitive subgrantee selection process upon approval of its Initial Proposal and will have up to one year to conduct additional local coordination, complete the selection process, and submit a Final Proposal to NTIA. NTIA will provide support and technical assistance to help ensure that the Final Proposal fully meets the requirements of the Infrastructure Act and the goals of the Program. The Eligible Entity may, at this point, utilize the funding provided (not less than 20 percent of the Eligible Entity’s total grant funds) to initiate certain eligible activities (see Section IV.B.8) before submission and approval of their Final Proposals.
Final Proposal	After the Eligible Entity has selected subgrantees and otherwise executed its approved Initial Proposal, it will submit to NTIA a Final Proposal describing how it complied with that Initial Proposal and the results of its processes. NTIA will award the remaining funds allocated to the Eligible Entity upon approval of the Eligible Entity’s Final Proposal, and Eligible Entities will initiate their subgrants for the remaining 80 percent of funding and any portion of the original 20 percent that the Eligible Entity has not yet awarded as a subgrant. Prior to submission to NTIA the Final Proposal must be made available for public comment.
Ongoing Monitoring, Reporting and Performance Management	Throughout the BEAD Program, NTIA will conduct ongoing monitoring of an Eligible Entity’s progress against its plans and ensure that the requirements of the Infrastructure Act are met. Eligible Entities will be required to comply with reporting requirements and monitor subgrantee compliance.

INTERNET FOR ALL INITIATIVE

The BEAD program is part of the [Internet for All initiative](#) — a [\\$45B national program](#) established by the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act — announced in May 2022 in Durham County. The Internet for All initiative was launched with three federal Notices of Funding Opportunity:

\$43B BEAD PROGRAM

The [BEAD Program](#) expands high-speed internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment and adoption programs across the country. To participate in the BEAD program, states and other eligible entities must submit a letter of intent and a planning funds budget, which will unlock \$5M in planning funds and allow states to begin creating their five-year action plan. Each participating state is guaranteed a minimum \$100M allocation, with additional funding determinations made based on coverage maps from the Federal Communications Commission.

INTERNET FOR ALL INITIATIVE (CONTINUED)

\$1B ENABLING MIDDLE MILE BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

The [Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program](#) will award grants on a technology-neutral, competitive basis to eligible entities for the construction, improvement, or acquisition of middle-mile infrastructure.

\$1.5B STATE DIGITAL EQUITY ACT PROGRAMS

[Digital Equity Act programs](#) invest \$1.5B to heighten adoption and use, like digital literacy training for those who need it most, including communities of color, rural communities, and older Americans.

In July 2021, Governor Cooper announced the creation of the [nation’s first Office of Digital Equity and Literacy](#), to expand digital literacy offerings and partnerships across North Carolina, lead the Digital Equity and Inclusion Collaborative, and promote the NC Digital Inclusion Playbook for local municipalities.

GREAT GRANTS (\$350M)

Read more on page 7–8.

COMPLETING ACCESS TO BROADBAND (CAB) (\$400M)

Read more on pages 9–12.

BEAD AND DIGITAL EQUITY (\$1.5B TO NC)

Read more below and on pages 13–15 and 17.

NCDIT is currently using federal planning funds to conduct needs assessments, identify digital barriers, and set policy priorities in order to develop various components of a multi-year strategy to help ensure all North Carolinians have access to an affordable, high-speed internet connection. The strategy will also include efforts to provide access to the devices and skills necessary to participate in the modern digital economy. NCDIT also aims to ensure North Carolina’s broadband maps reflect unserved and underserved locations and that residents know how to access state maps and submit challenges to the FCC’s National Broadband Map.

NCDIT’s planning process began on February 7, 2023, and incorporates various outreach, engagement and coordination activities among stakeholders, including counties, to ensure that all North Carolina communities will benefit from broadband expansion and digital equity efforts. North Carolina is guaranteed a minimum of \$100M in BEAD funding with additional funding possible.

Click [here](#) for more information on BEAD and Digital Equity Planning and to access Digital Equity Resources, including a survey and promotional toolkit.

INFRASTRUCTURE, AWARENESS AND DIGITAL LITERACY, AND ADMINISTRATIVE

Infrastructure (\$971M)

\$971M: Ensure availability of internet service at speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps for more than 98% of North Carolina households.

- \$380M: GREAT Grant GREAT Grant (\$350M American Rescue Plan Act; \$30 State CIF)
- \$400M: Completing Access to Broadband (CAB)
- \$90M: Stop-Gap Solutions
- \$100M: Broadband Make Ready Accelerator (Pole Replacement Fund)
- \$1M: Broadband Mapping

Awareness and Digital Literacy (\$50M)

\$50M: Improve awareness and enable all North Carolina citizens to realize the benefits of high-speed internet through digital literacy allowing access to the digital economy.

Administrative (\$15M)

\$15M: Supplement existing North Carolina's capacity to support high-speed internet efforts.

STOP-GAP SOLUTIONS

The Broadband Stop-Gap Solutions Program provides funding for areas unserved or underserved with broadband following investment from the GREAT Grant Program and the CAB Program. This program may provide grants to internet service providers, local government entities and nonprofits for the provision and installation of broadband infrastructure to unserved and underserved households.

[N.C. Session Law 2021-180](#) appropriates \$90M of federal American Rescue Plan Act funds for the Stop-Gap Program.

Requirements for the Broadband Stop-Gap Program are currently under development. The program will be launched in late 2022 following the GREAT Grant and CAB Grant programs.

This information is taken directly from the NCDIT Division of Broadband and Digital Equity webpage on [Stop-Gap Grants](#).

BROADBAND POLE REPLACEMENT

As of February 7, 2024, the NCDIT began accepting applications for pole replacement reimbursement from service providers back to June 1, 2021. The NCDIT posted its final guidance for the Broadband Pole Replacement Program on November 27, 2023. The program was established with \$100M in ARPA Funds to facilitate the deployment of high-speed internet service. The program allows utility pole owners to request reimbursement for pole replacement costs.

- Read the full pole replacement guidance [here](#).
- Review the full pole replacement website [here](#).

HOW COUNTIES CAN FUND BROADBAND IN NORTH CAROLINA

Counties can only invest in certain broadband projects in eligible areas, using funds from limited sources.

Counties have limited means to contribute funds toward broadband infrastructure projects. However, thanks to historic federal funding for pandemic recovery and new statutory authority granted by the North Carolina General Assembly in 2021, counties have new opportunities to partner with the state and internet service providers to expand broadband access to their residents.

During the pandemic, in 2021, counties were granted limited authority to invest certain types of funds in broadband infrastructure projects within very specific parameters. The legislation also authorized counties to participate in two major state-administered broadband infrastructure programs by investing matching funds in projects located in specifically defined areas. (See section on Eligible Sources of Matching Funds for Counties). County authority to provide grants for expanding broadband service is outlined in [North Carolina G.S.153A-459](#). Nothing in this section authorizes a county to provide high-speed broadband service and property tax dollars are NOT ALLOWED for the purpose of broadband grants.

The General Assembly also included legislative restrictions that limit a county from investing in separate broadband projects outside state programs. State legislation stipulates that a county that has utilized federal funding for broadband infrastructure projects on or after May 1, 2021, with the exception of funds expended under the Completing Access to Broadband Program or the GREAT Grant Program, shall be ineligible for participation in these two state-administered programs. While counties aren't precluded from taking a "go it alone" approach, funding a broadband infrastructure project outside of the state-administered programs disqualifies the county from participating in those programs,

thereby limiting the county's ability to leverage valuable state resources.

If a county decides to "go it alone" on a broadband project, they may not invest in "served areas," which are those designated to receive funding from state or federal programs, including but not limited to the Federal Communications Commission Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) program, ReConnect, and the GREAT Grant program. Areas with satellite projects funded by the DOF program may be deemed "unserved" because the state does not consider the service as "terrestrially deployed."

A county may only use funds it received directly from the federal government under P.L. 117-2 – the American Rescue Plan Act, or from unrestricted general funds to invest in broadband infrastructure in specifically defined areas. A county may also contribute these specific types of funds as match for the state's broadband infrastructure programs – (see sections on the GREAT Grant and CAB programs).

