

**NO
HOME
LEFT**

 **FFLINE**

**ACCELERATING
AFFORDABLE
CONNECTIVITY
PROGRAM ADOPTION**

**How local action can close the
broadband affordability gap**

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A Letter from Founder and CEO Evan Marwell

Closing the broadband affordability gap has become a national priority. Our first [No Home Left Offline](#) report highlighted affordability as the primary obstacle to closing the digital divide. It keeps 18 million U.S. households offline, representing nearly 47 million people that have access to the internet but cannot afford to connect. On November 6, 2021, Congress took action to ensure that these households would no longer be without the connectivity they need to survive and thrive in the 21st century.

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) can connect millions of unconnected households. The \$1.2 trillion bi-partisan Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) included \$14.2 billion for the ACP, a federal broadband benefit that provides eligible households \$30/month discounts on their monthly internet bill. Combined with commitments by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to deliver high-speed internet plans for no more than \$30 per month, 74% of eligible households can now receive high-speed internet at no cost by pairing their ACP benefit with one of these "free with ACP" broadband plans.

Unfortunately, while 51.6 million households are eligible for the ACP, including 17.7 million currently unconnected households, adoption rates remain critically low. That's why we are releasing the most up-to-date data for states and cities on the number of ACP-eligible households, how many have enrolled, and those still lacking a high-speed home connection. Congress has allocated \$2.75 billion in the Digital Equity Act (DEA) that states can use to increase ACP adoption by raising awareness and providing enrollment support to unconnected households. Our data equips state and city planners to use this funding to effectively target their outreach efforts to accelerate ACP adoption.

Governor leadership is critical to increasing ACP awareness and adoption, just as it was in connecting 43 million students and closing the K-12 digital divide. Eighty-five governors across all 50 states embraced the goal of connecting 99% of classrooms, and now leading governors are calling on their communities to increase ACP adoption. By mobilizing a broad public-private partnership, we can overcome the awareness, trust, and enrollment challenges that limit ACP enrollment and bring every state to the national best practice adoption rate of 61% of eligible households. We applaud the bold leadership of those governors who are making ACP adoption a priority for their states.

EducationSuperHighway is ready to support local leaders in this vital work.

Our [Affordable Connectivity Program Enrollment Dashboard](#) provides state and local leaders with the most up-to-date data on the number of ACP-eligible households, the number that have enrolled, and the number that still lack a high-speed home connection. The dashboard enables state and city planners to have an immediate impact on closing their digital divide, equipping them to effectively target new federal broadband funding to support ACP awareness and adoption efforts.


We have also created best practices to help cities launch awareness campaigns to ensure their residents know about the ACP and enrollment support tools that help them get through a challenging sign-up process that rejects 45% of applicants. Our [Affordable Connectivity Program Adoption Toolkit for Local Leaders](#) is a step-by-step guide that contains outreach templates, training materials, and best practices to help leaders get the word out to eligible households.

Critically, we have also developed [GetACP.org](#) to tackle the accessibility and user-experience challenges that users face when enrolling in the ACP. Our new virtual mobile assistant simplifies the ACP enrollment process. It provides real-time support to help eligible households determine the easiest way to qualify, identify the documents needed when applying, and find "free with ACP" broadband plans available at their address.

Achieving national best practice ACP adoption rates can significantly accelerate closing the broadband affordability gap, connecting two-thirds of the 18 million households that have access to the internet but can't afford to connect. We look forward to working together to take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity to close the digital divide.



Evan Marwell
Founder and CEO
EducationSuperHighway



"No Home Left Offline starts with ensuring every eligible American household knows about the Affordable Connectivity Program, can easily enroll, and then sign up for high-speed internet service. To seize this historic opportunity to bridge the broadband affordability gap, we must ensure local awareness and adoption efforts succeed in removing the barriers that keep millions unconnected."



2

Executive Summary





51.6M

Households Are Eligible for the ACP



17.7M

ACP-Eligible Households Are Currently Unconnected

Current ACP Adoption Rates Are Critically Low



25%

Current ACP Adoption Rate



13M

Households Enrolled in the ACP

National Best Practice Goals



61%

National Best Practice ACP Adoption Rate



31.4M

Households Enrolled in the ACP



11M

Unconnected Households Connected by the ACP (Two-Thirds of the Broadband Affordability Gap)



The Path to 31.4 Million Households Enrolled in the ACP

1. Leverage Unprecedented Funding to Close the Broadband Affordability Gap

51.6 million households are eligible for the ACP, including **17.7 million** unconnected households.

The Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) allocates \$65 billion to expand high-speed internet access. This includes \$14.2 billion for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), a federal broadband benefit that provides eligible households with a monthly discount of up to \$30 per month. The ACP provides the resources needed to connect the 18 million U.S. households that have access to the internet but can't afford to connect.

2. Boost Awareness of the ACP to Unconnected Households

Only **25%** of those eligible for the ACP have enrolled to date.

Millions of eligible households are not taking advantage of the program as they are unaware that the Affordable Connectivity Program exists. Surveys of low- and lower-middle-income households have found that in some communities, up to 75% of eligible households are unaware that they might be eligible for federal broadband benefits. While enrollment rates have been steadily increasing, the growth rate has slowed, meaning we must overcome these awareness challenges to achieve national best practice ACP adoption goals.

3. Provide Support to Remove the Barriers to ACP Enrollment

45% of applicants are rejected, and many more fail to complete the ACP enrollment process.

When establishing the ACP, Congress was unequivocal that its primary goal was to close the digital divide by reducing the broadband affordability gap. However, most households that have enrolled in the ACP already had Internet access, partly because ISPs have been effective at ensuring their customers know about the program; but also due to the complex challenges unconnected households face when enrolling. Without an internet connection, many struggle to make it through the process or access the documentation needed to prove their eligibility. By streamlining the enrollment process, making it easy to access eligibility documentation, and providing real-time support to applicants, we can overcome these obstacles and ensure the ACP delivers on Congressional intent.

4. Help Enrolled Households Sign Up for Affordable Broadband Plans

74% of ACP-eligible households are covered by a "free with ACP" broadband plan.

