



AMERICAN CONNECTION CORPS

CUMULATIVE REPORT

AUGUST 1, 2021 - DECEMBER 31, 2022



Dear ACC Community,

This cumulative report comes at both a reflective and preparatory time at Lead For America. We are reflecting on the unique partnerships, programming, best practices, and "never again!" moments that have emerged from the past year and a half of launching ACC and adapting it from our Hometown Fellows program.

Simultaneously, our winter months are fueled by the anticipation of springtime, and the new pools of talent that we can embrace and redirect toward service, especially in places most people overlook. These are the places where the ACC, our team, our community of Fellows and dynamic hosts, are hard at work. What motivates us? A steadfast faith in their possibility, and in the role that connection -- to internet, to opportunity, to one another -- plays in enabling community prosperity.

As our team prepares for a new season of recruitment for both Fellows and Hosts, we also turn to you, our partners, for support, I've had the opportunity to speak with many of you over the past months on what resonates most about the ACC program.

I am sure you will find a lot of impressive stories in this report. From impressive infrastructure expansions in the most unlikely terrain in southwest MN and rural Nebraska, to locally adaptive digital skilling programs in Eastern Kentucky and mainland Hawaii: there's a lot to say about what ACC Fellows do.

There's also a lot to say about who they are, and what they signify.

Many of you shared with me that what excites you most about the ACC is not just what Fellows achieve, but how they do it. We talked about the infectious hope they instill in others through their enthusiasm and expansive community engagement, their demonstration that national service can deliver for rural and disinvested America, and the importance of pathways for local leaders - young and old - to see how they can find possibility in the places and people they love.

As we share the highlights from the past 1.5 years from you in this report, we look forward to discussing together in the weeks ahead what the future of ACC post-pilot holds. If these stories are any indicator, the ACC offers a recipe for how we may connect rural and disinvested America to its greatest asset yet: talent.

Benya Beacom

VP of Civic Ventures, Lead For America

ABOUT ACC

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

OUR OBJECTIVE

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. As we reflect on the past year and a half, we are confident that our Fellows and this model are addressing important local needs, and building the bench of leadership necessary to sustain our communities.

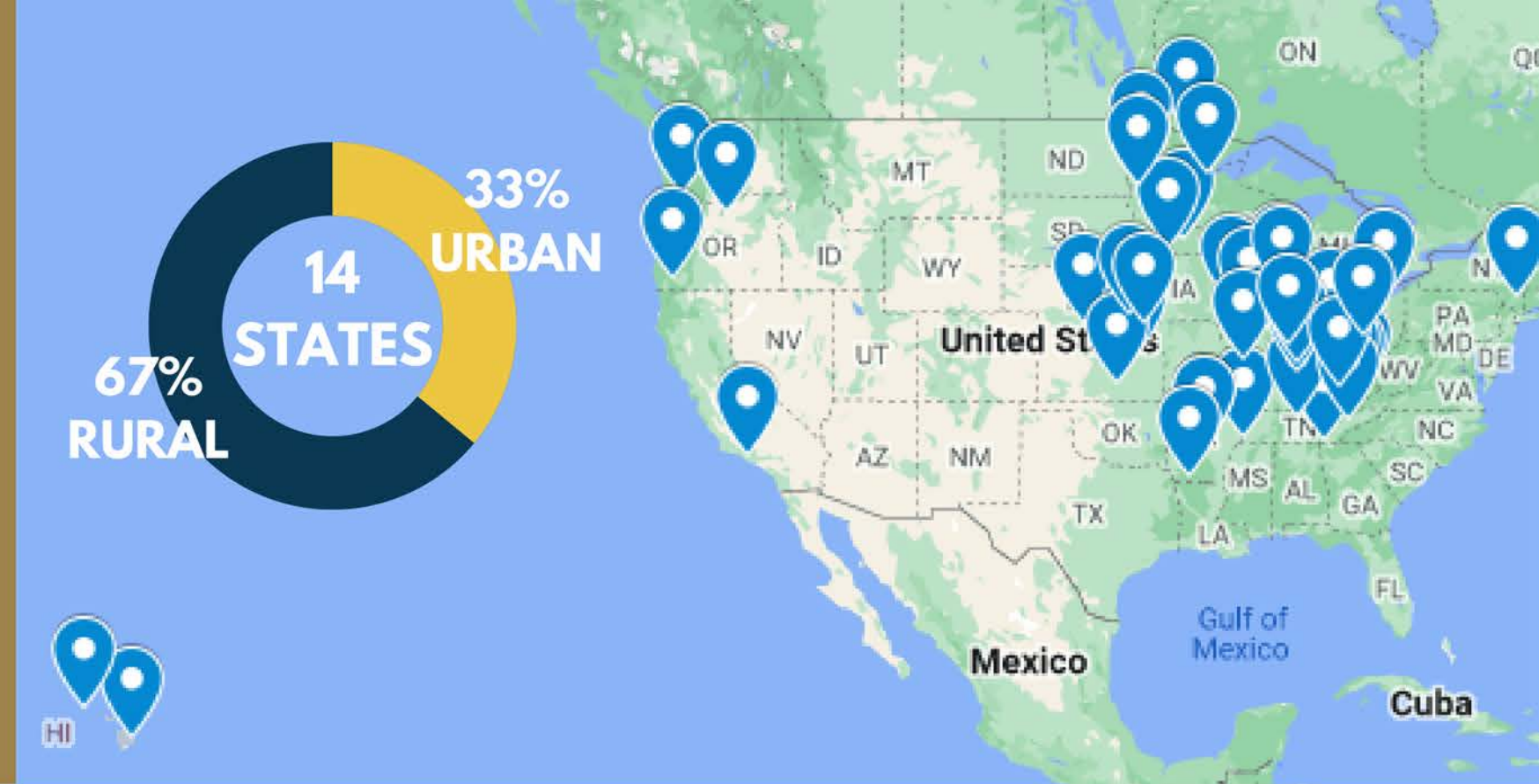
American Connection Corps fellows and staff at Land O'Lakes, Inc.