The American Rescue Plan Act provided direct pandemic recovery assistance to counties through two federal programs, the [State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund Program \(SLFRF\)](#) and the [Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Fund \(LATCF\)](#). All 100 North Carolina counties received SLFRF funds totaling \$2.037B statewide, and 56 eligible revenue sharing (public lands) counties received LATCF funds totaling \$29.94M statewide. These federal programs allow recipient counties to spend federal recovery assistance on broadband projects. U.S. Treasury has outlined detailed guidance for the SLFRF and LATCF programs, which each have specific eligibility, compliance, and reporting rules.

The American Rescue Plan Act also allocated \$5.4B to the State of North Carolina as part of the SLFRF program. North Carolina is investing nearly \$1B in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds, funding various programs to deliver high-speed internet infrastructure, access, affordability, and

digital literacy. North Carolina is also expected to receive additional federal funding provided by the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for more broadband investments in the near future (see section on BEAD and Digital Equity).

NCACC offers technical assistance to counties to help navigate American Rescue Plan Act programs and the unique features of North Carolina state law that impose additional limitations on counties. Email arpquestions@ncacc.org with questions regarding SLFRF or LATCF.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided direct pandemic recovery funds to counties through two federal programs, the [State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund Program \(SLFRF\)](#) and the [Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Fund \(LATCF\)](#). Counties can use either SLFRF or LATCF to invest in broadband projects and both sources of funds may be used as matching funds for the GREAT Grant and CAB programs (these two sources of federal pandemic recovery funds have their own unique reporting and compliance requirements that the county must meet when spending these funds). Counties should work with the County Finance Officer and Attorney to ensure the county complies with all U.S. Treasury eligibility and reporting requirements and abides by all applicable federal uniform guidance administrative requirements. Counties should also ensure they maintain proper documentation supporting determinations of costs and applicable compliance requirements, and how they have been satisfied as part of their award management and internal controls.

All North Carolina counties can use up to \$10 million of their ARPA SLFRF allocation to reimburse the county for general government services expenses, such as employee salaries and benefits and other operational costs under SLFRF's Revenue Replacement expenditure category (E.C. 6.1). Using ARPA SLFRF revenue replacement funds to reimburse the county for these types of eligible costs frees up the county's general fund monies. Once the reimbursement is made, these freed up general fund dollars are considered unrestricted

general fund revenue and can be used for broadband investments. Similarly, counties may use LATCF funds to reimburse the county for eligible operational expenses and invest the freed up general funds in broadband projects. Using freed up and unrestricted general funds provides more flexibility with timing because once the reimbursement is made, these funds are no longer considered ARPA dollars. This means ARPA rules, including the obligation and expenditure deadlines, no longer apply to the funds once they are converted to unrestricted general funds.

- Click [here](#) to access SLFRF allocation amounts for all 100 NC counties that received these funds.
- Click [here](#) to access LATCF allocation amounts for the 56 NC counties that received these funds.

UNRESTRICTED GENERAL FUNDS

The portion of county revenue that is considered "unrestricted" is limited and DOES NOT include property tax revenue. Unrestricted general fund revenue can come from certain ARPA reimbursements, unrestricted portions of sales tax, recreation fees or transfers from another fund. Counties may invest unrestricted general fund revenue in eligible broadband projects either as a cost match for state-administered programs, or in separate projects in "unserved areas." However, if a county takes a "go it alone" approach, funding a broadband infrastructure project outside of the state-administered programs, it will limit the county's ability to leverage valuable state resources.

Freed Up General Fund Revenue: Counties that use federal ARPA funds to reimburse the county general revenue fund for eligible government operations expenses may use those freed up general funds for broadband investments (see section on the American Rescue Plan Act). Using federal ARPA funds to directly pay for other county priorities (outside the SLFRF revenue replacement category), or covering future salaries and benefits, may not result in freed up unrestricted general funds. The county would need to distinguish between activities funded through sales tax or property tax and if the

UNRESTRICTED GENERAL FUNDS (CONTINUED)

ARPA funded activity is usually paid via property tax, it would be considered restricted.

Sales Tax Revenue: Counties may use the unrestricted portions of sales tax revenue for broadband investments. County revenue from local options sales taxes is a mix of restricted and unrestricted revenue. Under NC G.S. 105-487 and NC G.S. 105-502 (a), counties must use a portion of revenue from Articles 40 and 42 for public school capital outlay. Otherwise, the remainder of a county's net revenue under these two articles is unrestricted, as is all net revenue from Article 39 and Article 46.

Transfers From Other Funds: While there is a mechanism outlined in [G.S. 159-13\(b\)\(14\)](#) for local governments to transfer monies from an enterprise fund to another fund to use extra revenue generated from an enterprise activity for other purposes, there are significant limitations and consequences to consider. For example, G.S. 159G-37(b) prohibits a local government from receiving loans or grants for water or wastewater purposes from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF), Wastewater Reserve, Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF), or Drinking Water Reserve if the unit has transferred money from its water or sewer enterprise fund to the general fund to supplement the resources of the general fund.

- Click [here](#) to read the UNC SOG blog for more information about the limitations and consequences of transferring money from an Enterprise Fund.



TECHNICAL RESOURCES

This is broadband data in several different forms, depending on what you are looking for. All of the data included in this section is public data.

This section is meant to provide a variety of data sources and user guides for how to find data about broadband access and different broadband indicators for a county or across the state. There are different maps and data sources that can be customized to narrow in on data on the topic you may be looking for.

USING BROADBAND MAPS

Each of the maps provided in this section is provided by the NC Broadband Infrastructure Office and visualizes data collected by the state and other sources. These data sets and corresponding maps illustrate broadband availability, adoption, planning, and other related indicators throughout North Carolina.

Within each of these maps, layers of information are available and users are encouraged to explore and toggle between the layers to get a full understanding of the data provided. In addition, a zoom tool is available on each map to narrow data sets to either a region of the state, a county, or even down to the road level.

Many thanks to the NC Broadband Infrastructure Office and their partnership, which provided data visualizations that are integral to getting a full picture of the broadband landscape in North Carolina.

PLANNING MAPS

NC Broadband Funding: This funding data and map reflects the most accurate data possible from the FCC location data for all Federal, State, and Local funding programs. Click [here](#) to see the map.

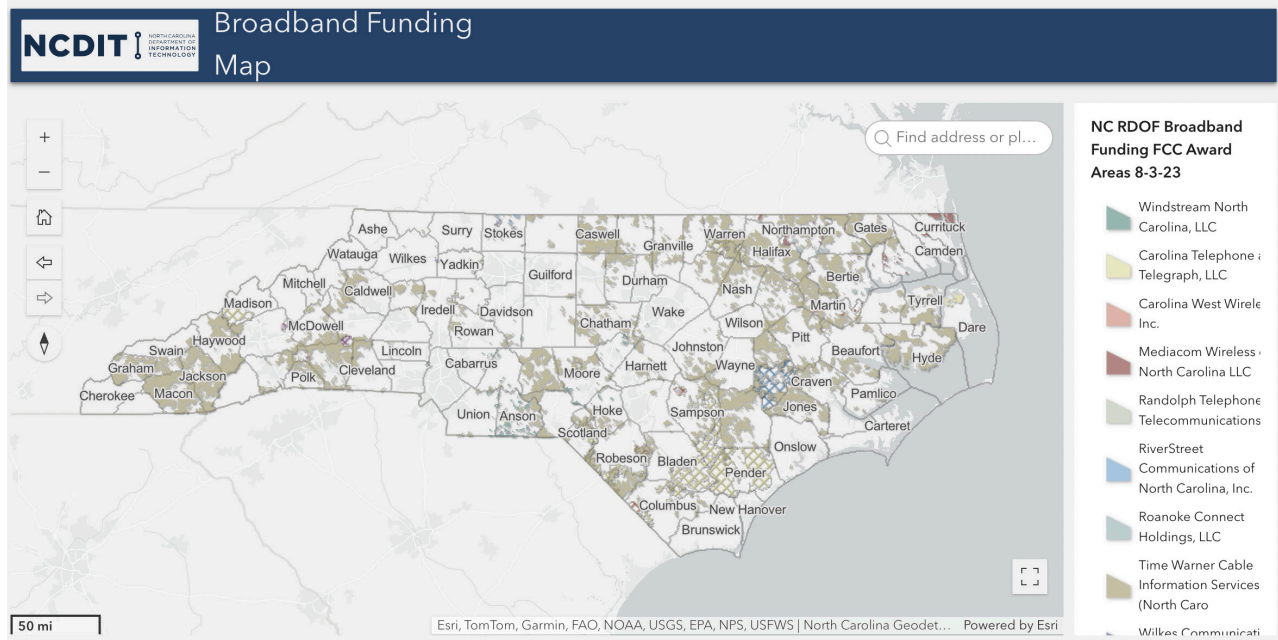


Image of NC Broadband Funding interactive map;
 URL: www.experience.arcgis.com/experience/c46fb30bdfb7465fb204a1748b023a38

PLANNING MAPS (CONTINUED)

NC Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Planning Tool: The CAB planning dashboard provides many datasets useful for project planning purposes. Click [here](#) to see the map.

