



# AMERICAN CONNECTION CORPS

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# YEAR-END REPORT

**Fall '21**

EDITION



# ABOUT THE ACC

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The American Connection Corps (ACC) is the nation's largest fellowship program focused on bridging the digital divide. Led by Lead for America and The American Connection Project, this initiative addresses broadband development and digital inclusion while strengthening our country's next generation of civic leaders.

## THE OBJECTIVE

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Individually, these Fellows are addressing locally-rooted issues surrounding connectivity and digital equity in communities. As a collective, they are making grand strides toward a connected country: one where each inhabitant - regardless of their geography or income level - will have the ability to reach new educational, health, and economic opportunities. **In their first three months, the ACC Fellows have already made significant improvements in bridging the nation's digital divide.** We hope this Year-End Report inspires and encourages you with the many examples of which this ACC Cohort has served their communities.

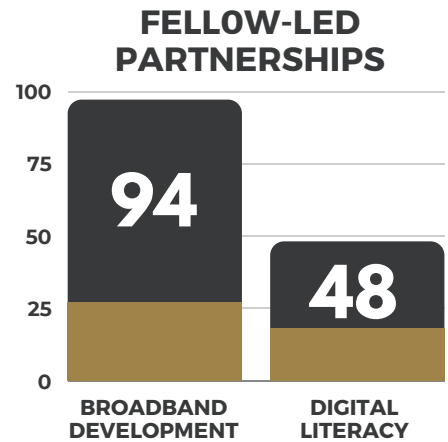
# IMPACT SUMMARY



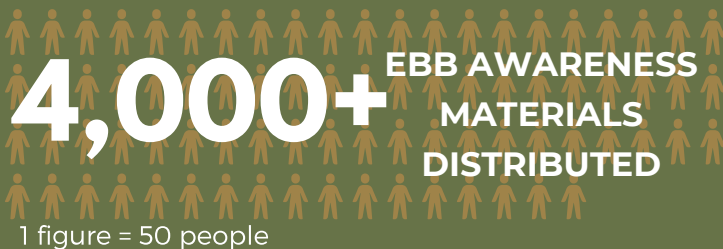
**2,000**  
HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATED  
IN FELLOW-LED  
SPEEDMAPPING INITIATIVES



Over 500  
households  
across the  
country now have  
access to high-  
speed internet