COHORT AT A GLANCE

GEOGRAPHIES, TRAININGS, AND FOCUS AREAS

From mid-sized cities like Chattanooga, Tennessee to rural Koochiching County, Minnesota and the islands of Hawai'i, our Fellows are addressing connectivity challenges as unique as their places. Nationwide, ACC AmeriCorps Fellows are answering the call of their communities and tackling the local need for broadband infrastructure, affordability and access, and all that it enables, across fourteen states, predominantly in rural or semi-rural areas.



TRAINED AND MENTORED BY:

- Accenture
- Benton Institute for Broadband & Society
- Heartland Forward
- Land O'Lakes
- Microsoft
- National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
- Next Century Cities
- NTCA: The Rural Broadband Association
- Purdue University
- The Enterprise Center

PROJECT SCOPE FOCUS



THE AMERICAN CONNECTION CORPS IS AN INITIATIVE OF:



AMERICAN
CONNECTION
PROJECT



COHORT AT A GLANCE

COHORTS 2021 & 2022

Maddie Long, '21 - City of Little Rock, AR
Hosea Born, '21 - Southwest AR Planning & Development
Mary Gay, '21 - Leadership Council SWIL (IL)
Nathan Palmer, '21 - PCs for People (IL)
Gary Thompson, '21 - Southeastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission
Cory Knipp, '21 - Southeastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission
Emma Woods, '21 - Eastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission
Iris O'Donnell Bellisario, '21 - Southern Indiana Development Council
Amalia Murguia, '21 - Wabaunsee County Advisor for Broadband Programs (KS)
Jose Trejo, '21 - Empower Evergreen (KS)
Rhea Carter, '21 - Partners for Rural Impact (KY)
Conner Thomas, 'Co21 - Partners for Rural Impact (KY)
Carter Grupp, '21 - Otter Tail Co., MN
Amber Lewis, '21 - The Northspan Group, Inc. (MN)
Liz Lima, '21 - Rural LISC (OH)
Oliver Borchers-Williams, '21 - Southeast Nebraska Development District (NE)
Michael Dwiggins, '21 - Southeast Nebraska Development District (NE)
Ken Edwards, '21 - Auburn Development Council (NE)
Breanna Wirth, '21 - Valentine Economic Development
Grace Clucas, '21 - Peoria Economic Development
Aaron Moss, '21 - Morrow County Commission (OR)
Wesley Smith, '21 - Knoxville Community Development Organization (TN)
Sam Goodwin, '21 - Tillamook County Broadband Office (OR)
Alex Young-Williams, '21 - Martin County, MN
Patrick Garry, '21 - Redwood County, MN

Della Benavidez, '22 - LatinX Digital Inclusion
Edgar Cabezas, '22 - LatinX Digital Inclusion
Ashley Ufret, '22 - LatinX Digital Inclusion
Roberto Lopez, '22 - LatinX Digital Inclusion
Christina Berger, '22 - Josephine County, OR
Michael Morrow, '22 - Gillam County, OR
Kathy Lofton, '22 - Innovate Memphis (TN)
Reid Sharkey, '22 - TN Dept of Economic and Community Development
Hannah Maurice, '22 - Knoxville Chamber of Commerce (TN)
Mateo Jimenez, '22 - Enterprise Center, Chattanooga, TN
Steve Kraus, '22 - City of Waseca, MN
Miguel Perez, '22 - City of Santa Paula, CA
Lyzette Cornejo, '22 - City of Santa Paula, CA
Tina Hannan, '22 - Nubian Directions (NY)
Allison Dougan, '22 - Marion Co., AR
Shola Kahiapo-Trevino, '22 - Hawaii Co, HI
Dayevin Bunao, '22 - State of Hawaii Broadband Office
Katie Herbert, '22 - Mercer Co., IL
Shelbi Henkle, '22 - Red Bird Mission (KY)
Dr. Danielle King, '22 - Thompson Scholars (KY)
Jaci Nagle, '22 - Koochiching, MN
Rachel Peterman, '22 - Mahnomen, MN
Celia Simpson, '22 - Martin Co., MN
Erin Benal, '22 - South Central Economic Development District (NE)