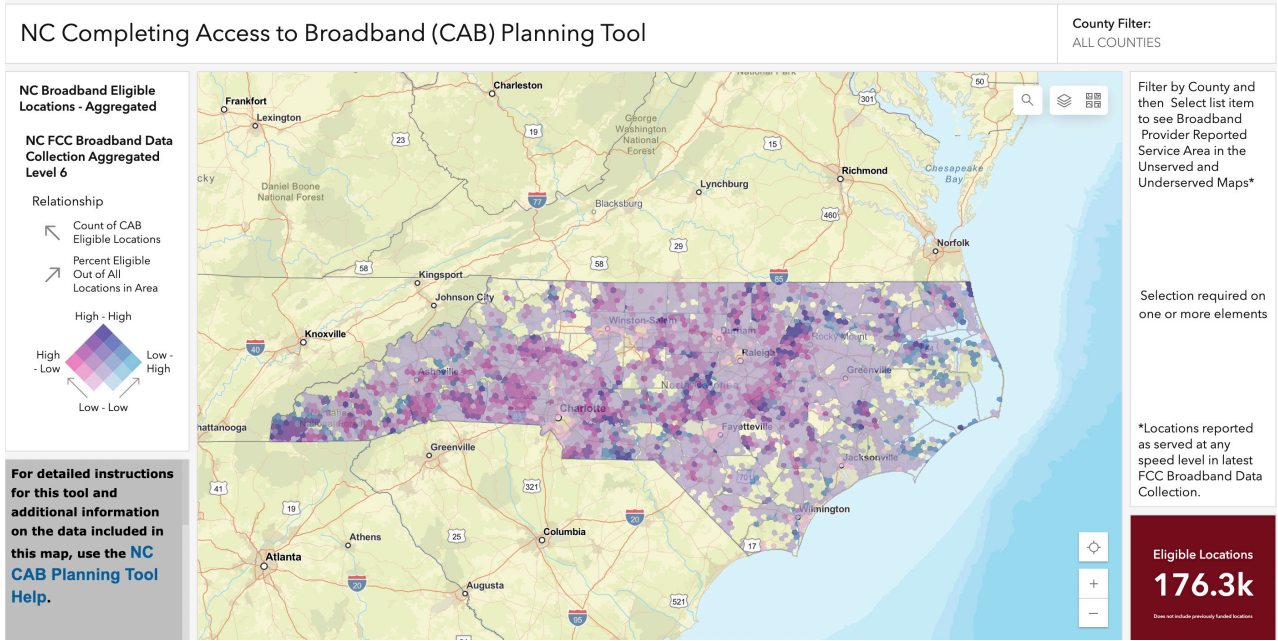


Image of CAB Planning Tool interactive map;
 URL: www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/0968e0d6753b4eb59b0b70ebb361f2cb

NC Broadband Survey: The NC Broadband Survey is designed to gather information on locations in the state without adequate internet access and speeds. Click [here](#) to see the map.

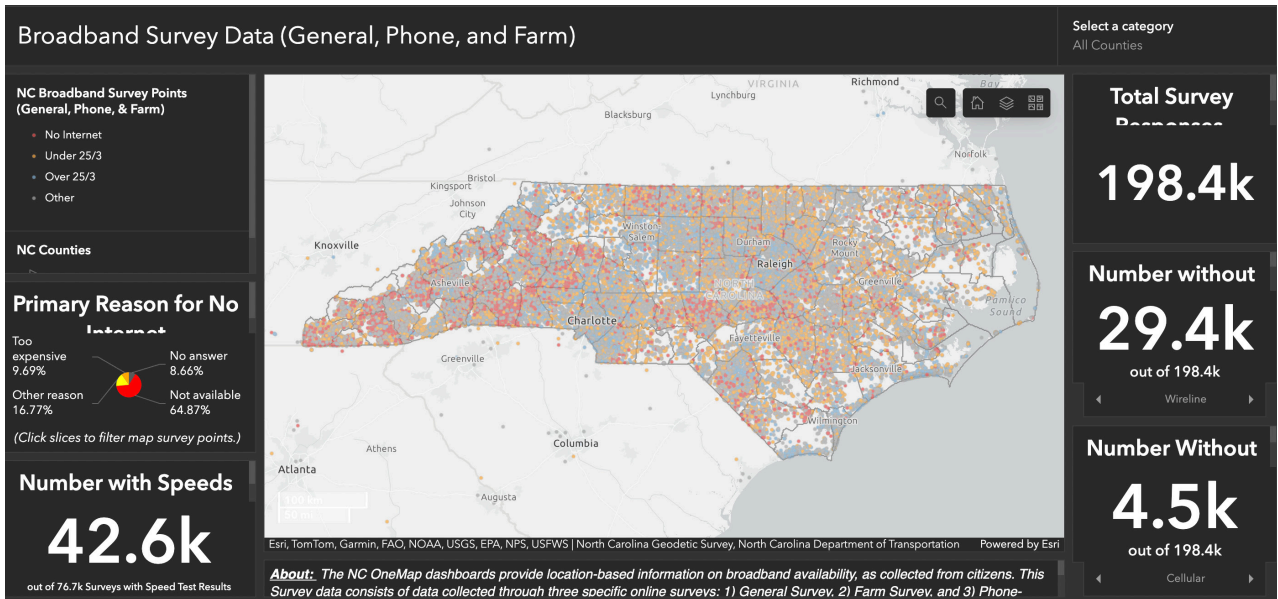


Image of NC Broadband Survey interactive map;
 URL: www.experience.arcgis.com/experience/4096f70b64474e85a6646969902e514d

ADOPTION AND AVAILABILITY MAPS

Fixed Broadband Service Areas: Use this application to see the broadband providers serving a specific area of the state with minimum speeds of 25mb/s download and 3mb/s upload. Data can also be used to visualize the technologies being deployed to each area. Click [here](#) to see the map.