brown= fellow recruited

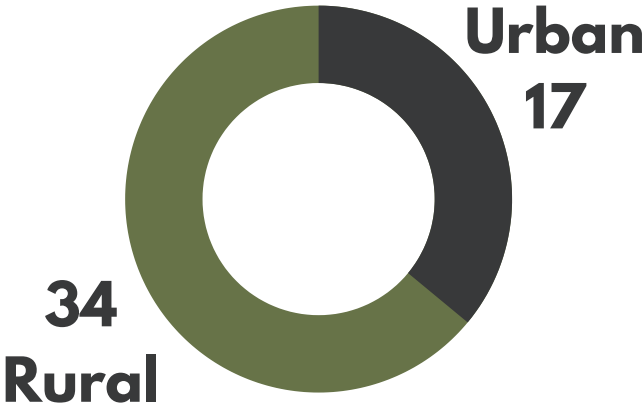


**600+**  
DESKTOPS, LAPTOPS, AND  
TABLETS DISTRIBUTED TO  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

# COHORT AT A GLANCE

## GEOGRAPHIES, TRAININGS, AND FOCUS AREAS

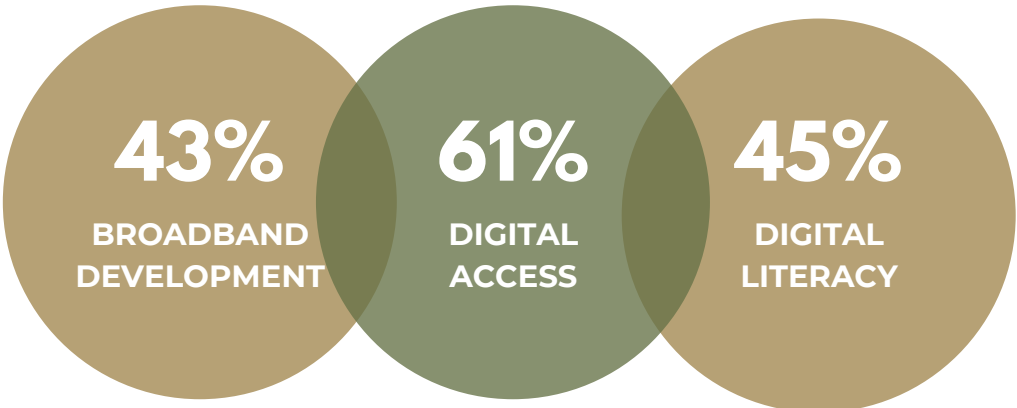
From the major metropolitan areas of Atlanta, GA, to the intimate rural counties across Kansas, our Fellows are addressing connectivity challenges as unique as their communities. Fellows are answering the calls of their communities and tackling needs for broadband infrastructure, digital access, and/or digital literacy.



### TRAINED AND MENTORED BY

- National Digital Inclusion Alliance
- Next Century Cities
- Microsoft
- Accenture
- Heartland Forward
- Tusk Strategies
- Land O'Lakes
- Edible, Inc.
- Purdue University
- NTCA: The Rural Broadband Assc.
- S&T Telephone

### PROJECT SCOPE FOCUS





# ACCESS TO HIGH SPEED INTERNET

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Over 500 households across the country now have access to high-speed internet because of the American Connection Corps.

In addition to her EBB awareness initiative where she distributed over 1,800 EBB flyers to community members, **Carly Fitz** in **Perry County, OH** is also bringing internet access to over 500 households.

After meeting with Technology Directors at her local school districts, Fitz saw an opportunity to use their data to inform local ISPs. The Tech Directors were able to identify roads within their districts that didn't have internet access when students were learning remotely during COVID lockdowns. Fitz took the list of road names to a local ISP who was able to put in lines, bringing access to 500 new households. This plays into her long-term vision for Perry County "to increase retention of high

school graduates so they stay and continue to help the county grow, recruit businesses by being competitive with our accessibility and workforce, and bring increased digital literacy skills to all so they can discover education, healthcare and online work options they'd never been able to consider before."

**Carly Fitz**  
**Buckeye Hills**  
**Regional Council**

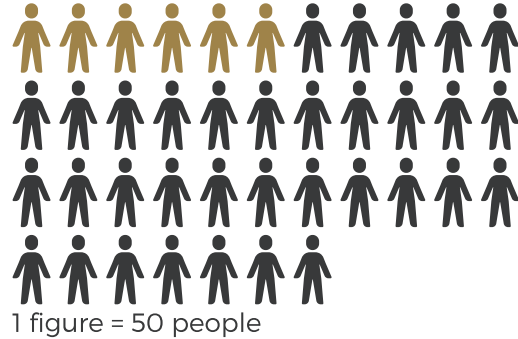


# PEOPLE SERVED

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# 2,000

HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATED  
IN FELLOW-LED  
SPEEDMAPPING INITIATIVES



This quarter, **Michael Dwiggins** and **Oliver Borchers-Williams** had 600 households participate in their speed mapping initiative with **Southeast Nebraska Development District (SENDD)**. SENDD launched an ongoing statewide initiative to better understand the current status of broadband and how to increase connectivity. By empowering county commissioners to act as broadband advocates for community-wide

speed-mapping, Oliver and Michael are helping create a statewide glance at accurate, real-time data to inform ISPs and government officials. As they manage the relationships between the counties, ISPs, state government officials, economic developers, universities, and more, they are serving as a vital central unit to expand broadband access in the 16 counties they serve. ,

**Oliver Borchers-Williams**  
SENDD



**Michael Dwiggins**  
SENDD



# DIGITAL WORKSHOPS

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Fellows identified and engaged with those in their communities in need of digital education, including SeniorNet (**Grace Clucas, Peoria, IL**) and "Tutu and me" (**U'ilani Kualii, Hawaii**). **Liz Lima at LISC** also trained 30 Digital Navigators to promote digital access in their communities.