LEAD FOR AMERICA

START WHERE YOU LIVE

AMERICAN CONNECTION CORPS STAFF



Benya Beacom
VP of Civic Ventures,
& LFA Co-Founder



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VP of Government
Relations



Emily Steinberg
Director of Programs
and Strategic Growth



Scott McFarland
Director of National
Service



Cadie Bergan
Senior Recruitment
& Selection Manager



Camille Saunders
Recruitment &
Selection Associate



Kevin Lindsay
Program Manager



Rebecca Johnson
Program Manager



Liz Lima
ACC AmeriCorps Team Leader



ACC IMPACT SUMMARY

CUMULATIVE FROM AUGUST 2021 - DECEMBER 31, 2022*

88
Grants Pursued



Awaiting
46.2%



Awarded
53.8%

Totalling
\$45,503,659

97



Broadband Action Teams (BATs) Formed with Fellows Engaged

218

Town Halls & Public Workshops Hosted



6,580

Households Connected to Affordable Broadband via ACP Enrollment

2,313

Households Connected via new Infrastructure



Broadband development across the nation is being fueled by passionate community members who are forming coalitions with the goal to see improved, or in some cases, simply gaining access to connectivity. These groups, referred to as **Broadband Action Teams or BATS**, are at the forefront of community action.

In our host communities, ACC AmeriCorps Fellows are at the helm, crafting and executing a vision to establish a firm foundation for their communities' digital equity agendas. Facilitating conversations between local leaders, internet service providers, and government agencies, Fellows explore funding, define local mapping needs, and help prepare their communities for infrastructure investment opportunities by creating or participating in a Broadband Action Team (BAT).



37

Unique Host Sites Served Across

14

States

75

ACC Fellows Deployed through



AmeriCorps



7,636

Speed Mapping Tests Conducted

78



Public-Private Partnerships fostered and/or supported by Fellows



145

Digital Skill Building Workshops

*Additional data provided on the following pages.

ACP: BY THE NUMBERS

6,327

Homes reached
by ACP
campaigns



79

ACP
Awareness
Campaigns



3,115

Households Enrolled
in the Affordable
Connectivity
Program Directly by
Fellows

Who qualifies for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)?

- Based on household income, to qualify the household must be at 200% of the poverty line.
- If the participant, their child, or dependent participate in certain government assistance programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, WIC, or other programs.
- If you or anyone in your household already receives a Lifeline benefit.

Benefits of ACP

- \$30/month off internet service to participant's home
- Up to \$75 credit, one-time, for purchasing an internet-compatible device



AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (ACP) OUTREACH

The Affordable Connectivity Program (formerly the Emergency Broadband Benefit) is a federal benefit that makes internet connectivity affordable for families whose incomes are within 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. As the importance of internet connectivity to fulfill educational, health, and occupational needs continues to rise, our Fellows are tackling immediate needs to ensure that their communities are aware of this benefit and eligible parties get connected easily and successfully.



Dayevin Buneo - Honolulu, Hawaii - State of Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism - Hawaii Broadband and Digital Equity Office
Since starting service in August of 2022, Dayevin has focused on coordinating ACP Pop-up events in his area of Hawaii. In total, three events have reached 100 individuals representing over 300 household members and enrolled nearly 45 people. Dayevin has been both a co-coordinator and a digital navigator. Events were supported by Pear Suite, Code for Hawaii, and Hawai'i's Broadband Action Team, the Broadband Hui was integral as their personnel allowed increased capacity for sign-ups and follow-up outreach.



AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (ACP) OUTREACH



ACC Fellows serving in Kentucky include Dr. Danielle King, ('22) Thompson Scholars, Rhea Carter, ('21) Partners for Rural Impact, Conner Thomas, ('21) Partners for Rural Impact, Shelbi Henkle, ('22) Red Bird Mission, and Jordan Jones, ('22) Prosper Appalachia.

After the transition from the Emergency Broadband Benefit to the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), ACC Fellows in Kentucky banded together to market ACP's benefits to the consumers in the eight Promise Zone counties. Working with partners such as Kentucky Highlands Investment People's Rural Telephone Cooperative and Leslie County Fiber Board, they realized the importance of on-the-ground, face-to-face interactions with consumers that were not aware of ACP. Some had existing barriers either with an internet connection, digital literacy, or reading and writing ability that prevented them from signing up. In March of 2022, ACC Fellows in the state began hosting the first "Affordable Connectivity Drives" in person at the People's Rural Telephone Cooperative office in Manchester, Kentucky (in Clay County, part of the Promise Zone).

Their purpose was to satisfy the need for micro-level intervention and interaction on a personal level rather than through an ad. Through this effort, they were able to directly sign up many more individuals and spread awareness to many more individuals across their communities.

Outside of the direct impact work of meeting eligible unenrolled ACP consumers where they are, the fellows have engaged in work aligning community partners for value-added synergistic efforts. As members of Sandi Curd's AHEAD project (an initiative focused on getting tenants of affordable housing complexes in the Promise Zone connected to the internet to do a pre/post-QoL analysis), the fellows have created maps, marketing materials for libraries, participated in multiple critical strategy meetings, and served as the "boots on the ground" at the Corbin Housing Authority to do ACP outreach.



