A guide to closing the digital divide in America’s cities

MARCH 2022
18 MILLION U.S. HOUSEHOLDS LACK HOME BROADBAND BECAUSE THEY CAN NOT AFFORD IT

Approximately 28 million households in the United States do not have high-speed broadband. 18 million of these households are offline because they cannot afford an available Internet connection. This broadband affordability gap is concentrated in America's cities and has become one of the primary inhibitors of access to economic security and opportunity. It is a reality centered in our nation's poorest communities and disproportionately impacts people of color.

THE NEW AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM CAN PAY FOR THESE HOUSEHOLDS TO GET CONNECTED

The $14B Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is a new federal benefit program that helps low-income households afford the internet access they need at home for work, school, healthcare, and more. The benefit can subsidize existing service or cover the cost of new service and provides:

- Up to a $30/month discount on Internet service.¹
- A one-time discount of up to $100 for a laptop, tablet, or desktop computer.

¹ Up to a $75/month discount for households on qualifying Tribal lands.
WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

A household is eligible if one member of the household meets at least one of the criteria below:

- Has an income that is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines;
- Participates in certain assistance programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC, or Lifeline;
- Participates in one of several Tribal specific programs, such as Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal Head Start (only households meeting the relevant income qualifying standard), Tribal TANF, or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations;
- Is approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school breakfast program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision;
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year; or
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating broadband provider’s existing low-income program.

Eligible households can enroll in the Affordable Connectivity Program at acpbenefit.org, submitting a mail-in application or contacting their preferred participating broadband provider and selecting a plan.

TAKE ACTION TO MAKE SURE YOUR RESIDENTS KNOW ABOUT THE NEW AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM

Local leaders play a critical role in closing the broadband affordability gap, given their deep understanding of their communities, strong connection to residents, and ability to effectively engage trusted messengers and community influencers.

To date, only 23% of Americans eligible for federal broadband affordability programs have enrolled. Local leaders can make an immediate impact on the digital divide in their community by launching an awareness campaign to ensure their residents know about the Affordable Connectivity Program using our action plan and toolkit.

EducationSuperHighway can provide local leaders with best practices for identifying and reaching unconnected households; an understanding of the federal funding opportunities available to support your efforts; and the tools you will need to close the broadband affordability gap in your community.
ACTION PLAN
FOR LOCAL LEADERS

With unprecedented funding and a broad coalition of support, we now have a historic opportunity to close the digital divide.

PREPARE
a communications and outreach plan

CONVENE
stakeholders to unite behind your city-wide goal

PROMOTE
the ACP via government communications channels

ACTIVATE
outreach by CBO’s and trusted institutions

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

LOCAL LEADERS
• Convene stakeholders behind a community-wide goal to raise awareness of the ACP.
• Activate communications channels because studies show most residents are unaware of the ACP and enrollment is low.
• Provide resources to community-based organizations to amplify awareness and support enrollment.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS
• Support the initiative and ACP adoption campaigns as trusted community voices.
• Launch ACP awareness campaigns with your community members.
• Plan or direct community members to in-person and virtual enrollment events.

INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS
• Provide a dedicated direct line for ACP enrollment with trained representatives.
• Share a clear and documented process for residents interacting with them to sign up for the ACP and broadband service (include eligibility information and the documents/information needed to enroll).
• Provide a transparent pricing and plan structure for what the ACP subsidy covers and what it doesn’t.
1. CONVENE

Unite community-based organizations, Internet Service Providers, and trusted institutions behind a community-wide goal to raise awareness of the Affordable Connectivity Program. Ensure they understand the critical role they play in helping residents sign up for internet service.

☐ APPOINT A COORDINATOR
Designate an individual or office to serve as a principal coordinating entity that can coordinate this effort across city agencies, such as a Chief of Staff, Director of Communications, or Broadband Advisor.

☐ CONTACT STAKEHOLDERS
Utilize the template letters EducationSuperHighway has created to invite your stakeholders to an in-person gathering or webinar.

☐ HOST A MEETING WITH ISPs
Host an in-person or virtual meeting of Internet Service Providers in your city to outline their role in the initiative. Ensure each has a clear and documented process for residents interacting with them to sign up for the ACP and broadband service. Our team can provide guidance and help to facilitate this meeting.