## DISTRIBUTING TECH TOOLS

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# 600+

**DESKTOPS, LAPTOPS, AND TABLETS DISTRIBUTED TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS**



**James Clark**  
**Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe**

**James Clark** is using technology to help preserve the Ojibwe language and culture among the **Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (MN)**. Clark has distributed tablets to aide in his educational initiatives.

Another ACC Fellow, **Nathan Palmer**, is serving with **PCs for People in Chicago, IL**. He and the team refurbished and distributed 162 desktops and 36 laptops to community members in Cook County and Metro East as part of a statewide initiative to bridge the digital divide in IL. Through their efforts, almost 200 families gained access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities they previously could not reach.

# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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**Maddie Long** in **Little Rock, AR**, received funding from Heartland Forward to expand Emergency Broadband Benefits (EBB) promotional measures, particularly focused on addressing Spanish-speaking and African American communities in the Little Rock area.

In her first three (3) months, Maddie has hosted an EBB webinar with community partners, city council members, and legislators; created marketing materials on EBB eligibility and benefits that was distributed to 2,000 families through local schools; created a social media campaign; and collaborated with the mayor on a press release and media campaign to be featured in radio and local news outlets.

**Maddie Long**  
**City of Little Rock**



*"I'm truly thankful for Lead for America and its partners because, without it, this kind of work wouldn't be happening in rural areas at the scale that's now possible through their efforts. High-quality, affordable broadband is paramount to the future of rural America and LFA has created capacity for transformational change in communities across the country in an equitable, inclusive way." - Ken Edwards, ACC Fellow in Nebraska*



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

## ENGAGING FUNDERS

Fellows were active in applying for funding and showcasing available funding to partners this quarter. **Mary Gay** at **Leadership SWIL** played a valuable role in Southwestern Illinois by creating a website that details active broadband grants for community members and law makers.



1 figure = 50 people

# 4,000+

EMERGENCY BROADBAND BENEFIT (EBB) AWARENESS MATERIALS DISTRIBUTED TO RESIDENTS IN FELLOWS' COMMUNITIES

**Wesley Smith**  
**Knoxville Chamber**

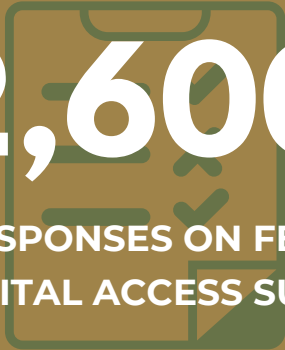


Our ACC Fellows have engaged their respective communities by creating EBB awareness marketing materials for over 4,000 households. **Wesley Smith** in **Knoxville, TN** is addressing digital inequity and EBB utilization in one of the most economically-fragile communities in the city. Through Needs Assessment Surveys, EBB fact sheets flyers, and mailers, Wesley was able to increase awareness for over 200 public housing residents.

# DIGITAL ACCESS SURVEYING

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At the **Auburn Development Council** in Nebraska, **Ken Edwards** partnered with the University of Nebraska to get survey data from Nemaha County residents regarding their broadband connectivity and affordability. By November, they had already received 248 responses (almost 10% of the population!), demonstrating significant room for improvement in affordability and access.