Shelbi Henkle, serving with **RedBird Mission** in Kentucky, has focused on increasing ACP enrollment numbers in the counties they serve. As part of their mission to increase the numbers, ACP enrollment information was created to distribute to local libraries throughout the area in Train the Trainer Model. In one county, there was an ACP enrollment improvement from 2,602 to 2,734 (4.82 percent increase, another county increased from 2,092 to 2,279 (8.2 increase) and another county went from 588 to 620 (5.16 increase). RedBird also established a Senior4Seniors program which pairs an upperclassman high school student with someone from the local senior center. This serves dual purposes of providing service hours for students and digital literacy for seniors. The goal, create a partnership between a high school student who is well-versed in technology and a senior citizen who may need one-on-one assistance with personal devices such as laptops, tablets, or phones. The program allows senior citizens to gain confidence with their own devices, navigate scams, and connect with those in their community that they engage with often.

Maddie Long serving with the **City of Little Rock**, has been promoting the Emergency Broadband Benefit, now known as the Affordable Connectivity Program since the start of her fellowship in 2021. When starting out numbers were at 4,969 and after her efforts 11,655 Little Rock residents are enrolled. This thanks to the combined efforts of Long, the City and partners Heartland Forward, Excel by 8, Little Rock Coalition of Neighborhoods, Central Arkansas Library System (CALs), Central Arkansas Water, Little Rock School District, and Little Rock Community Centers. Each have contributed greatly. Heartland Forward supported initial outreach with funding for PSA's on local radio stations in Spanish and English. Long has since worked in earned media channels and relied on community connections to build trust in the program. CALs and Little Rock Community Centers, led employees through training led by FCC Associate Chief Keyla Hernandez-Ulloa to assist library patrons. Little Rock School District frequently allows the organization to send take-home flyers and table at events to share information about the program as well as on their school communication platforms. Central Arkansas Water provided ACP information to the Greater Central Arkansas area, including Little Rock, and putting inserts in 450,000 customer bills. Their goal for 2023 is to have 20,000 residents enrolled!





AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (ACP) OUTREACH



Christina Berger, ACC AmeriCorps Fellow serving in **Josephine County, Oregon**, is embracing ACP enrollment in her rural county. She has established partnerships with the Three Rivers/Josephine County School District and the Grants Pass School District 7 as part of our outreach and application assistance efforts to bolster ACP enrollment. Both districts have 15 schools with a total enrollment of 4,815 students, 20% being minority students and 44.9% economically disadvantaged. All students are eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced-price meal program through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) making their households ACP-eligible. Berger has even gone so far as to set up a helpdesk for troubleshooting applications that have been denied due to errors like inaccurate document uploads. In partnership with the local library and county government.

She notes, "all our efforts to get access to those students were made possible with the positive support of our BAT members at the Southern Oregon Education Service District (SOESD)." Berger has helped facilitate the application of an ACP outreach grant, with support from members of their BAT (Broadband Advisory Team) to further efforts long term.

Additionally, through a partnership between the Josephine County BAT and AllCare Southern Oregon, a leading subsidized healthcare CCO, Berger has trained AllCare care coordination teams and many members of their state care coordination team management to assist in ACP enrollment as clients of this service would qualify. Additionally, Berger and her host have ordered print materials from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to be shipped directly and distributed to local libraries, community colleges, charter schools, and other community organizations in the county.

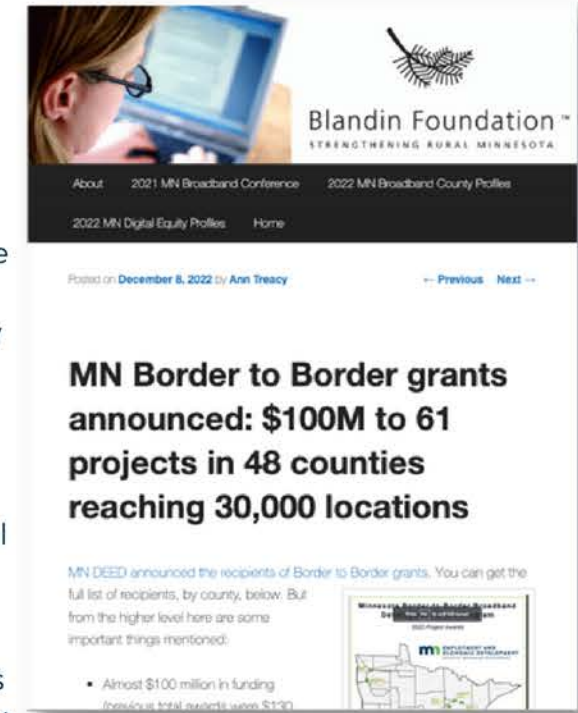
OREGON

EXPANDING BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Fellows Help Secure Over \$6.7M Minnesota Border-to-Border Grants

Thanks to the efforts of ACC AmeriCorps Fellow **Patrick Garry** in Redwood County, MN, 2,399 unserved residents will now have access to high-quality broadband. Garry helped the county pursue and successfully apply for **\$2,259,955** in Minnesota Border-to-Border state grant funding for a major boost in broadband expansion. Garry also helped create impactful public-private partnerships between the county and local ISPs Arvig and Hanson Communications.