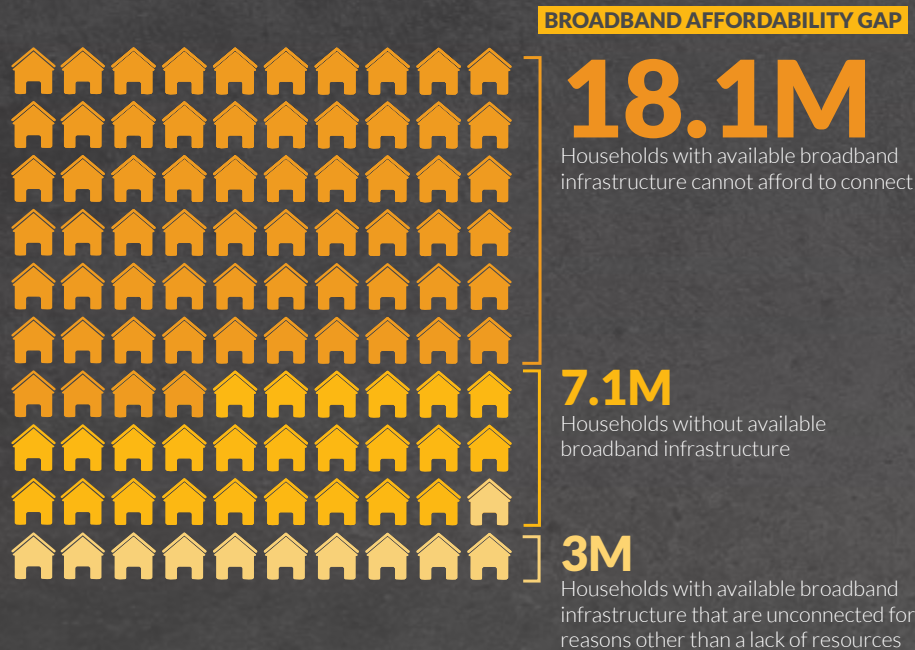
Our nation's Internet Service Providers have stepped up. Over 1,300 ISPs are participating in the ACP, with many offering high-speed internet plans for \$30 per month or less. 37.9 million ACP-eligible households are in areas where an ISP offers a plan that is free with the ACP benefit, meaning they will have no out-of-pocket cost for internet service. This includes 12.9 million unconnected households, a significant new business opportunity for ISPs.

2 Executive Summary

The broadband affordability gap is two-thirds of the digital divide.

Approximately 28.2 million of the 122.8 million households in the United States do not have high-speed broadband. The historical narrative has been that these households are unconnected because they do not have access to high-speed Internet infrastructure. However, the reality is that 18 million of these households, home to 47 million people, are simply offline because they cannot afford an available Internet connection. This broadband affordability gap is present in every state and has become one of the primary inhibitors of access to economic security and opportunity. It is a reality centered in our nation's most under-resourced communities and disproportionately impacts people of color. You are more likely to be offline if you are a low-income, Black, or Latinx American.

CHART 1 | The broadband affordability gap is the number one barrier to closing the digital divide.



Over the past year, closing the broadband affordability gap has become a **national priority**.

Congress has provided the tools to make dramatic progress on closing the gap, passing the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA), which includes \$65 billion to expand high-speed internet access. A crucial part of this legislation was the creation of the **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)**, a \$14.2 billion federal broadband benefit that provides eligible households with a monthly discount of up to \$30 per month (up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands) and a one-time \$100 discount toward a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet. **51.6 million households are eligible for the ACP, including 17.7 million currently unconnected households.**

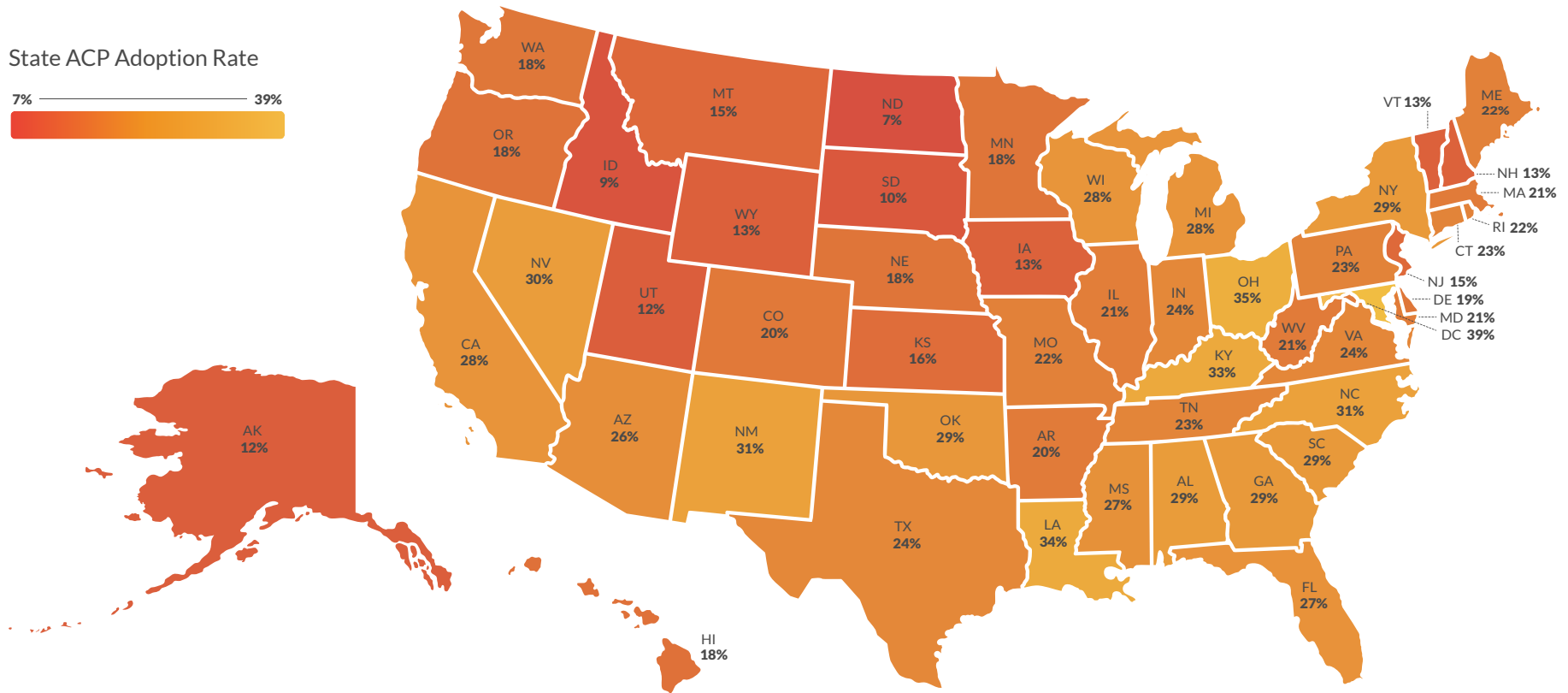
Congress also allocated \$42.5 billion to the **Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program**, which states can use to connect the 20-25% of the digital divide concentrated in multi-family residential housing (also known as multi-dwelling units or MDUs) by installing free Wi-Fi networks in apartment buildings in low-income areas. The **Digital Equity Act (DEA)** also allocates \$2.75 billion for ACP adoption efforts, including awareness and enrollment support for unconnected households. This unprecedented funding represents the largest ever federal infrastructure investment dedicated to connecting those on the wrong side of the digital divide and aims to make high-speed internet affordable for all. By leveraging this funding to accelerate ACP adoption, states and cities can close the broadband affordability gap and ensure no home is left offline.