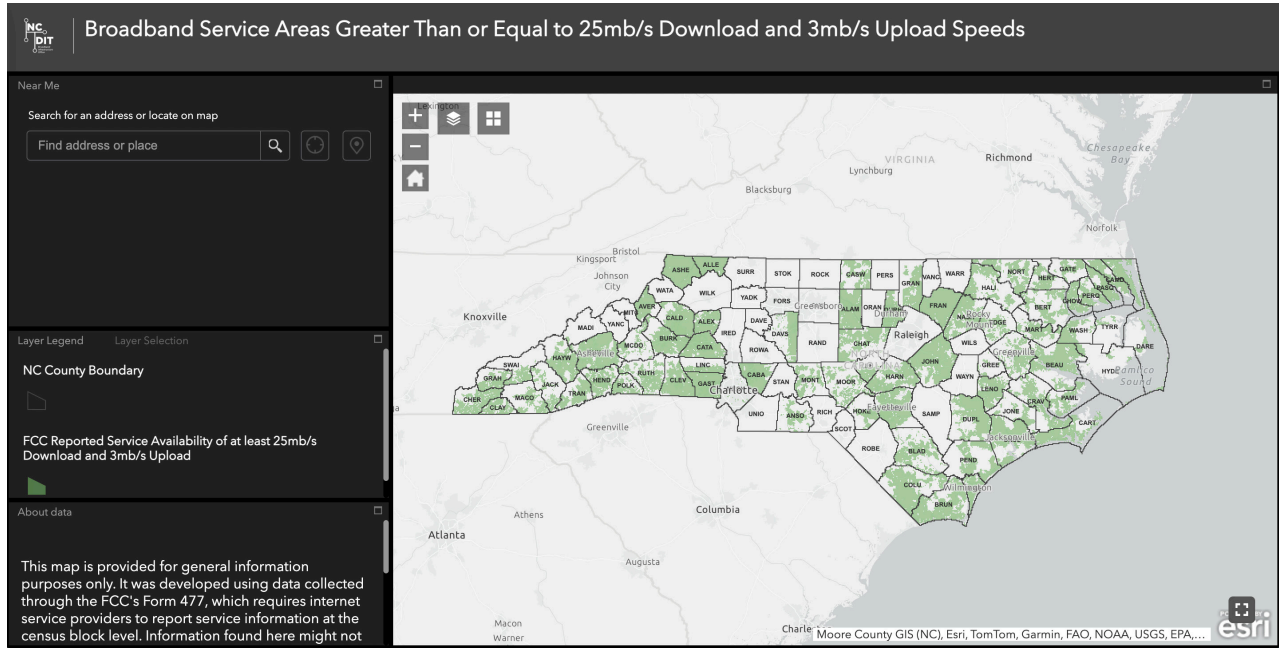


Image of Fixed Broadband Service Areas interactive map;
 URL: www.nconemap.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=01dbafeaa16247e59555d9f445be15f6

Broadband Adoption and Availability Index: Use this application to view indices created by combining US Census demographic data with FCC Broadband availability data. For more information about the methodology, visit the [Broadband Infrastructure Office website](#). Click [here](#) to see the maps.

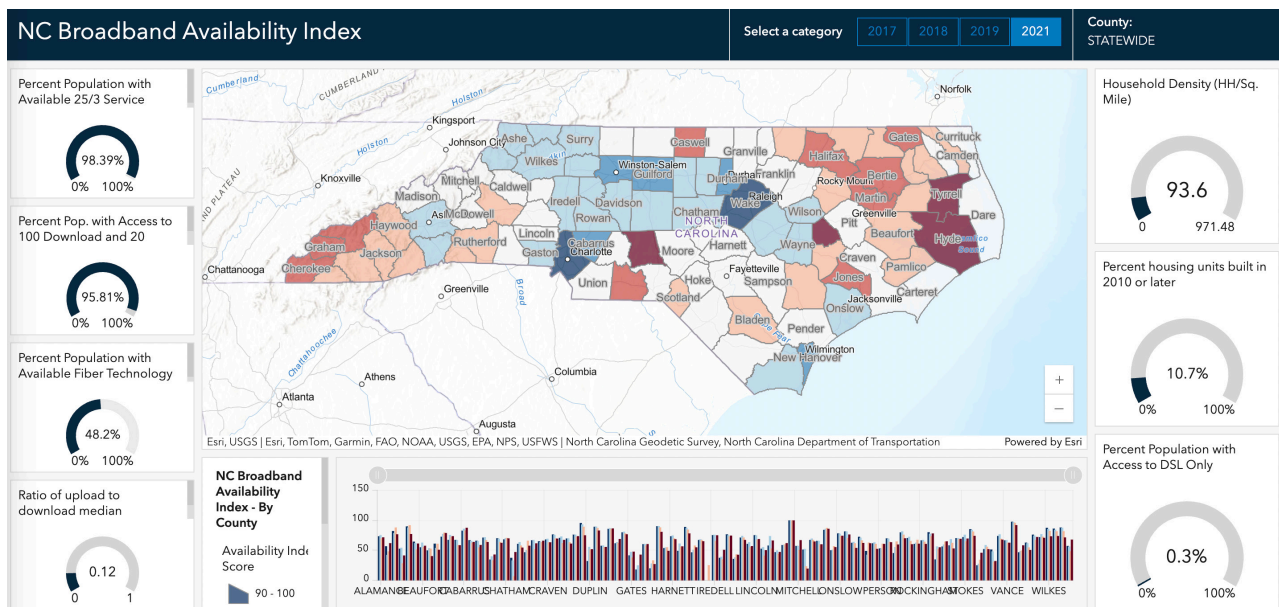


Image of Broadband Availability Index interactive map;
 URL: www.experience.arcgis.com/experience/1ca29805a2454ffab6b9579702b99e59/page/Broadband-Availability/

ADOPTION AND AVAILABILITY MAPS (CONTINUED)

NC Student Connectivity Dashboard: The North Carolina Remote Learning Student Connectivity Dashboard is intended as a general broadband planning resource for improving student connectivity across the state. Student locations in each county have been aggregated to various levels to help identify concentrations of K-12 students in relation to broadband availability and access points. Click [here](#) to see the map.

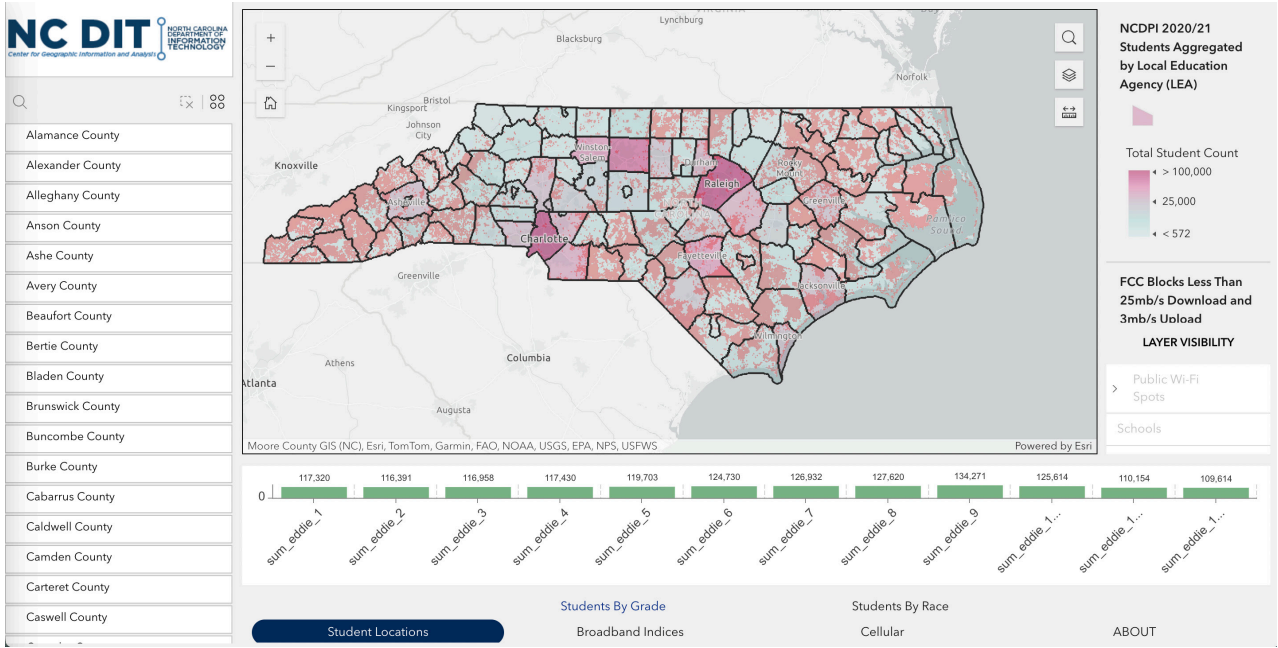


Image of NC Student Connectivity interactive map;
 URL: www.experience.arcgis.com/experience/f6270f8bb5344c6c8a8b0ecc81933ca8/

COUNTY REGIONAL AND DIGITAL INCLUSION PROFILES

The North Carolina Department of Information Technology Office of Digital Equity and Literacy works to ensure that all North Carolinians can afford a high-speed internet subscription and have the devices and skills necessary to participate in the digital economy. As part of this effort, they worked with Roberto Gallardo, Ph.D. to use data from 017-2021 Census Five-Year American Community Survey data and Ookla speed test data to create county profiles aimed to help communities understand the digital landscape of their communities. County profiles can be found [here](#).

North Carolina Digital Inclusion Profile

Albemarle Commission	Cape Fear Council of Governments	Centralina Regional Council
Eastern Carolina Council of Governments	Foothills Regional Commission	High Country Council of Governments
Kerr-Tar Council of Governments	Land-of-Sky Regional Council	Lumber River Council of Governments



AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM DASHBOARD

This dashboard visualizes the data released on [Affordable Connectivity Program \(ACP\)](#) utilization by the Universal Service Administrative Company.