ACC AmeriCorps Fellow **Carter Grupp** was instrumental in infrastructure development in the West Central Minnesota region. Grupp assisted Otter Tail County with securing over **\$4.5 million** in state funding for broadband deployment through the Minnesota-Border-to-Border grant program. Grupp leveraged public-private partnerships with local ISPs, Arvig and Otter Tail Telcom, to provide reliable internet access to farms, businesses, and households across Otter Tail county. This project will deliver reliable, high-speed broadband to nearly 1,350 underserved and unserved households in the area by June 2025.



By adding capacity to broadband initiatives through **Shola Kahiapo-Trevino's** AmeriCorps service, the **Hawai'i County Department of Research and Development** was able to collaborate with community partners in a number of new ways. The first was by participating in **NDIA's Digital Inclusion Week** with the **Hilo Public Library** to raise awareness of local digital equity issues and elevate broadband initiatives implemented throughout the island.

Hawai'i County's increased capacity due to Shola's focus on broadband development also led to the establishment of HIDEC (the Hawai'i Island Digital Equity Coalition), a new coalition focused on digital equity and inclusion on Hawai'i island. With more than a dozen community organizations and government agencies participating in HIDEC, the group strives to provide access to technology, education for internet basics, and deploy affordable internet services to the community. It is also through these collaborations that the County can apply to be nationally recognized as a digital trailblazer by the NDIA.

DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN ENGAGEMENT



Nebraska ACC AmeriCorps Fellows **Erin Benal** ('22) with **South Central Economic Development District**, **Oliver Borchers-Williams** ('21) and **Michael Dwiggin** ('21), both serving with **Southeast Nebraska Economic Development District**, are continuing to make a big impact by aiding the state of Nebraska, and its recently created Broadband Office, in the formation of the state's digital equity plan. While each fellow serves specific regions of the state, their focus here extends to the entire state's path towards digital equity.

The State Digital Equity Act provides Nebraska a unique opportunity to focus on expanding digital opportunities for people across the state. Together with the Nebraska Information Technology Commission (NITC) and Nebraska Regional Officials Council (NROC) they are creating Regional Broadband Committees that will help communities determine digital equity needs and increase cohesion over a diverse geographic and demographic region.

With each fellow focusing on digital equity and broadband expansion through direct service, they are identifying gaps, assets, best practices, quality information and data while sharing their experiences with BATs and communities to make sure the state plan supports priority populations locally.



Oliver Borchers-Williams, Michael Dwiggin, and Erin Benal are pictured here during the ACC Summer Institute held in Washington, DC.



Emma Woods is an ACC AmeriCorps Fellow serving the **Indiana State Library** as a Digital Inclusion Fellow in partnership with the **Purdue Center for Regional Development**.

With the mission of building awareness and digital inclusion at the forefront of her service, Woods has created a survey for library directors to gain insight and curate a digital inclusion plan for libraries statewide. Using that data, as well as knowledge from ACC training and past fellowship experience, Woods is creating online media to build awareness. Among those efforts is a 3-part webinar series on what digital inclusion is all about at the local level. Not only will it define inclusion in digital spaces, it will be a vital resource highlighting what resources are available to build inclusion, and how community implementation of digital inclusion strategies can work for library staff. In collaboration with other fellows focusing on digital inclusion in Indiana, the team has also created a media tool kit to promote the FCC map challenge process and promote various digital equity and inclusion programs within the libraries.



Residents of the Knoxville, TN area participating in the eKnox digital literacy program led by ACC AmeriCorps Fellow Hannah Maurice. Participants learn digital skilling and have the opportunity to purchase a low-cost device for continued access after completing the 5-week course.



The eKnox digital literacy program is offered by the **Knoxville, TN Chamber** to give the Knoxville community an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of digital literacy and valuable skills. Throughout the past four months, ACC AmeriCorps Fellow **Hannah Maurice** and a team have led courses twice a week. The 5-week program has graduated approximately 45 students. However, based on data, 150 people have been directly impacted. Participants who complete the course will have the opportunity to purchase the Chromebook they have used for \$50. Of the 35 participants who made the purchase, all of them report they use them daily.



ADVANCING DIGITAL SKILLING



This fall, **Celia Simpson** ('22) serving in Martin County, MN with **Project 1590** jumped right into making an impact! She hosts a coding club for 3rd and 4th-grade students at Martin County West school as part of her service to increase digital literacy in rural Minnesota. The curriculum was developed by Girls Who Code, an international non-profit dedicated to closing the gender gap in tech. Students read excerpts from Learn to Code and Change the World, then completed projects in Scratch, a free block-based coding platform. By the end of the 6-week program, participants had created 15 projects including a hide-n-seek game, a clicker game, and an adventure game. They learned about looping, algorithms, variables, and more. While the program was small to start, Simpson received a lot of positive feedback and has begun planning for a 5th/6th-grade group in spring of 2023.

Celia Simpson working with members of Girls Who Code, a coding club she leads at Martin County West in Martin County Minnesota.



TENNESSEE

ACC AmeriCorps Fellow **Kathy Lofton**, serving with host site **Innovate Memphis** is working with a pilot program with senior citizens.