☐ HOST A MEETING WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGS
Host an in-person meeting or webinar for community-based organizations and trusted institutions in your city to help them navigate the Affordable Connectivity Program and launch effective outreach campaigns.

Resources:
- Affordable Connectivity Program Fact Sheet
- Community-Based Organization E-mail Template
- Internet Service Provider (ISP) E-mail Template
- Local Institutions (School Districts, Housing Authorities, Faith-Based Organizations, Libraries) Email Template
- Contact adeyinka@educationsuperhighway.org to learn how our team can host and support your city’s webinar.
2. PREPARE

Develop communications plans for raising awareness of the Affordable Connectivity Program in your community.

- **OUTLINE A PROCESS**
  Outline a clear process that you will communicate to residents about how they should enroll in the Affordable Connectivity Program and sign up with Internet Service Providers.

- **EDUCATE OTHERS**
  Educate community-based organizations and trusted institutions about how the Affordable Connectivity Program works and best practices for identifying and reaching unconnected households.

- **SHARE INFORMATION**
  Equip trusted messengers with talking points and FAQs that enable them to easily share key information and confidently help community members navigate questions about eligibility and enrollment.

- **CREATE A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**
  Use our communications plan template to plan a calendar of outreach activities.

**Resources:**
- Communications Plan Template
- Affordable Connectivity Program Key Talking Points & FAQs
- Best Practices for Reaching Unconnected Households
- Template Affordable Connectivity Program Webpage
3. PROMOTE

Promote the Affordable Connectivity Program using city communications channels and launch outreach campaigns that raise awareness and encourage participation.

☐ CREATE A WEBSITE
Create an Affordable Connectivity Program website for your community.

☐ HOLD PRESS CONFERENCE
Hold a press conference with community-based organizations and trusted institutions that are participating in the initiative.

☐ ISSUE PRESS RELEASE
Issue a joint press release that ensures community members are aware of the Affordable Connectivity Program. Use EducationSuperHighway’s sample press release that is customized with digital divide statistics and sample quotes.

☐ PROMOTE PLAN
Execute the communications plan using government channels and EducationSuperHighway’s social media toolkit.

Resources:
- Sample Press Release
- Affordable Connectivity Program: Social Media Toolkit
- Affordable Connectivity Program: Awareness Flyer
4. ACTIVATE

Activate community-based organizations and trusted institutions outreach initiatives.

☐ SHARE INFORMATION
Make sure community-based organizations and trusted institutions have promotional materials, and equip trusted messengers with talking points and ACP FAQs that enable them to easily share key information.

☐ HOST A WEBINAR
Work with EducationSuperHighway to host a webinar for community-based organizations and trusted institutions to ask questions prior to starting community outreach.

☐ CHECK-IN MEETINGS
Schedule 30, 60, and 90-day check-in meetings with community-based organizations and trusted institutions, to track their efforts and troubleshoot challenges.

☐ TRACK PROGRESS
EducationSuperHighway will provide local leaders with ACP enrollment data for the check-in meetings to allow your community to track your progress. EducationSuperHighway recommends that local communities issue regular press announcements highlighting your success and helping to maintain a community-wide focus on the initiative.

Resources:
• Affordable Connectivity Program Key Talking Points & FAQs
• Best Practices for Reaching Unconnected Households
• Affordable Connectivity Program: Social Media Toolkit
• Affordable Connectivity Program: Awareness Flyer
• Progress Tracking Dashboard
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ABOUT EDUCATIONSUPERHIGHWAY

EducationSuperHighway is a national non-profit with the mission to close the digital divide for the 18 million households that have access to the Internet but can’t afford to connect. We focus on America’s most unconnected communities, where more than 25% of people don’t have Internet.

From 2012 to 2020, we led the effort that closed the classroom connectivity gap. In 2013, only 10% of students had access to digital learning in their classrooms. Today, thanks to an unprecedented bi-partisan effort by federal, state, and school district leaders, supported by K-12 advocacy organizations, the classroom connectivity gap is closed - 47 million students are connected, and 99.3% of America’s schools have a high-speed broadband connection.