On March 4, 2024, the FCC provided further information in a Public Notice that announced the last fully funded month of the program is April 2024. Providers currently participating in the ACP are strongly encouraged to review the FCC’s Order and Public Notice, which set out requirements regarding the specific and frequent notices to enrolled ACP households about the end of the program.

Click [here](#) to view the dashboard.

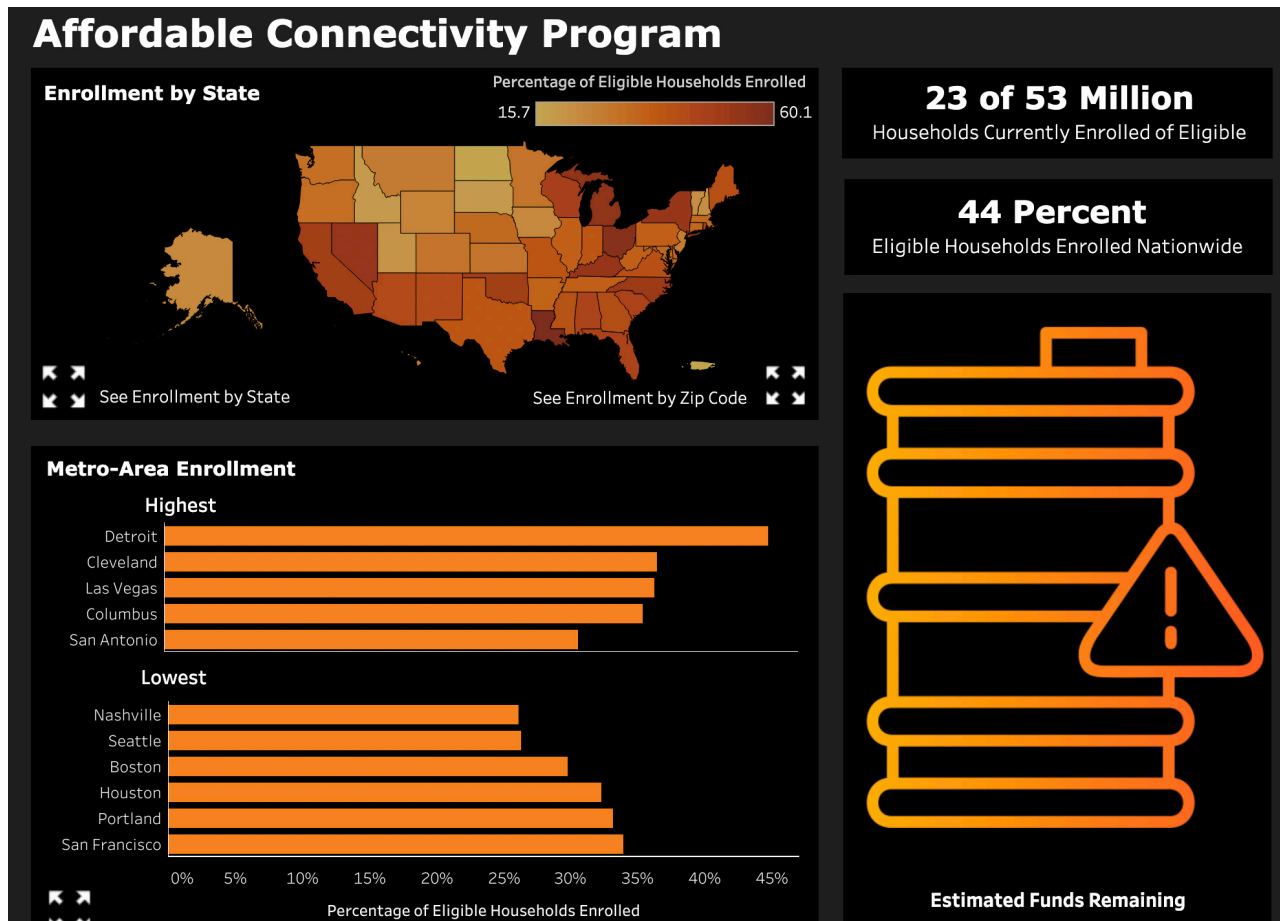


Image of Affordable Connectivity Program Dashboard;
 URL: www.acpdashboard.com

FCC NATIONAL BROADBAND MAP

Search and visualize Fixed Broadband Deployment data collected by FCC on the FCC’s web mapping application that displays data for the entire country. This data represents availability by census block. Click [here](#) to see the map.

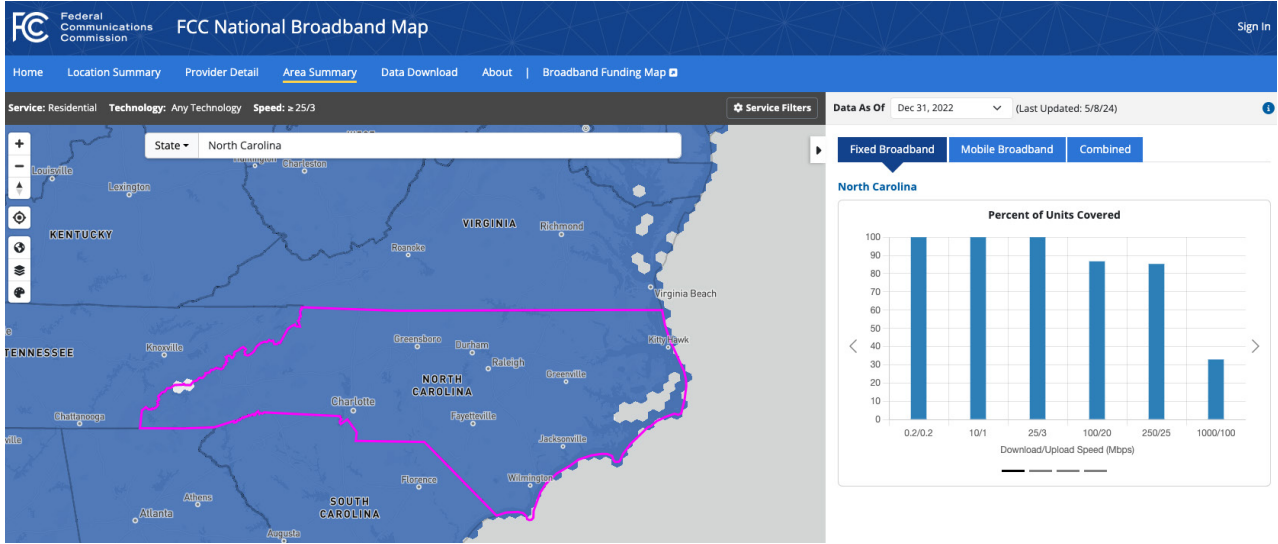


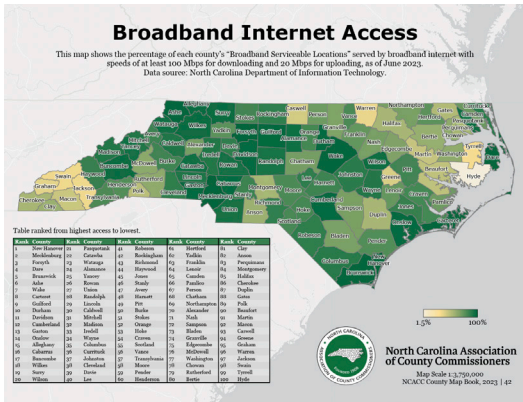
Image of FCC National Broadband interactive map;
 URL: www.broadbandmap.fcc.gov/area-summary/filtered?version=dec2022&geoid=37&type=state&zoom=5.82&vlon=-79.860970&vlat=35.182870&br=r&speed=25_3&tech=1_2_3_4_5_6_7_8

NCACC COUNTY MAP BOOK DATA

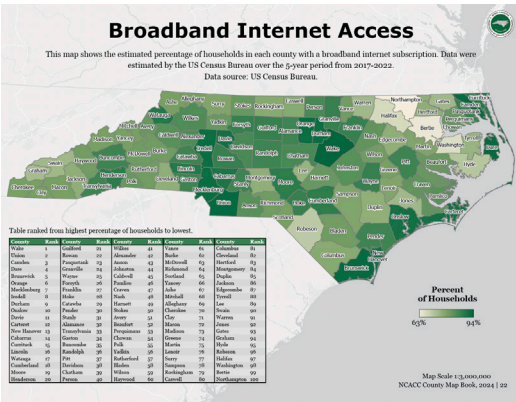
Each year, the NCACC shares a new edition of its County Map Book. The maps and data in these books highlight demographic, economic, health, and educational information from North Carolina’s 100 counties. This annual publication is intended to provide context and promote analysis for decisions at the local level in counties across the state.