Participants range from 65 and as old as age 96. Many have never used a laptop or tablet before. The seniors are introduced to terms and definitions, identifying icons, powering on the laptop device, securing the device with a password, attaching peripheral hardware, becoming familiar with the ergonomics/parts of the laptop and keyboard,

internet safety, uses for the device, accessing the internet, navigating websites, understanding parts of a web page, and discussing general application for personal use. The devices, which are donated by community partner er2, are used in a lab-style, hands-on format. The seniors are given exercise packets to help them apply and reinforce the skills they are being taught.

Upon completion, an informal ceremony is held for participants. Each member receives a certificate and a photo.



"The oldest of my students were 95 and 96 years old, respectively. The impact was life-changing for both my senior citizens and myself as the facilitator of the class. Their fears subsided, as many of them had never even touched a laptop or had the opportunity to send an email. They now feel empowered and capable of doing basic things like Christmas shopping on a website, being able to participate in activities with their family members, attending worship virtually, and even being able to type in a web address by themselves."

- **Kathy Lofton, ACC AmeriCorps Fellow**

ADVANCING DIGITAL SKILLING



Carter Grupp, center, speaks to ACC Fellows and partners on a "Digital Equity in Minnesota" panel at the ACC Winter Retreat at Land O' Lakes headquarters.

ACC AmeriCorps Fellow **Carter Grupp** serving with **Otter Tail Economic Development Group** in Minnesota knew that he had to act on digital literacy when he learned Minnesota currently ranks last of all 50 States in computer science course offerings at public high schools with offerings at only 24%.

Enter Northland Hackathon, Minnesota's largest Hackathon and free computer science networking platform. The effort, started by software developer Luke Heine, is a chance for Minnesota students to create and collaborate with peers on online platforms. Last year, the Duluth-based non-profit saw participation from students in over 30 schools in Northeastern Minnesota through building apps, games, websites, and more. In year two of operations, Grupp has played a pivotal role in beefing up offerings for 2023. The group has added 3 additional team members to drive student engagement and marketing, plan event logistics, provide resources for teachers, partner with industry, and recreate their site. Learn more how you can support the organization at northlandhackathon.com.

Reid Sharkey, an ACC AmeriCorps Fellow serving with the **Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development**, has focused his efforts on not only expanding digital access but equity through programs like Broadband Ready Communities. Now expanded, the Broadband Ready Communities Program will utilize a portion of the Tennessee Emergency Broadband Fund – American Rescue Plan (TEBF-ARP), to promote community-based digital adoption work to ensure that constituents have the resources and skills necessary to access broadband infrastructure. Broadband Ready Communities 2.0 is intended to work with local officials and counties on closing the digital divide as the state prepares to receive the largest investment in broadband infrastructure in state history.



ADDRESSING AFFORDABILITY



Devices distributed through ACC Fellows' efforts

COMPUTER & DEVICE DISTRIBUTION

For Fellows in communities with established infrastructure, accessibility and adoption rise as key priorities in digital equity. In Illinois, our Fellows have placed a strong emphasis on securing and distributing affordable devices in their communities.



Liz Lima, served as an ACC AmeriCorps Fellow at **Rural LISC**, assisted with the establishment of the Rural Digital Equity Network, known as RDEN. RDEN functions as a digital equity-focused alumni network, connecting past Rural LISC Digital Navigator grantees to their peers. RDEN offers follow-on advanced Digital Navigator training/support, technical assistance, and devices to its members. In February 2023, Rural LISC RDEN members will distribute 250 devices across the Rural Digital Equity Network, connecting more rural families across Ohio and the nation to the tools they need to participate in modern life.



Nathan Palmer, placed at **PCs for People**, has helped people in need of connection access and receive devices they can afford. Palmer was responsible for distributing over 50% of the total number of devices delivered through his ACC fellowship. He demonstrated significant initiative in seeing people connected to laptops, Chromebooks, and hot spots. Through his year of service, he distributed over 1,000 devices in Cook County, Illinois.



BROADBAND ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Oliver Borchers-Williams
SENDD, Nebraska



Oliver has spent 18 months working to facilitate broadband expansion in Southeast Nebraska. Funding for a **\$10 million public-private partnership** between Gage County, Nebraska and Nextlink Internet was approved this fall and will deliver symmetrical 2 Gbps speeds to nearly 1,000 unserved and underserved households in unincorporated areas of southeast Nebraska. Construction will start in the spring of 2023.

Inadequate connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the County to work with Oliver to identify underserved areas and develop the Request for Proposals that led to this partnership, the first of its kind in the state. The Gage County-Nextlink project offers a valuable blueprint for bridging the digital divide and fostering deeper public engagement with broadband expansion.

This partnership has inspired similar models in a grouping of six villages in project adjacent Gage County bringing fiber access to roughly 900 additional homes, and 200 in neighboring Saline County. In total his efforts are bringing nearly 2100 rural homes, and farms online in the next year.