**2,600+**  
**RESPONSES ON FELLOW  
DIGITAL ACCESS SURVEYS**

**Amber Lewis**

**The Northspan Group, Inc.**

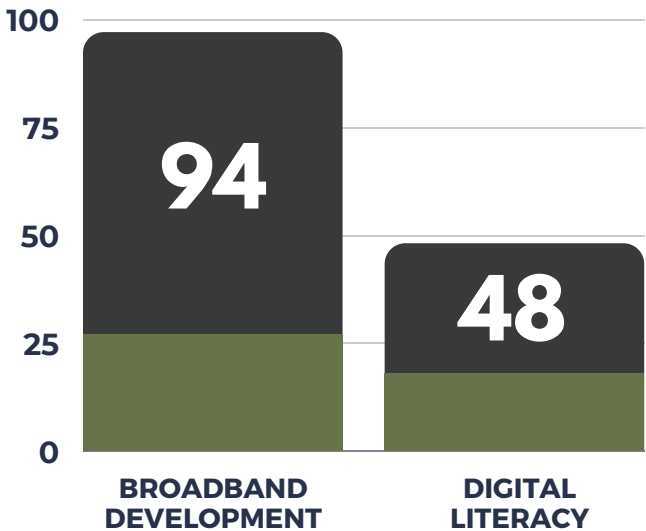


Having grown up in the Iron Range of northeast Minnesota, **Amber Lewis**, experienced firsthand the workforce and education challenges that come with a lack of digital access. Through ACC, she has returned to serve her community through **The Northspan Group, Inc.**, a nonprofit community development organization that provides services to businesses and local governments across counties in the Arrowhead Region of Minnesota, and across the border into Northwest Wisconsin.

Amber has spearheaded a region-wide data collection process, gathering resident surveys, feasibility reports, and other broadband data across Northeast MN, and cross-analyzing them with demographic data. This data collection process is the region's first and most comprehensive approach to understanding demographic inequities around digital access.

# PARTNERSHIPS

ENGAGING COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS



## LEADING PARTNERSHIPS

Fellows have been stepping into leadership roles at their placement sites in their first quarter. Equipped with ACC trainings and local mentorship from their host supervisors, **Fellows have begun managing almost 100 previously established partnerships and formed over 40 new partnerships on their own.**

For Fellows addressing broadband development, forming their own relationships with ISPs has been a critical priority this quarter. **Aaron Moss**, serving in **Morrow County, OR**, has reinvigorated the county's Broadband Access Team, creating space for local ISPs to form relationships, collaborate, and address the unserved households in the community.

**Alex Young-Williams** at **Project 1590** in Fairmont, MN, is addressing similar challenges. He has developed relationships with six (6) ISPs in the area, as well as various county officials with hopes to reignite the county's broadband committee that has been inactive for over two years. Alex hopes this committee can unite to address the unserved households in the county.

**Aaron Moss**  
Morrow Co., OR



**Alex Young-Williams**  
Project 1590  
Fairmont, MN



When the Kansas State Department of Education announced new standards for digital competencies, **Amalia Murguia** in **Wabaunsee County (KS)**, initiated outreach with the school districts to develop new curriculum. Through her research and resource mapping, Amalia is helping these local schools reach these new digital competency and computer literacy standard. These standards also include developing technical skills, successfully curating a professional online presence, and general safety practices in the digital sphere.

**Liz Lima** at **Rural LISC (OH)** played a key role in training a recent class of Digital Navigators. Lima trained 30 Navigators,

representing eight (8) organizations that each play critical service roles in their communities. Through this initiative, Lima and the Rural LISC team were able to equip Navigators to raise EBB awareness, provide devices and tech support in their communities.

As **Grace Clucas** settled into her role in **Peoria, IL**, while she found many people working on broadband initiatives, there was limited collaboration and communication between them. Acknowledging this gap, Grace stepped into the community as a connecting tool to bridge the efforts, creating cohesion and increasing effectiveness.

**Amalia Murguia**  
**Wabaunsee Co, KS**

**Liz Lima**  
**Rural LISC, OH**

**Grace Clucas**  
**Peoria EDC, IL**



*"I am so excited to work with our local schools to help our students gain skills in digital literacy and computer science. As we move forward with technology, these skills will only become more useful to students as they graduate. I'm hopeful we can help lay a good foundation of being smart and careful while using the Internet and its tools to their full capabilities." - Amalia Murguia, ACC Fellow in Kansas*



# ADDITIONAL BROADBAND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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## KENTUCKY FELLOWS

**Zak Bray** (EKCEP, Prosper Appalachia), **Sierra Marling** (Red Bird Mission), **Rhea Carter** (Partners for Education), **Conner Thomas** (Partners for Education) and **Malcolm Davis** (Thompson Scholars) have partnered together to tackle the digital divide in Kentucky as a united front. Together, these fellows develop strategies to educate and engage government officials and collaborate on innovative ways to bring broadband to the Appalachian region.