Maps in the 2023 and 2024 versions of the County Map Book showcase the expansion of broadband access across North Carolina.

- Click [here](#) to view the 2023 County Map Book. Broadband maps are on pages 40, 42 and 44.
- Click [here](#) to view the 2024 County Map Book. Broadband maps are on pages 22 and 24.



Broadband Internet Access Map, 2023 NCACC County Map Book



Broadband Internet Access Map, 2024 NCACC County Map Book

COUNTY-COMMUNITY IMPACT STEPS

The below resources serve to help counties explore the scope and depth of the broadband landscape in their communities.

Below is a step-by-step explainer of the FCC maps and resulting challenge process, and gives an overview on the importance of this data. Read below for context on this vital aspect of broadband expansion and a step by step guide for how to submit a challenge.

Additionally in this section, read on for a rundown on how to conduct an asset inventory in your county and information on where to go for further information.

FCC MAPS AND THE CHALLENGE PROCESS

Question	Answer
<p>What are FCC maps?</p>	<p>The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the federal agency responsible for collecting, verifying and reporting broadband data in the United States. FCC data is what is used to determine eligible locations for federal and state funding for broadband projects and dictates areas considered served, underserved, and unserved.</p>
<p>What has changed with the FCC maps?</p>	<p>On March 23, 2020, federal legislation was enacted to change the way broadband data is collected, verified, and reported. The Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability Act – also known as the Broadband DATA Act – aims to correct inadequate broadband data collection, which has historically overstated access. Among other things, the bill requires the FCC to collect location specific data and allow the public, third parties, and others to challenge data through an ongoing iterative process.</p> <p>In November 2022, the FCC released a national broadband availability map, which provides information about the internet services available to individual locations across the country, along with new maps of mobile coverage, as reported by internet service providers (ISPs) in the FCC’s ongoing Broadband Data Collection. Since the national broadband availability map was released, the FCC has been accepting challenges to its national broadband maps in an effort to better capture available internet service across the United States. Community members can review the map that displays where internet services are and are not available across the United States, as reported by internet service providers, and allows for individuals to easily dispute individual availability information that is inaccurate.</p>
<p>Why are these new maps important?</p>	<p>This is the first time that the FCC has allowed consumers, state, local and tribal government entities as well as other stakeholders to verify the accuracy of the data shown on the map. Previously, they accepted information submitted to them solely by service providers. <i>(continued)</i></p>

FCC MAPS AND THE CHALLENGE PROCESS (CONTINUED)

Question	Answer
<p>Why are these new maps important? (Continued)</p>	<p>This new process allows challenges to what has been reported and what is experienced on a location specific basis. Participating in the challenge process helps ensure mapping accuracy and enables communities to identify unserved and underserved areas with the greatest need for high-speed internet infrastructure investments.</p>
<p>Why should I submit a challenge?</p>	<p>Participating in the challenge process helps ensure mapping accuracy and enables communities to identify unserved and underserved areas with the greatest need for high-speed internet infrastructure investments. The areas reflected in this data map could help define projects for future state funded programs that are designed to target underserved and unserved locations across the state. North Carolina is continuing to implement grant funding for broadband and the new maps allow more locations to be eligible for grant funding, specifically, North Carolina’s Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) program.</p>
<p>How do I submit a challenge?</p>	<p>The North Carolina Department of Information Technology has created step-by-step instructions for submitting challenges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select the Fixed Broadband tab and then click the Availability Challenge link (mid-right). 2. In the window that opens, click “Select” next to the provider whose service you want to challenge. 3. Select either (1) “Send my challenge to the selected provider,” which will initiate a challenge against the provider, or (2) “I’m giving feedback about the information above but not submitting a challenge.” 4. Enter your contact information - your name and email are required - and your phone number is optional. 5. Select the reason code for your challenge. The remaining fields will update based on the type of challenge you select. 6. Enter a description and upload any supporting documents or screenshots. 7. Check the certification box. 8. Click Submit.
<p>Where can I find additional resources or help?</p>	<p>Below is a list of helpful links:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Click here for more information about Broadband Data Collection and the new National Broadband Map. • Click here to access the Broadband Data Collection Help Center. • Click here to watch an instructional YouTube video on how to submit challenges to the FCC’s National Broadband Map.

HOW TO CONDUCT AN ASSET INVENTORY

Counties should know what resources they have before they set out on broadband projects. This resource is for county staff or officials who want to understand what assets already exist in the county that could be helpful for broadband projects. Knowing what infrastructure and useful assets that already exist or are in use is helpful in understanding where there are opportunities for expansion.

- **What is asset mapping?** Simply put, asset mapping is a process of the of collecting, organizing, and tracking data on relevant infrastructure assets that can be utilized for broadband deployment.
- **Why is asset mapping important?** Asset mapping helps counties understand what tools they have to use as incentive for ISPs to partner with on broadband projects.
- **Who should do it?** This kind of effort can be done through a county GIS person or other county staff who have the information and skills needed to assemble an asset inventory.
- **What is an asset?**
 - Town- or county-owned water towers, silos, towers, and tall buildings can be used by providers at low- or no-cost leases for mobile or fixed wireless broadband internet deployment.
 - Rights of way can be made available for easier and less expensive access to burying or stringing fiber optic cable.
 - Capital projects, either current or future, such as road construction or installing or upgrading water pipes or other infrastructure, can be used as an opportunity to lay new fiber optic conduit for future activation.
 - Other community-owned infrastructure, such as utility poles, can be used at reduced costs or even free of charge by telecommunications companies to expand broadband networks.
 - Community-owned land can be leased, often at reduced costs, to telecommunications companies to expand broadband networks.
 - Community-owned utilities have assets, including customer databases and office infrastructure, that can be shared with broadband providers.
 - Franchise agreements and contracts that are near expiration provide opportunities for new and better broadband service.
- **How to conduct an asset inventory?** The NCDIT has [examples of asset mapping](#) and other resources to help with this effort.
- **What does the final inventory look like?** [See pages 23-30 from Carteret County Digital Inclusion Plan](#) for how they detailed their asset inventory. Asset mapping results can also be presented in maps detailing the assets.
- **You have an asset inventory, now what?** An asset inventory is a great tool to have to bring to providers in the county during planning discussions and as the county hones in on areas that need to be prioritized for future broadband projects. For next steps, consider completing the NCDIT Asset Inventory Survey.
 - The N.C. Office of Digital Equity and Literacy is collecting information from all organizations across the state that offer services to help people get online. The department wants to learn about organizations, businesses and programs that support internet affordability, access to computers and digital devices, digital skills and literacy, tech support, and free Wi-Fi, so that they can publicly publish these assets and identify gaps that need to be addressed in the state's comprehensive digital equity plan.
 - If you are an organization, business, school or agency that provides any of these services, please complete the [asset inventory survey](#) to let NCDIT know about your offerings. The survey may take 10-30 minutes to complete, depending on the number of programs you include. You will be able to download your response for your records when you are finished.
 - Take the survey now at: https://ncsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6t08BwvYUuxnmui

PROVIDER PARTNERSHIP RESOURCES

Broadband projects rely on successful partnerships between counties and providers. This section helps counties establish those.

This section is for county officials and county staff who are looking for guidance on how to work with providers to establish and execute successful partnerships for broadband projects. There are resources designed to help counties find out who their active ISPs are, how to connect with them, and how to create an environment of collaboration and cooperation to work on broadband projects.

GREAT GRANTS IN NC COUNTIES

The Division of Broadband and Digital Equity is committed to closing the digital divide by executing Governor Roy Cooper’s plan to address access to broadband infrastructure, digital equity and literacy, and affordability.