2 Executive Summary

Unfortunately, only 25% of eligible households have enrolled in the ACP, and most already had a home broadband connection.

Without high-speed home Internet, Americans can't send their children to school, work remotely, or access healthcare, job training, the social safety net, or critical government services. The ACP provides vital support for unconnected households. Yet, **only a quarter of eligible households have enrolled**, and while enrollment has been steadily increasing, the growth rate has slowed. The rate of enrollments in cities with a population of 50,000 or more people has decreased from May and June. Sixty cities (7% of cities) with populations greater than 50,000 have seen a loss in enrollment in the last month. Urgent action is now needed to drive ACP awareness and enrollment to ensure we seize the unprecedented opportunity to close the broadband affordability gap.

CHART 2 | Only 13 million households (out of 51.6 million of those eligible) have enrolled to date



2 National Highlights

Cities in every state are proving that we can do dramatically better. Despite significant variation in ACP adoption rates, every state has examples of cities that are leading the way.

CHART 3 | Cities are showing that high ACP adoption is possible in every state.



Selma City, AL
 Metlakatla CDP¹, AK
 Winslow City, AZ
 West Memphis City, AR
 Lancaster City, CA
 Walsenburg City, CO
 New London City, CT
 Wilmington City, DE
 Washington City, DC
 Kissimmee City, FL
 Candler-McAfee CDP, GA

Wahiawa CDP, HI
 De Smet CDP, ID
 East St. Louis City, IL
 Austin City, IN
 Davenport City, IA
 Hutchinson City, KS
 Dayton City, KY
 Opelousas City, LA
 Lewiston City, ME
 Crisfield City, MD
 Southbridge Town City, MA

Saginaw City, MI
 Red Lake CDP, MN
 Moss Point City, MS
 Jennings City, MI
 Butte-Silver Bow (balance)², MT
 Beatrice City, NE
 Sun Valley CDP, NV
 Keene City, NH
 Teterboro Borough, NJ
 Waterflow CDP, NM
 Utica City, NY

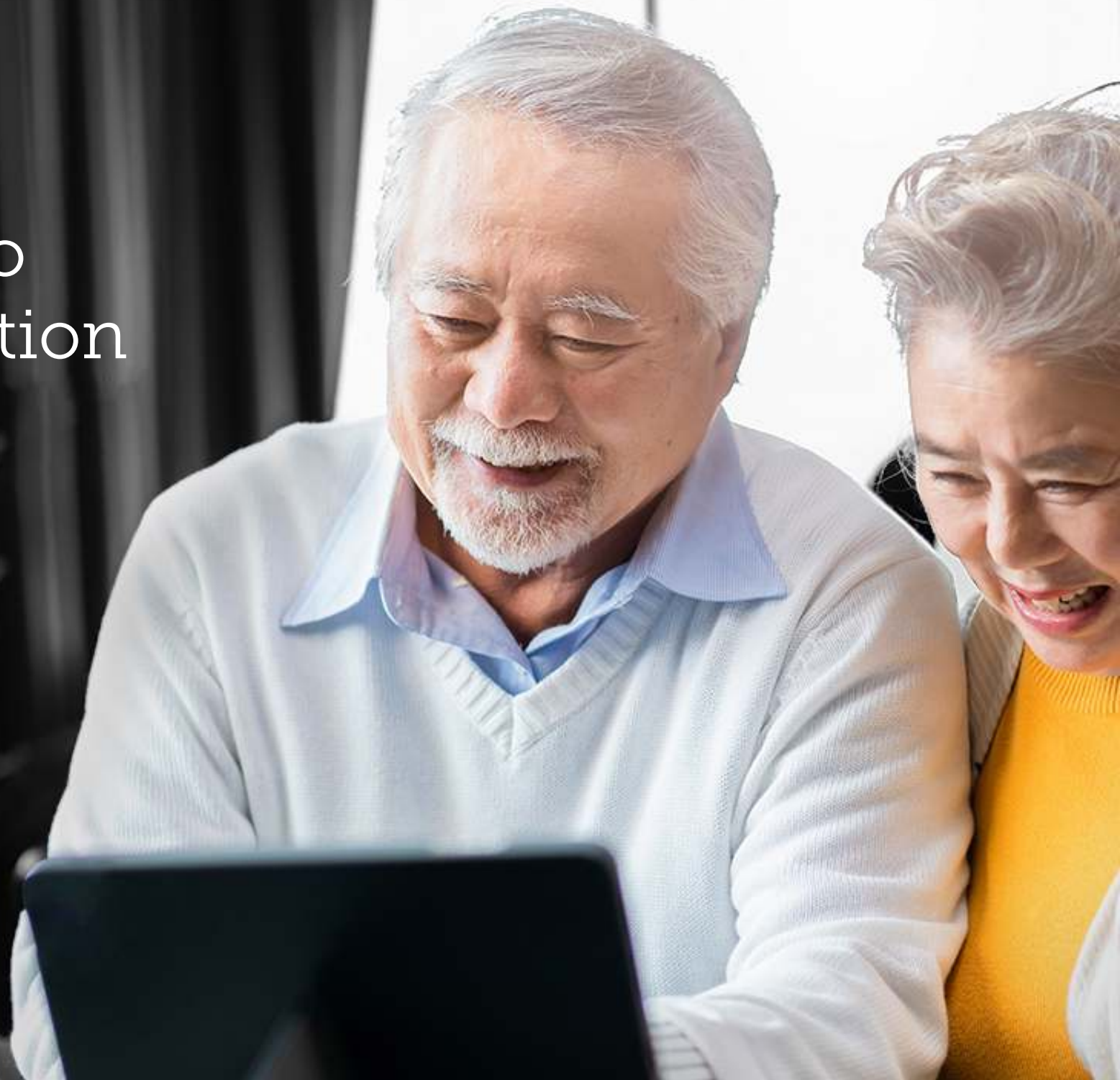
Henderson City, NC
 Belcourt CDP, ND
 Youngstown City, OH
 Turley CDP, OK
 Klamath Falls City, OR
 Chester City, PA
 Woonsocket City, RI
 Welcome CDP, SC
 Mission City, SD
 Elizabethton City, TN
 Rio Grande City, TX

