![National Urban League logo]

Addressing the Broadband Adoption Gap in Your State
Presented by the National Urban League

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) includes historic investments to increase broadband access, affordability, and digital inclusion:

- $42.45 billion to increase access to broadband in hard-to-reach rural communities *and* to support broadband adoption
- $14.2 billion for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) that provides a $30 monthly benefit for participating households to connect to broadband
- $2.75 billion for digital equity and inclusion programs

The National Urban League remains dedicated to advocating for digital equity on behalf of our most vulnerable populations and will continue to work closely with partners in all levels of government to offer solutions to close the digital divide. This guide outlines solutions for state and local lawmakers and government agencies as they establish programs for newly available funding from the IIJA to help close the digital divide by driving broadband adoption, ensuring all communities have equitable access, and promoting digital skills.

STEP 1 – Understand the Access Versus Adoption Gap in Your State – and How to Address Both

Broadband access is the availability of a reliable high-speed Internet network via multiple types of technologies including fiber optics, wireless, cable, DSL and satellite. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines broadband as a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speeds. *Broadband adoption* means subscribing to an available Internet access service where an individual or family lives. Anything less means fewer benefits to individuals, families, and society from broadband.

As mandated by the Broadband DATA Act, the FCC will release maps to determine what areas lack broadband access. In June 2022, the FCC opened a new system to collect information from over 2,500 broadband providers to help the agency collect more precise location-by-location data to build updated broadband maps. These maps will help your state further understand who does and does not have broadband access, but it is equally as important to understand who has yet to adopt broadband where service is available*.*

According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, at least 32.7 million households or 71.6 million people have not adopted broadband.

There are a variety of complex factors that affect broadband adoption, including income, age, geography, education, race, and ethnicity. It is vital that funding be targeted to meet the individual needs of non-adopters in marginalized communities, and projects selected to receive funding should be well-equipped to address the inequities that have resulted in low levels of adoption in those areas.

Federal Communications Commission: Status Update: Mapping Where Broadband Is—and Is Not—Available in the U.S.
American Community Survey: Tables - SDA (ipums.org)

STEP 2 – Establish a "Broadband Adoption Office" or Build Staff Capacity and Expertise on Broadband Adoption Issues in State and Local Broadband Offices

Many states and local governments have broadband offices devoted to getting all residents in their communities online. All too often, these offices are focused entirely on the lack of *broadband access* – when the problem is often *broadband adoption.* A dedicated broadband adoption office or staff with relevant expertise could focus on meeting the complex needs of non-adopters in your state to get more residents online quickly. NTIA requires states to complete an assessment of the broadband adoption gap and to engage in diverse stakeholder outreach and incorporate their input as part of the 5-year plans submitted to NTIA for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program.

[Which States Have Dedicated Broadband Offices, Task Forces, Agencies, or Funds? | The Pew Charitable Trusts (pewtrusts.org)](#)

STEP 3 – Know the Resources Available for Broadband Adoption in Your State

Included as part of the IIJA, the Digital Equity Act appropriates approximately $2.75 billion to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to address issues related to digital equity and inclusion.

In addition, the $42.45 billion broadband allocation by the IIJA **CAN ALSO** be used for broadband adoption efforts. Eligible entities may use grant funds received under this section to competitively award subgrants. State and local governments must conduct outreach to diverse organizations and draw on their experiences. This includes national groups that are well-versed in working with government agencies and trusted local organizations with on-the-ground community experience.

To learn more about how your state can access the funding for broadband adoption provided by the IIJA visit:
https://www.ntia.doc.gov/category/grants

STEP 4– Promote Enrollment in ACP and Other Subsidy Programs

Due to unprecedented efforts from the public and private sectors, free or low-cost broadband service is now available to more Americans – such as through the ACP program, which provides subsidies for both service and devices. In fact, all the national providers now have a no-cost service offering for anyone who is ACP eligible.

As of July 2022, 12.9 million households are enrolled in ACP nationwide, but many more households in your state have not enrolled.

In August 2022, the FCC will vote to establish the ACP Outreach Grant Program to provide eligible governmental and non-governmental entities funding to conduct outreach to increase awareness of and encourage participation in the ACP among eligible low-income households.

It is important for funding to be directed to programs that will increase the utilization of these offers by identifying non-adopters, connecting potential users with low-cost broadband service providers, helping to market private and public discounted Internet offers, and assisting consumers with registration for such programming and/or receiving subsidies. Community-based organizations can help ensure locally, culturally, and contextually responsive outreach and messaging.

STEP 5 – Facilitate Broadband Adoption in Your State

Agencies should focus on who to serve as well as how to serve them. Programs should be tailored to address the local, root causes of non-adoption.

Inventory Digital Equity Organizations and Form a "Broadband Adoption Advisory Board"
Identify and meet with the organizations and community leaders in your state with resources and programs focused on closing the digital divide and bring them together to form a "Broadband Adoption Advisory Board." Eligible organizations can help identify community needs whether it is additional subsidies for services and devices or programs to increase digital skills. These groups should also have the capabilities to address the complex needs of non-adopters and should include credible and diverse voices that can overcome language barriers, housing insecurity, government apprehension, lack of digital skills, privacy and security concerns, and more.

Support Tailored Digital Inclusion Programming and Digital Navigators
Connect digital skills training with relevant content and services. No two broadband adoption programs can, or should be, exactly the same because no two communities are the same—each has its own characteristics, needs, opportunities, and challenges. Digital navigators with community ties provide the labor and expertise to meet non-adopters where they are and address specific needs for non-adoption. Outreach by digital navigators could include door-to-door education, school and grocery store sign-up drives, and other on-the-ground efforts.

Maintain and Expand Public Computing Centers
People may resist subscribing to broadband at home or have difficulty obtaining or affording a compatible device which creates the need to establish and operate public access computing centers across the country at community centers, libraries and through other community digital learning centers. These centers should have digital skills classes that help demonstrate how the Internet can improve outcomes for education, job training, employment opportunities, and health.

Provide Free or Low-Cost Device Options and Technical Support
Funding programs must also focus on modern device availability and affordability, particularly for non-smartphone devices such as computers and tablets which allow for robust participation in both online and hybrid spaces.