Indiana Fellows Lead Statewide Campaign to Ensure Accurate FCC Maps

With the news of the Federal Communications Commission's recent deadline for challenging the new FCC broadband maps, our Indiana ACC AmeriCorps Fellows serving through Purdue University - including **Gary Thompson** with the **Southeastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission**, **Iris O'Donnell Bellisario** with **Southern Indiana Development Commission**, **Emma Woods** with the **Indiana State Library**, and **Cory Knipp** serving with the **Southeastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission** - joined together to develop a statewide communications campaign and outreach strategy. Gary noted, "We thought it important that Indiana get every dollar it needed to build infrastructure for communities that desperately need broadband."

In Iris' region alone, she sent out over 90 emails coordinating with community partners to distribute content, created 16 communication documents, and reached 1,978 people through Southern Indiana Development Commission's social media. This plan was presented to Echo Wireless, IARC Regional Meeting, Knox County Broadband Task Force, and to the national ACC Fellow cohort during a Weekly Pod. Purdue University estimates that 84 counties in Indiana were directly engaged in this process. as a result of ACC Fellows' efforts.



Steven Kraus, Waseca County Minnesota

For rural residents of Minnesota, the Line Extension Connection program is a game changer.

Waseca County has advocated that residents submit their addresses and network with their neighbors facing the same challenges of unserved/underserved areas. **Steve Kraus, ACC Fellow**, has consulted with mayors, township and county commissioners, libraries, school administrators, and IT faculty to bring this offering to light. They noted early on rural farmers living in sparsely populated areas of the county were often the most likely to be unserved.

The program's goal is to connect residents and businesses that lack access to broadband access to service providers and then assist in the expense of extending broadband to those locations. Unserved residential and business locations that lack access to speeds of at least 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload, can apply by entering their information into the [Line Extension Connection portal](#). This will initiate their interest in receiving broadband internet service and make their location available for consideration.

By submitting their information and address into the Line Extension Connection portal, internet service providers will have the opportunity to review the location and submit a bid based on the cost to bring service to the specific site. The Office of Broadband Development will evaluate these bids and required provider documentation and make awards up to \$25,000 to providers whose bid proposes the lowest cost to the State for extension of the service. Submitting location information into the Line Extension Connection portal does not guarantee an extension of service and the first round of applications are due by May 2023.

Thanks to Kraus and his host Waseca County, all county commissioners approved a request to work with a trusted, local internet service provider for a Border-to-Border grant for submission in early March 2023, pledging a \$2.5M local match. This grant will connect more than 200 families and place more than 82 miles of fiber in the ground.

ACC IN THE MEDIA

DAILY YONDER
KEEP IT RURAL

Where Are Families Taking Advantage of the Home Broadband Discount?

A new mapping tool identifies places where larger numbers of households could be signing up to reduce the cost of their broadband bill.

Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

Lead For America @LeadForAmerica_ · Mar 14
★ Congrats to our partners at @LandOLakesInc for earning Top 5 distinction by @FastCompany for innovation within corporate social responsibility! With LFA, the American Connection Corps has placed 50 Fellows nationally to help bridge the digital divide!

fastcompany.com

CONNECTING THE HEARTLAND

AN INITIATIVE OF
HEARTLAND FORWARD
AN INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMIC RENEWAL

Sentinel

Today's Paper | Subscribe Today | Login

Position focuses on digital literacy

LOCAL NEWS
NOV 18, 2022

BROOKE WOHLRABE
Staff Writer
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TWEET SHARE

MN Broadband Task Force July 2022: Affordable Connectivity Program and American Connection Corps

The Task Force member heard about Affordable Connectivity Program and Affordable Connectivity Program American Connection Corps. It was energizing and informative.

American Farm Bureau @FarmBureau · Apr 4
On the latest episode of #FarmSideChat, we discuss the importance of broadband access & the vital role it plays in sustaining those communities. Tune in to hear from American Connection Corps Fellow Patrick Garry & Minnesota farmer Bruce Tiffany.

apple.co/2MuZjwN

PURDUE UNIVERSITY Center for Regional Development

These 39 companies are doing corporate social responsibility right

See the full list of honorees of Fast Company's 2022 World Changing Ideas

BENTON INSTITUTE for BROADBAND & SOCIETY

Philanthropy Joins Hands to Build a New Generation of Leaders to Help Bring People Online

November 17, 2022

Source: Benton Institute for Broadband & Society
Author: Adrienne Furniss

The Farmer

Connecting communities one house, one business at a time

Fellows with the American Connection Project help local communities expand broadband capabilities.

Paula Mohr
November 29, 2022

7 Min Read

gt government technology

Digital Inclusion Training Programs Increasing Nationwide

As government and other groups that work directly with communities across the country increasingly prioritize digital equity, programs to train new experts in the field are steadily growing.

April 08, 2022 · Zack Quintance

Koyu Lake

AmeriCorps fellow joins locally led broadband effort

empowerline

Rural Broadband: A Necessity, Not a Luxury

Farmside Chat

Education

Listen on Apple Podcasts

1011 NOW KOLN/KGIN

Fellows data mapping called crucial to broadband grant

Ken Edwards, a lead fellow serving the Auburn Economic Development Council, says it's not hard to get testimonies in rural Nebraska about

NEWS CHANNEL 10 NEBRASKA Region: Central

Fiber optic internet from NextLink coming to rural northern Gage County

Students of north central Gage County in southeast Nebraska will soon fiber internet.