Halchita CDP, UT
 Rutland City, VT
 East Highland Park CDP, VA
 Terrace Heights CDP, WA
 Glen White CDP, WV
 Glendale City, WI
 South Greeley CDP, WY

TOP CITIES

3

Barriers to ACP Adoption



3 Barriers to ACP Adoption

To close the broadband affordability gap, we need to ensure that unconnected households know about the ACP and that it is easy for them to enroll in the program.

Over the past year, EducationSuperHighway has conducted ACP adoption pilots around the country in partnership with states, cities, school districts, housing authorities, and other trusted institutions. This work, along with feedback from other organizations helping households sign-up for the ACP and home broadband service, has identified a series of complex awareness and enrollment challenges that keep under-resourced households offline.

“Nearly 40 percent of the households in America qualify. And if you qualify, you’re going to get a \$30 credit per month toward your Internet bill, which means most folks get on for nothing.” PRESIDENT BIDEN



CHART 4 | Barriers to ACP Adoption



Awareness

- In many communities, 75% of eligible households are unaware of the Affordable Connectivity Program.
- Lack of awareness that many ISPs offer ‘free with ACP’ service plans.
- Difficulty understanding ACP eligibility requirements.



Trust

- Skeptical about government programs and free services.
- Worried about unexpected costs if the subsidy ends.
- Concerned about sharing personal information for eligibility confirmation.



Enrollment

- Lack of internet access and language barriers make it difficult to access the ACP’s online sign-up processes.
- The ACP application is long (30-45 minutes) and complex.
- 45% of applications are rejected, and many more fail to complete the application process.

3 Barriers to ACP Adoption

Awareness Challenges

Many families eligible for the ACP are simply not aware that the program exists. For example, a national survey of low and lower-middle-income households found that only 25% had heard of the EBB program, the predecessor to the ACP.³ Broad outreach alone often fails to build the trust needed to drive people to action and should be paired with outreach from trusted sources such as government agencies that administer benefit programs, school districts, community health centers, faith leaders, community-based organizations, and businesses they regularly interact with. These organizations have existing relationships with eligible households, know the most effective time, place, and manner to increase awareness in the communities they serve, and have established outreach channels such as in-person community events, digital marketing, emailing, phone banking, text messaging, physical information distribution and posters in high-traffic target areas.

Trust Challenges

As is true with many government programs, many unconnected households, particularly those that are undocumented, are concerned about sharing personal information as part of the enrollment process. These households are also skeptical that the ACP will actually cover the cost of their home broadband connection and are concerned they will be saddled with unexpected costs by ISPs.

In all of our pilot programs, individuals approached without a community-based organization representative were highly skeptical of the information provided. In contrast, **those who were approached by community-based organization staff (particularly those able to communicate in languages other than English) were much more likely to be receptive to the information and expressed interest in enrolling in the ACP.** By ensuring the messenger is a trusted community member or institution, it is possible to tackle misinformation and long-held misconceptions, make households aware of the benefits of home internet access, and reassure families that accessing the ACP will not lead to questions about their immigration status or unexpected future costs.

Enrollment Challenges

Making enrollment as straightforward and painless as possible is critical to driving high ACP adoption rates and achieving national best practice goals. Unfortunately, 45% of ACP applicants are rejected, and many more simply abandon the complex, time-consuming process. Specific challenges include providing the necessary documentation to prove eligibility, language barriers, and a lack of the digital skills required to navigate the online application process.



Why Is It So Hard To Sign Up for the ACP?

SIGN-UP STEPS

STEP 1

Determine Eligibility and Create an Account

- Access National Verifier
- Determine eligibility
- Create an account with an email address

STEP 2

Prove You Qualify for the ACP

- Prove identity with SSN or by uploading a government ID
- Prove eligibility by uploading documentation from qualifying programs

STEP 3

Access Free Service

- Find a provider that is participating in ACP
- Navigate provider plans to find a free option

CHALLENGES

- The ACP application is not optimized for mobile devices.
- The application is only available in English and Spanish.
- Households are overwhelmed by the number of eligibility options and don't know the easiest way to qualify.
- The application requires an email address, but many eligible applicants do not have one or lack the digital literacy skills to access their account.
- If an applicant's address is not recognized, they are asked to provide their longitude and latitude.
- On average, the enrollment process takes 30-45 minutes, and approval is frequently not immediate.

- Unclear which documents are needed to prove eligibility.
- Applicant's rarely have immediate access to documents they are required to upload.
- Applicants must restart the process if their chosen form of identification does not exactly match the document they are using to prove they qualify for ACP through another government program.
- Many standard eligibility documents provided by states are rejected by USAC.