All applications and current awards for the 2022-2023 GREAT Grant (Federal) funding round received are listed below. In accordance with Section 38.4.(a) of North Carolina S.L. 2021-180 subsection (7), NCDIT made the applications publicly available beginning May 31, 2022, for a protest period of 20 days. All protest submissions must have been entered within this 20-day period.

Click [here](#) to view the 2022-2023 GREAT Grant Applications and 2022-2023 GREAT Grant Awards.

ACTIVE INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS (ISPs)

The interactive map below will help you find out all of the active internet service providers (ISPs) in your county. This resource can be helpful in determining who the active providers are so that a county can bring all providers together for a provider round table or for individual outreach to understand plans for broadband expansion projects. The information can also be added to a county’s asset mapping document to understand the active providers in the county so that a county can be strategic in its efforts.

Click [here](#) to see the map. When looking at this map, use the county filter at the top right corner of the map to select a county (outlined in red on the image below). On the right hand side of the map, a list will appear showing all reported active ISPs and the type of service they provide.

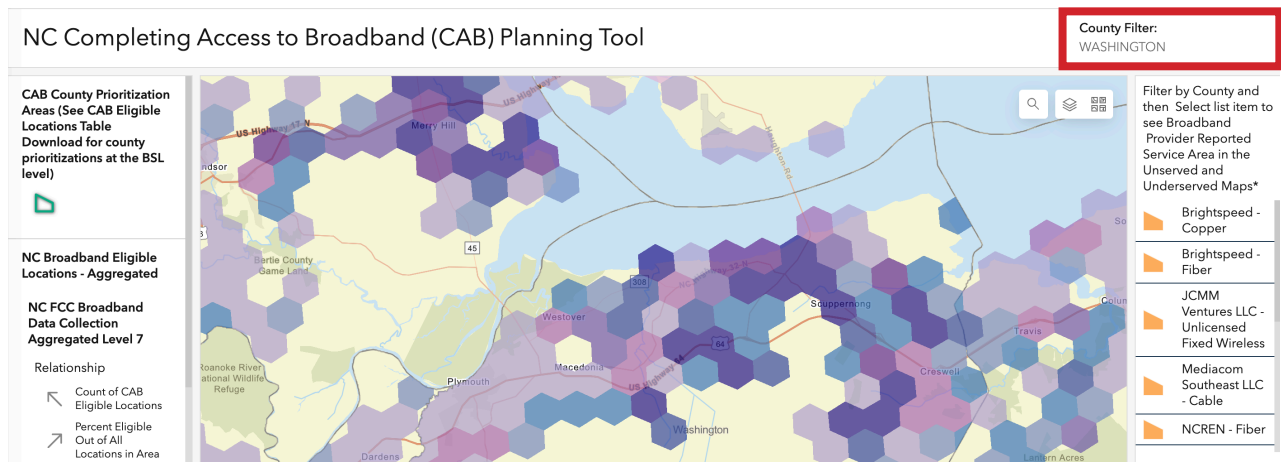


Image of CAB Planning Tool interactive map;
 URL: www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/0968e0d6753b4eb59b0b70ebb361f2cb

HOSTING A PROVIDER ROUND TABLE

Once you’ve collected the data for your county and know the providers in your county, it’s time to get everyone together to discuss broadband plans.

This resource helps a county structure a provider round table to establish relationships with current and potential service providers. This meeting can also provide an opportunity for counties to set out their goals for broadband and to find out if there is a provider who will be the right partner with them in this work.

Click [here](#) to view more information on meeting with your county’s broadband providers from the NCDIT Division of Broadband and Digital Equity.

LIST OF PROVIDER WEBSITES

Organization	Organization	Organization
AT&T Wireless — att.com	Citizens Telephone Company — comporium.com	ERC Broadband, LLC — ercbroadband.com
ATMC (Focus Broadband) — atmc.com	Cloudwyze, Inc. — cloudwyze.com	French Broad Electric Membership Corp. — frenchbroademc.com
BalsamWest FiberNET, LLC — balsamwest.net	CND Acquisition Corporation — comcast.net	Frontier Communications — ftr.com
AT&T - North Carolina — att.com	Comporium, Inc. — comporium.com	Greenlight — wilsonnc.org
Blue Ridge EMC — blueridgeenergy.com	Conterra Ultra Broadband, LLC — conterra.com	Hosted America, LLC — hostedamerica.com
Blue Ridge Mountain EMC — brmemc.com	Country Cablevision — ccvn.com	JCMM-Net Change — net-change.com
Brightspeed — brightspeed.com	Eastern Carolina Broadband — ecbroadband.com	Mediacom, LLC — mediacomcc.com
Carolina Airlink — carolinaairlink.com	Eastern Shore Communications — esvc.us	NC Communications Advanced Service (North State) — lumosfiber.com
Carolina West Wireless — carolinawest.com	Ellerbe Telephone Company, Inc. — myriverstreet.net	Nfinity Link Communications, Inc. — nfinitylink.com
Cebridge Acquisitions, LP — alticeusa.com	E-POLK, INC. — e-polk.org	Northland Cable — vyvebb.com
Cherokee Cablevision, Inc. — balsamwest.net		

LIST OF PROVIDER WEBSITES

Organization
Open Broadband — OpenBB.net
Randolph Telephone Membership — rtmc.coop
RiverStreet Communications of NC, Inc. — myriverstreet.net
Roanoke Connect Holdings — roanokeelectric.com
Saluda Mountain Telephone Compay — myriverstreet.net
SkyBest — skyline.org

Organization
Sky Fi, Inc. — getskyfi.com
Skyrunner, Inc. — skyrunner.net
Spectrum Southeast, LLC — charter.com
Star Telephone Membership Corp — stmc.net
Surry Telephone Membership Corp — surry.net
Ting Fiber, Inc. — tucows.com

Organization
T-Mobile Wireless — t-mobile.com
US Cellular — uscellular.com
Verizon Wireless — verizon.com
Windstream NC, LLC — windstream.com
Yadkin Valley TMC — yadtel.com
Zitel, LLC — zitel.com
Zito West Holding, LLC — zitomedia.com



NTIA: Internet for All event in Wake County, May 2023

PUBLIC AWARENESS RESOURCES

Find out how to promote the programs and services available to the public to access affordable internet and advocate for broadband service.

This section is for county staff who want to implement a public awareness campaign to highlight the different programs for residents to report internet access issues, sign up for affordable internet, and a plan for how to inform the public on how the county is working on broadband.

BROADBAND TOWN HALL TOOLKIT

MEETING CHECKLIST

When planning and hosting a town hall meeting with providers and community members, use the six steps below as a checklist of items.

1. Establish a goal of the meeting.
2. Identify a meeting facilitator.
3. Invite key attendees.
4. Finalize the meeting agenda (see “Suggested Agenda” section).
5. Conduct the meeting.
6. Based on the outcomes of the meeting, prepare a timeline for follow-up messaging and conversation.

MATERIALS

Below is a list of materials that you may need for your meeting:

- Printed agendas
- Affordable Connectivity Program flyer
- Broadband Survey flyer

SUGGESTED AGENDA

Welcome and Overview: The convener of the meeting (board chair or county commissioner) championing these efforts opens with the objective for the meeting and a brief overview of the agenda.

(Optional) Data Overview: Invite an NCDIT staff member, NCACC staff member or county expert to come present a data overview. This data may include:

- Broadband coverage in the county and
- Device availability in the county comparable to the region.

Current Broadband Plan: The county manager or county staff person leading broadband plans presents an overview of the current broadband plan. This session may include:

- An overview of how the county is funding broadband,
- Grants they have been awarded,
- Current point in the project timeline, and
- Expectations of the project timeline.

Provider Presentation: This is a good chance for the provider who has been awarded grants or the main provider who is working in the county to present their current work, expansion plans, affordability and areas they are covering.

Community Engagement: Digital Inclusion

- Invite an NCDIT staff member to help discuss best practices in developing a digital inclusion plan.
- Include an open discussion about digital inclusion.

TEMPLATES

On page 34, two templates to customize a meeting invitation and a meeting agenda are listed.

The meeting invitation can be sent through various communication channels, including email, social posting, flyer, newsletter announcement and digital signage, along with the meeting agenda.

Before the meeting, be sure to designate someone to record notes.