October 4th 2022, 5:53 PM CDT

Wednesday, October 19th 2022, 10:57 PM CDT

The American Connection Project's goal is to bridge the rural digital divide by sponsoring fellows to serve two-year fellowships in underserved areas. Briana Mumme (left). Redwood County Economic

AMERICAN CONNECTION PROJECT

As part of continued Fellow education and professional development, Land O' Lakes hosted the American Connection Corps PY '22 cohort for the ACC Winter Retreat at their headquarters in Arden Hills, MN from November 14-18, 2022.



United
IN A
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CAUSE

Speaker Highlights

The schedule was overflowing with incredible speakers spanning across government, nonprofit, and corporate sectors. Some highlights include:

- **Minnesota Broadband Office:** Featuring stories and best practices from a leading state broadband office, including thoughts from Bree Maki, Director of MN Office of Broadband, and Tom Karst, Federal Program Officer at NTIA
- **Microsoft Tech Spark & Airband:** Dennis Ellis presented the Microsoft TechSpark model to Fellows, and Jasmine Thomas - along with Vanessa O'Neil and Lee Kreuter at Land O'Lakes shared the partnerships behind the Microsoft Air Band initiative.
- **Purdue University Center for Regional Community Development:** Annie Cruz Porter led Fellows in a deep dive into how Purdue is planning and leading the engagement and design of the State Digital Equity Plan.
- **Benton Institute:** Fellows were guided in a reflection and action-setting plan for their Listening Tours facilitated by Bill Coleman, a consultant with the Benton Institute.



Garreth Hubbard, Government Affairs Manager at Land O'Lakes welcomes the Fellows to the headquarters.



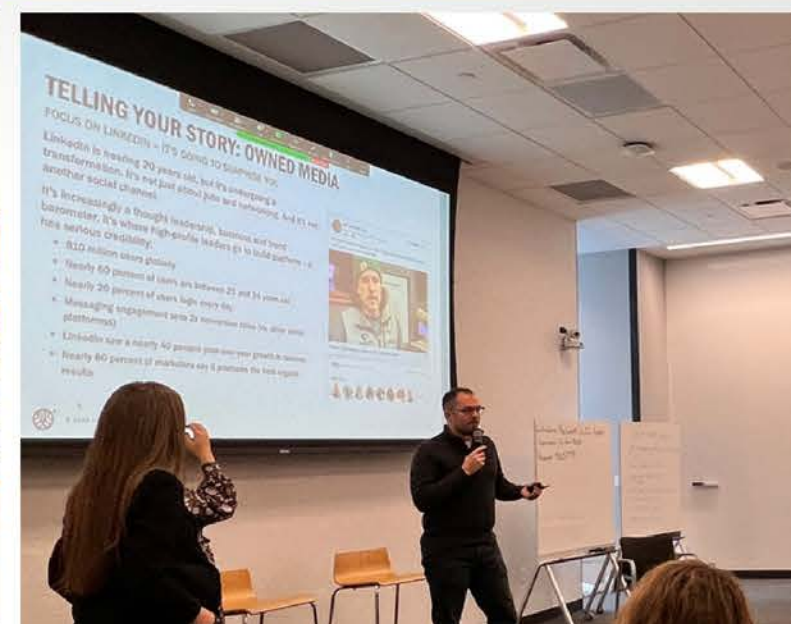
Jasmine Thomas, explains the Microsoft AirBand initiative.



Paige Tyler-Shapiro, TN Federal Program Officer at NTIA clarifies BEAD funding timelines.



Dennis Ellis from Cheyenne, WY shares the Microsoft TechSpark model with Fellows.



Land O'Lakes Communications Team gives pointers on how to share the ACC story to local media.

Understanding Broadband's Role in Precision Agriculture

While in Minnesota, ACC AmeriCorps Fellows took a field trip and received a private tour of the **WinField United Innovation Center**, Land O'Lakes' 55,000-square-foot hub dedicated to cutting-edge agronomic research. ACC fellows got a first-hand look at understanding the needs for broadband access in modern-day precision agriculture.





THE LYCEUM MOVEMENT

Lyceum Dinner

A Lyceum is a resurgence of the early 19th-century public forum movement, which created a place for neighbors in over 3,000 rural and mid-sized cities to talk about big ideas together. In partnership with the Lyceum Movement, Lyceum dinners are fast becoming a tradition at ACC events.

During the ACC Winter Retreat, our Fellows, partners, and guests gathered to discuss their journey to the fellowship, career path, and how where they grew up shaped who they are. The theme for the night: Hope through Hardship. What is the transformative power of hardship? How do we create and sustain hope? Do you need one to have the other?

Attendees were prompted by a thoughtful conversation led by LFA's VP of Civic Ventures and ACC Founder Benya Beacom, Melissa Matczek of Scoular, Emily Buckman of American Farm Bureau, and Garreth Hubbard of Land O' Lakes before engaging in a guided discussion.





Thank you

AMERICAN
CONNECTION  & PARTNERS
PROJECT