- After qualifying for ACP, households must then apply for an affordable broadband plan.
- ACP website displays an overwhelming number of ISP options.
- Difficult to find out which plans are free with ACP.
- Unclear how to enroll in ISP affordable broadband plans.

3 Barriers to ACP Adoption

Accessibility

Using the National Verifier to enroll in the ACP is a challenging and cumbersome process for unconnected households because it **requires internet access**. Applicants must either spend hours traveling to and waiting for a public internet connection, navigate the multi-step process on a mobile device, or use a paper enrollment form that subjects them to a manual approval process. The U.S. Government Accountability Office noted that this has resulted in two-thirds of applicants abandoning their applications.⁴

Language is also a significant barrier to enrollment, as the online ACP application is only offered in English and Spanish. Prospective enrollees come from a wide range of backgrounds, and many are unable to access the application without significant **language assistance**. The American Community Survey⁵ reports that 67.8 million people speak a language other than English at home, with over 350 languages spoken in households across the United States.

Finally, the fact that the National Verifier system requires an **email address** also poses a significant burden. Many individuals who have attended our pilot events rely on text messaging as their primary communication method. They either did not have an email address, lacked the digital literacy skills needed to access their account, or could not remember it to complete the enrollment process.

On average, the enrollment process **takes 30-45 minutes**, and approval is immediate less than half the time. This makes it extremely difficult to support households through the enrollment process and significantly reduces the effectiveness of enrollment events and digital navigators. It also makes the cost of applying for the ACP too high for many eligible households that are hourly workers with work, child, or family care obligations.

Documentation

When applying for the ACP, households must **identify, gather and submit** documentation to prove their identification and eligibility. This is a significant barrier for many applicants, who are overwhelmed by the number of eligibility options, unclear which documents are needed to prove eligibility or don't know the easiest way to qualify. Providing the necessary documentation to prove eligibility is also challenging for many applicants as they rarely have immediate access to

documents they are required to upload, or the standard eligibility documents provided by states are rejected. **As a result, 87% of rejected ACP applications are due to improper or incomplete documentation.**

Document Review Challenges

Jessica, a first-year student in college, submitted her ACP application using her social security number (SSN) and Pell Grant award letter. The National Verifier rejected her application stating that her eligibility document was invalid. She spent 45 minutes on the ACP hotline to find out that her application was correct and her reviewer had made a mistake.

To overcome the complex awareness and enrollment challenges that keep under-resourced households offline, **state and local leaders should take immediate action to launch ACP awareness campaigns and develop ACP enrollment support strategies** that leverage Digital Equity Act funds to enable outreach to and support for unconnected households by community-based organizations and trusted institutions. We now need to activate a broad public-private partnership between governments, community-based organizations, trusted institutions, businesses, and the non-profit sector to facilitate awareness building and enrollment support in person, over the phone, and using technical assistance tools.

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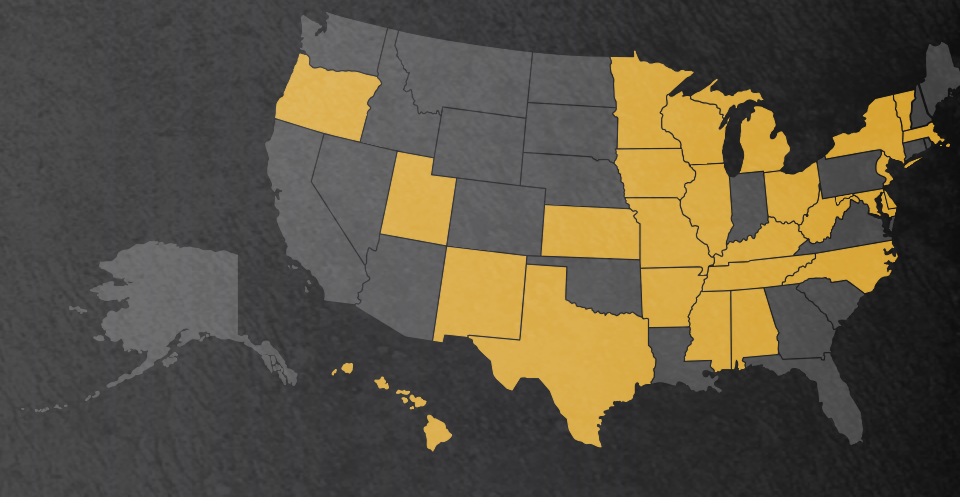
How States Can Impact ACP Adoption



4 How States Can Impact ACP Adoption

Governor leadership is critical to closing the broadband affordability gap, just as it was to connecting 43 million students and closing the K-12 digital divide.

The work to close the broadband affordability gap is local and requires us to work together to provide hands-on support that helps families overcome complex enrollment barriers. Fortunately, we have done this before. As part of our mission to close the classroom connectivity gap, EducationSuperHighway partnered with 85 governors in all 50 states to set goals, conduct outreach to school districts, and provide matching funds for fiber construction. **Governors are once again stepping up to ensure national best practice ACP adoption rates are replicated across their states.** To support this effort, we are partnering with governors to help them set goals around the broadband affordability gap, use data to target resources where they are needed most, track progress, and design their broadband adoption programs.



Governors in **25 states** have already made ACP adoption a priority.

Governors Are Leading the Effort To Boost ACP Adoption in Their States

Congress has provided the resources needed to close the broadband affordability gap, and now governors are stepping up to put this investment to work by:

PRIORITIZING ACP awareness and adoption in their states.

LAUNCHING state-wide ACP awareness campaigns in partnership with local leaders that leverage social and earned media to get the word out to eligible households.

DEVELOPING broadband affordability plans and ACP adoption strategies that allocate Digital Equity Act funds to community-based organizations and trusted institutions to increase ACP awareness and provide enrollment support.

ACTIVATING government agencies and businesses to conduct outreach to eligible households they already serve.