TEMPLATES (CONTINUED)

Meeting Invitation Template:

[XYZ COUNTY]

Invitation
TOWN HALL MEETING

TO: **[NAME]**
DATE: **[MONTH DAY, YEAR]**
SUBJECT: BROADBAND PARTNERSHIP FOR **[XYZ COUNTY]** STRATEGIC PLANNING

You are cordially invited to a strategic planning meeting relating to the expansion of broadband access in **[XYZ COUNTY]**. This meeting will bring together community stakeholders—including local government leaders, broadband service providers, school administrators, and others—that will develop and implement effective strategies to implement the technologies needed in the county develop or improve connectivity.

Currently, less than 70% of households statewide have a broadband internet subscription (according to the U.S. Census Bureau). Our meeting objective is to provide a planning strategy to constructively address the deployment steps needed for successful implementation of county-wide connectivity.

MEETING DATE: **[MONTH DAY, YEAR]**
TIME: **[00:00-00:00 AM/PM]**
LOCATION: **[LOCATION]**
ROOM: **[ROOM NAME/NO.]**
RSVP: **[XXX-XXX-XXXX]** or **[EMAIL ADDRESS]**

Please RSVP no later than **[MONTH DAY, YEAR]**. You may direct any questions to **[EMAIL ADDRESS]**.

*To learn more about the status of our county broadband access program, visit **[WEBSITE]**. We look forward to your partnership and input as we work to build the foundation for effective connectivity throughout **[XYZ COUNTY]**.*

Meeting Agenda Template:

[XYZ COUNTY]

Meeting Agenda
[MONTH DAY, YEAR]

5 – 5:20 p.m. Welcome and Introductions

- **[NAME OF CONVENER]**
- **[TITLE]**

5:20 – 5:30 p.m. **[PRESENTATION OR RESOURCE TITLE]**

5:30 – 6:30 p.m. Why are we here?

- **[NAME OF PRESENTER]**
- **[TITLE]**
- **[NAME OF PRESENTER]**
- **[TITLE]**

6:30 – 7 p.m. Closing and Next Steps

- **[NAME OF PRESENTER]**
- **[TITLE]**

7 p.m. Adjourn

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN FOR FCC CHALLENGE PROCESS

This is the first time that the FCC has allowed consumers, state, local and tribal government entities as well as other stakeholders to verify the accuracy of the data shown on the map. Previously, they accepted information submitted to them solely by service providers.

This new process allows challenges to what has been reported and what is experienced on a location specific basis.

Participating in the challenge process helps ensure mapping accuracy and enables communities to identify unserved and underserved areas with the greatest need for high-speed internet infrastructure investments.

MESSAGING

Newsletter Messaging: As a trusted leader in your county, you can help your community become better informed about the federal initiatives intended to gather more accurate broadband data from residents.

Since outreach from trusted community partners increases public participation in benefit programs, be sure to reach out to your county’s community-based organizations, utility departments and other local government entities to promote consistent message and awareness. An example is listed below.

[XYZ COUNTY] Residents Invited to Submit FCC Challenges

High-speed, high-quality broadband is essential for participation in modern American life. The first step to connecting everyone, everywhere is to develop accurate information about where broadband service is and is not available across the country. The FCC’s Broadband Data Collection (BDC) provides highly granular maps of fixed broadband service availability on a location-by-location basis nationwide and standardized maps of mobile broadband service availability.

Go to the [FCC’s National Broadband Map](#) and type your address in the search bar to begin.

Sample Social Media Posts:

Post about an upcoming county meeting to discuss broadband expansion efforts.

Your input matters! Join with community partners to discuss opportunities to make high-speed internet connectivity a reality in our county.

[MONTH DAY, YEAR]
[00:00-00:00 AM/PM]
[LOCATION]
[WEBSITE]

#InternetForAll #ConnectingCounties

Highlight key messages about the county broadband initiative.

Lack of affordable service and limited access to devices are contributing to the widespread digital divide issue in North Carolina.

For more details, visit **[WEBSITE]**.

#InternetForAll #NCACC #ConnectingCounties

MESSAGING (CONTINUED)

Sample Social Media Posts (Continued):

Highlight key messages about the county broadband initiative (continued).

Access to high-speed internet is an essential part of our world.

For more details, visit **[WEBSITE]**.

#InternetForAll #NCACC #ConnectingCounties

Any improvement to high-speed internet access will help make #NCCounties — and North Carolina — a more connected, knowledge-driven place to live.

For more details, visit **[WEBSITE]**.

Together, let’s keep our county connected.

#InternetForAll #NCACC #ConnectingCounties

Post about ACP general enrollment.

[XYZ COUNTY] has broadband gaps that keep people in our community from being able to easily and efficiently access services like telehealth, remote learning and remote work.

Help us find the gaps in our community by visiting www.ncbroadband.gov/survey and taking a 5-minute survey.

Together, let’s keep our county connected.

#InternetForAll #NCACC #ConnectingCounties

Are you eligible for a monthly discount on broadband internet service? Contact the Affordable Connectivity Program by visiting www.acpbenefit.org or calling 1-877-384-2575!

#InternetForAll #NCACC #ConnectingCounties

[XYZ COUNTY] residents! Thanks to the FCC’s Affordable Connectivity Program, you could save on your internet bill. See if you qualify and apply today at www.getinternet.gov!

#InternetForAll #NCACC #ConnectingCounties

Post about the NC broadband survey.

Help **[XYZ COUNTY]** families and homes get better connected. Take the #NCBroadband Survey and let us know your connection needs and quality.

Take the 5-minute survey at www.ncbroadband.gov/survey.

#InternetForAll #NCBroadband #ConnectingCounties

[XYZ COUNTY] needs your help finding the areas of our community that need better high-speed broadband service.

Take the 5-minute survey at www.ncbroadband.gov/survey.

#InternetForAll #NCBroadband #ConnectingCounties

Click [here](#) to download the FCC Broadband Data Collection Challenge Processes informational flyer. To learn more about how to file location and availability challenges to FCC’s Broadband Map, watch [this instructional video](#).

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TO CONTINUE FUNDING THE AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM

The Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), established by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58) in 2021, provides a subsidy toward monthly internet access payments for most households that earn up to 200% of federal poverty guidelines. The subsidy is \$30 per household and \$75 per household on tribal lands. ACP also provides a one-time subsidy of up to \$100 toward the purchase of a connected device (e.g., mobile phone, laptop).

Currently 23 million U.S. households receive ACP support. The last fully funded month for ACP is April 2024. The program stopped accepting applications February 7, 2024. On April 9, 2024, the FCC announced reduced maximum reimbursements for May 2024, the final month of the program.

In North Carolina, more than 840,000 households enrolled in the ACP. This program goes beyond helping low-income households access broadband services in their home. It is a key tool to incentivize broadband service providers to deploy capital into rural and underserved areas. With continued funding for ACP, service providers will have more certainty that subscribers are ready and able to sign up as broadband infrastructure is built.

NCACC along with stakeholders, which include the North Carolina Department of Information Technology and members from the North Carolina General Assembly, have advocated for continued funding of this program to help promote access to high speed quality affordable internet access across the state.

NCACC encourages everyone to [contact their congressional delegation](#) to advocate for continued funding for ACP. For more information on the ACP wind down, click [here](#).



NCACC President Tracey Johnson at NTIA event in Wake County, November 2022



KEY CONTACTS

NCACC CONTACTS

For questions on the playbook, contact communications@ncacc.org.

For questions on broadband policy in North Carolina, contact policy@ncacc.org.

NCDIT CONTACTS

For questions on GREAT Grants, contact greatgrant@nc.gov.

For questions on CAB, contact cabprogram@nc.gov.

For questions on NC Mapping, contact stephanie.edwards@nc.gov.

For questions on Digital Equity, contact annette.taylor@nc.gov.

WE'D LIKE TO EXTEND A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO NCDIT!

NCDIT has generously granted permission for their materials to be used and customized by the NCACC and have granted permission to the Association to facilitate access to these materials.



Empowering 100 counties to work together for one state.

The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) is the official voice of all 100 counties on issues being considered by the General Assembly, Congress and federal and state agencies. The Association provides expertise to counties in the areas of advocacy, research, risk management and education and leadership training.



**Thank you for all
that you do for
our counties!**

323 West Jones St., Suite 500
Raleigh, NC 27603

(919) 715-2893
www.ncacc.org