Kentucky ACC Fellows attending the 2021 Shaping Our Appalachian Region, Inc. (SOAR) Summit.

## MENTORSHIP

Since the beginning of our program, the ACC Fellows have been paired with individual mentors to provide professional development, networking inroads, and invaluable business perspective based on their experience driving broadband enablement and digital inclusion across their respective industries. Paired based on geography and areas of focus, these mentors have helped bring decades of experience into our fellows' strategies for their communities.



Minnesota ACC Fellows visit Land O'Lakes headquarters for a day of presentations and workshops from senior level staff.

# COMMUNICATIONS SUMMARY

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## 2021 ACP STORYTELLING GOALS

*SPARK PASSION FOR CONNECTIVITY THROUGH OUR AUDIENCE'S PASSION FOR SOLVING PROBLEMS:*

- **Grow awareness** that the digital divide remains an urgent issue
- **Grow understanding** that speed, quality, and literacy matters
- **Start a dialogue** on how digital access can free every place of its limitations



## ACTIONS TAKEN TOWARD GOALS

- Launched the **ACP Story Studio**, training fellows to tell their story and speak about digital inclusion online and in local media; provided partners with storytelling toolkit assets
- Conducted outreach to **national media**, focused on mediums that connect with activator audience and allow for in-depth storytelling
- Supported fellows' social content with amplification on Land O'Lakes, Inc., and established social media execution strategy



## RESULT HIGHLIGHTS

### Awareness

- Earned **25.6 million** post-ACC launch media impressions in local and national media
- Fellows posted **79 times**, earning **537K** impressions

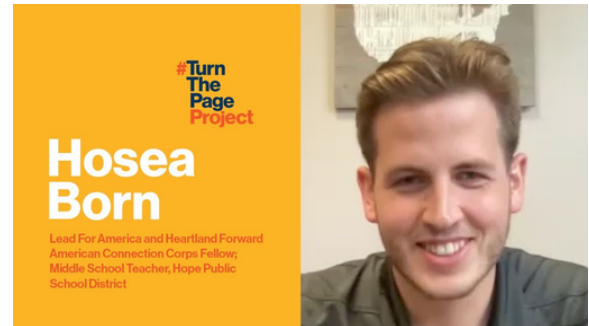
### Understanding

- Achieved **100%** speed, quality and literacy **message pull-through** in podcast format

### Sparking a dialogue

- Posts by fellows earned a **13.7% engagement rate** (marketing posts typically receive 1-5%)

# STORY STUDIO IMPACT TO DATE



## EARNED MEDIA

As the infrastructure bill was signed, the story grew momentum:

- **23.8 million** national media impressions from **3 placements**, with 100% message pull through for "American Connection Corps"
- **1.8 million +** local impressions from **12+ placements** secured by fellows or host organizations



## SOCIAL MEDIA

Fellows grew their posting frequency:

- **79** social media posts by the fellows on broadband topics
- **537,040** social media impressions for the fellows' broadband posts

And they *activated* their communities online:

- **1129** likes across all posts
- **116** total comments
- **13.7%** engagement rate (marketing posts typically receive 1-5%)

# ACC FELLOWS IN THE MEDIA



#TurnThePageProject

ON HOW DIGITAL DIVIDES HURT STUDENTS IN RURAL AMERICA

## Hosea Born

Lead For America and Heartland Forward American Connection Corps Fellow; Middle School Teacher, Hope Public School District



## GUMPTOWN MAGAZINE.

Lead For America, Land O'Lakes  
Place American Connection Corps  
Fellow in Alabama

## THE TOPEKA CAPITAL JOURNAL

### Congress must pass a bipartisan infrastructure plan to close the digital divide

By Laura Kelly and Stan Stark Special to Gannett Kansas



TCCA announces placement of American  
Connections Corps fellows

## The Farmer.

### 6 ACC Fellows to broaden internet connectivity in rural Minnesota