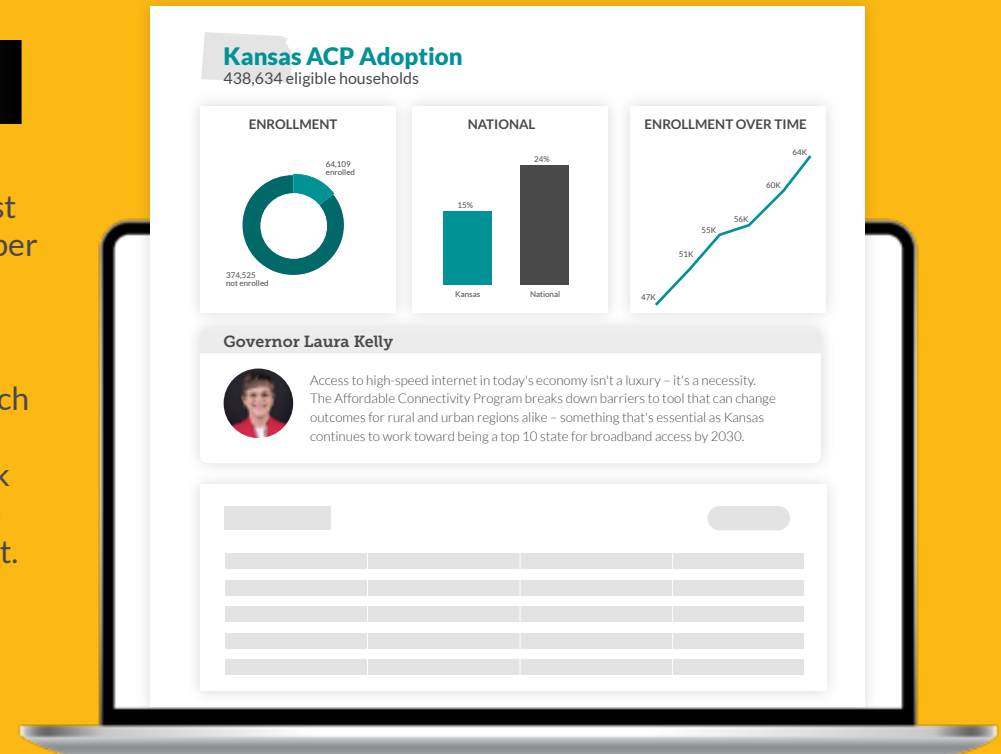
As states develop ACP plans as part of their DEA applications, priority should be given to increasing adoption by those who need it most – households that are currently offline.

ACP Enrollment Dashboard

helps states maximize the impact of their Digital Equity Act funding

EducationSuperHighway's new [Affordable Connectivity Program Enrollment Dashboard](#) provides state and local leaders with the most up-to-date data on the number of ACP-eligible households, the number that have enrolled, and the number that still lack a high-speed home connection.

The dashboard enables state and city planners to target their outreach efforts and DEA investments to communities where the potential to impact the digital divide is greatest. It also enables governors to track progress and performance and can surface best practices from those who are finding new ways to increase ACP awareness and enrollment.



"High-speed internet is critical to helping people live, learn, access health care, and grow their businesses. The Affordable Connectivity Program is an important step toward closing the digital divide, and **North Carolina is all in on expanding access to broadband in communities across our state.**" GOVERNOR ROY COOPER, NC

"High-speed internet is a necessity – not just a luxury. As our world becomes increasingly digital, affordable internet access is needed to expand every citizen's economic opportunity and security. Fortunately, the new Affordable Connectivity Program helps connect households with internet service. **My Administration is committed to ensuring we seize this opportunity to bring digital equity and affordable high-speed internet connectivity to every community in our state.**" GOVERNOR MIKE DeWINE, OH

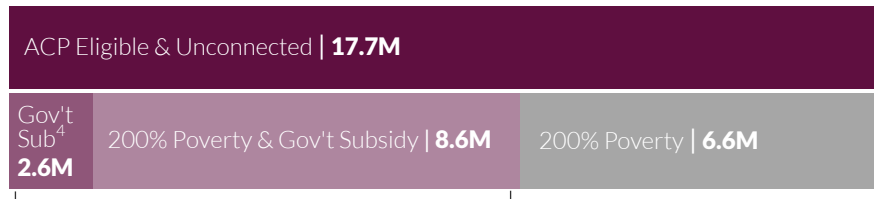


4 How States Can Impact ACP Adoption

Leveraging existing state benefit programs can accelerate ACP adoption.

Two-thirds of the 17.7 million households that are ACP eligible and unconnected are already enrolled in one or more government benefit programs that automatically qualify them for the ACP.

CHART 5 | Two-thirds of unconnected households should be easy to enroll

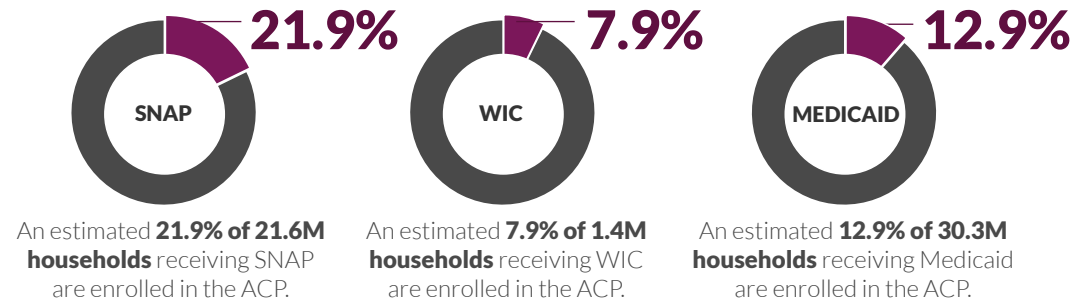


11.2M ACP-eligible households are already beneficiaries of one or more government benefit programs.

Three federal benefit programs administered by states present a significant opportunity to accelerate ACP adoption.

States can utilize existing communication channels with SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid participants to build awareness of the ACP program and encourage them to enroll. In addition, states can leverage these programs to simplify adoption by entering into data-sharing agreements with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that allow the FCC to instantly verify a household's eligibility for the ACP.

CHART 6 | Many SNAP, WIC and Medicaid beneficiaries are not enrolled in the ACP despite being automatically eligible⁷



An estimated **21.9% of 21.6M households** receiving SNAP are enrolled in the ACP.

An estimated **7.9% of 1.4M households** receiving WIC are enrolled in the ACP.

An estimated **12.9% of 30.3M households** receiving Medicaid are enrolled in the ACP.

A key communication channel in these efforts is text messaging. Many government agencies prioritize email, yet some research suggests that text messaging can offer significantly higher open rates, up to 98%.⁸ In addition to providing the opportunity to deliver shorter, more digestible messages, text messages creates a platform to start a conversation that can be highly effective for local governments aiming to educate the communities they serve about ACP and where to find support. The simple format offers a quick, easy and efficient outreach tool for state and local governments that are already seeing results.

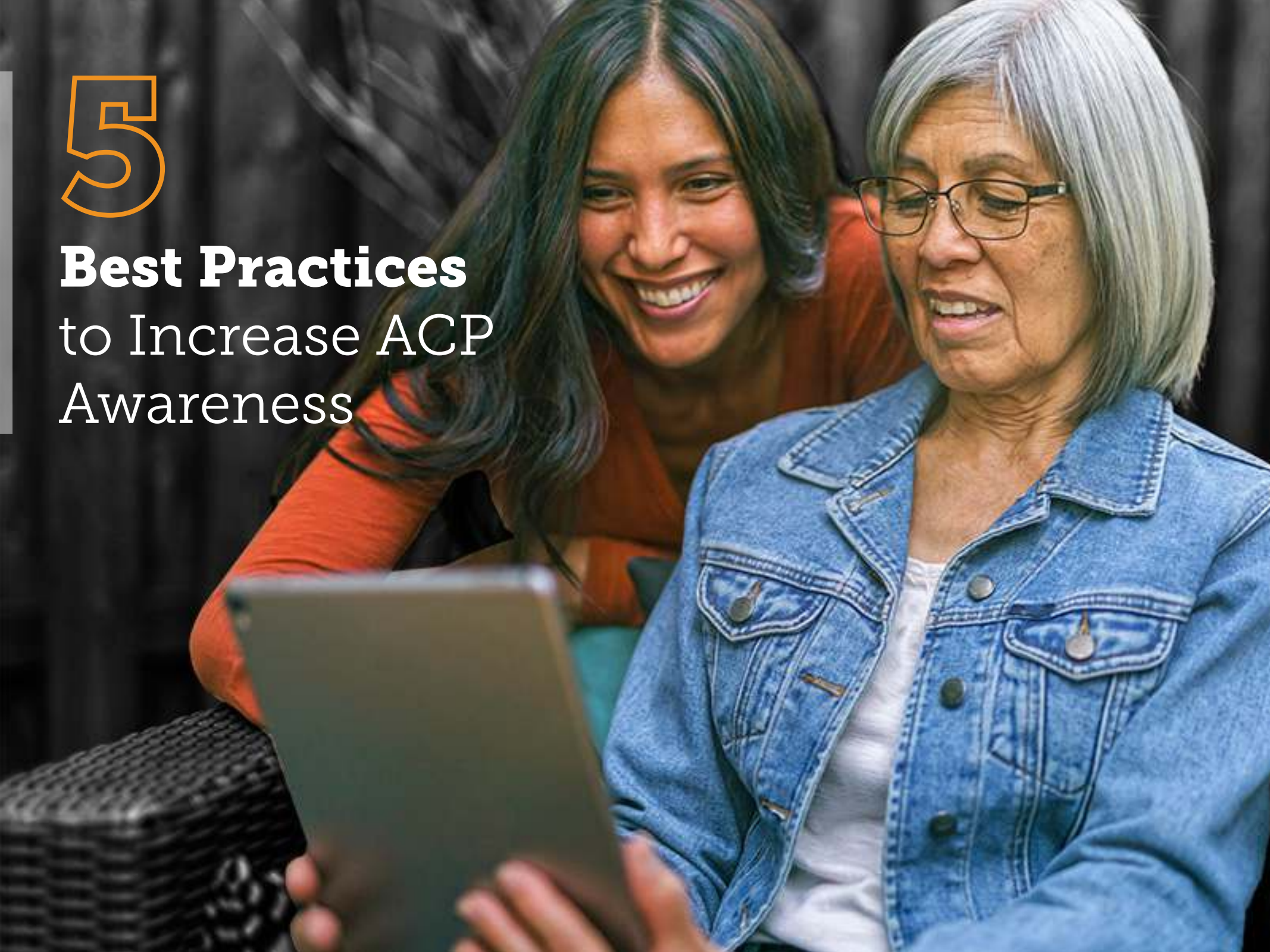
For example, Massachusetts texted more than one million SNAP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) beneficiaries about the ACP, which led them to double their weekly enrollment in the five days following the text. Similarly, Michigan texted approximately 1.3 million likely eligible households, prompting 25,000 new ACP enrollees. The city of Mesa, Arizona, reported that texts to residents about the ACP resulted in a 10% click-through rate compared to a usual 1-5% rate for other governmental outreach.⁹

Visit our **ACP Enrollment Dashboard** to see the latest adoption rate in America's states and cities. nohomeleftoffline.org/acpdata



5

Best Practices
to Increase ACP
Awareness



Key Recommendations for Building ACP Awareness

To reach unconnected eligible households, states must allocate IJA funds to community-based organizations and trusted institutions to conduct targeted ACP outreach campaigns.

Use Data to Target Unconnected Households

Two-thirds of the 17.7 million households that are ACP-eligible and unconnected already benefit from one or more government benefit programs. ACP enrollment should be easiest for these “automatically eligible” households, as states can enter into data-matching agreements that verify eligibility using existing data instead of requiring families to upload new documentation. States and cities should also leverage enrollment in other programs they administer to conduct awareness efforts to members of high-participation programs. Granular data (i.e., zip codes or census tract level) showing the number of ACP enrollments and the number of ACP codes that ISPs have activated is also needed to ensure outreach efforts by cities, community-based organizations, and trusted institutions are targeted and effective. Our new [Affordable Connectivity Program Enrollment Dashboard](#) provides local leaders with the most up-to-date data, and ISPs should take steps to share connectivity and serviceability data to support this work.

Extend ISP Connectivity and Serviceability Data Sharing Beyond K-12

During the COVID-19 pandemic, over 130 ISPs, covering more than 90% of households in the country, joined EducationSuperHighway's K-12 Bridge to Broadband data exchange program. The program enabled states and school districts across the country to quickly identify which of their students lack home broadband and which ISPs they can partner with to connect them. To maximize

“What we’re doing here is really new, involving local community organizations that haven’t traditionally been involved in broadband work but who have strong links to the community, and using those community links to target the digital divide.” VINHCENT LE, TECHNOLOGY EQUITY - LEGAL COUNSEL, GREENLINING INSTITUTE



ACP enrollment, ISPs should now expand this data exchange program beyond K-12 to enable other institutions, such as housing authorities, health centers, and municipal governments, to quickly identify and conduct outreach to households that are offline in America's most unconnected communities.

Engage Community-Based Organizations to Conduct Outreach

Broadband adoption efforts across the country have shown that outreach from community-based organizations, and other trusted institutions, is one of the most effective ways to educate unconnected and under-resourced communities on the ACP and the value of home broadband. Unfortunately, while these organizations have established relationships with target households, they rarely have the capacity required to conduct meaningful outreach. By providing these organizations with DEA funds, states can unlock the potential of these trusted organizations and increase ACP awareness in the communities that need it most.

5 Best Practices to Increase ACP Awareness

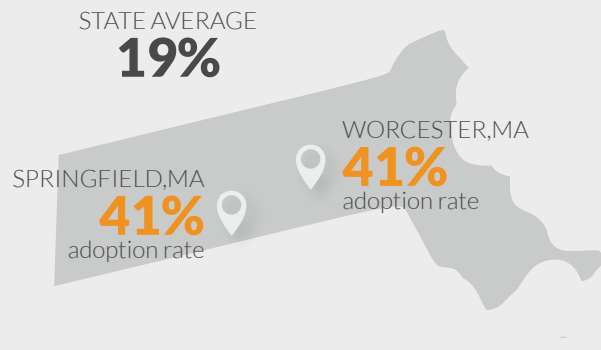
Partner with Government Agencies that Administer ACP-Eligible Programs

Two-thirds of the 17.7 million households that are ACP eligible but unconnected already benefit from one or more government benefit programs. By leveraging text messages, robocalls, and direct mail to households already enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Medicaid, states can rapidly increase ACP awareness. In addition, by setting up automated validation of enrollment in these programs with the FCC, states can significantly reduce ACP enrollment challenges faced by unconnected households.

Partner with Schools to Raise Awareness and Provide Proof of Eligibility

Like government agencies, school districts can rapidly increase awareness of the ACP and simplify the ACP enrollment process for eligible households. This can be accomplished by funding existing community engagement staff to conduct outreach and providing households with a letter certifying that a student is participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program or meets the eligibility criteria for Community Eligibility Provision.

Blueprint: Partnerships with school districts can boost ACP adoption.



EducationSuperHighway partnered with the Springfield and Worcester public school districts in Massachusetts to run ACP adoption campaigns and make the benefit more accessible to their households. Together, the school districts serve approximately 50,000 students. Each school district identified a core team of outreach staff to conduct a calling campaign. They also leveraged several awareness channels — e.g., social media, radio, school messenger - to ensure that every district household could receive multiple touchpoints about enrolling in ACP and getting free internet.

Key Learnings

- The ACP enrollment rates in both communities are double that of the state's average, indicating that consistent messaging from a trusted institution can significantly impact the adoption of the benefit.
- 100% of schools in both districts have a **Community Eligibility Provision** status, meaning that every household is eligible for ACP. This meant that not only was the message relevant to all community members receiving outreach but also that the districts could pair awareness messaging with eligibility documentation, which removes one of the primary enrollment barriers.
- The school district staff best equipped to design these campaigns were experienced in leading communications efforts with households and doing community engagement. ACP awareness efforts should first and foremost be informed by those already communicating with community members and know the best channels and messaging to reach them.

5 Best Practices to Increase ACP Awareness

Partner with Housing Authorities & Affordable Housing Owners

Beneficiaries of Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA) and those supported by Section 8 project-based rental assistance (PBRA) are automatically eligible for the ACP. Awareness campaigns targeted at these buildings can be highly efficient, and many buildings have resident service coordinators that can be trained to help residents with ACP enrollment. Consequently, states should partner with and provide outreach funding to housing authorities and affordable housing owners to accelerate ACP adoption.

Blueprint: New York Public Housing Partnerships Boost ACP Awareness for Qualified Households

New York City Council Member Julie Menin has been leading a partnership to increase broadband adoption in two New York City Housing Authority residences - Holmes Towers and Isaacs Houses. Menin formed a partnership between resident associations, ISPs, the CWA, and the non-profit Isaacs Center to raise awareness of the ACP, help residents enroll, and then sign up for “free with ACP” broadband plans available in the buildings.

The partnership began building awareness using flyers, notices in communal areas, and text messages to residents. It then conducted events to help residents enroll in the ACP and sign up for “free with ACP” broadband plans. Finally, the Isaacs Center set up weekly office hours and drop-in sessions for residents that were unable to sign up at the enrollment event. The strategy of combining hyper-local community outreach with ACP enrollment support reached hundreds of residents and provides a blueprint for expanding ACP enrollment in public housing across the nation.

Elements of a Successful ACP Awareness Campaign

Partnerships with community-based organizations and trusted institutions are critical to raising awareness of the Affordable Connectivity Program. To maximize the success of these partnerships, local leaders should ensure their ACP awareness campaigns incorporate the following best practices:

Provide Funding for Outreach Staff

As communities across the country have experimented with broadband awareness efforts, they have learned that organizations with paid teams of outreach staff are more successful in making unconnected households aware of the ACP and affordable broadband plans offered by ISPs. Our research and pilot work has shown that volunteer-driven enrollment support, while well-intentioned, falls short, given the current complexity of the ACP enrollment process. Community-based organizations and other trusted institutions are often short-staffed and struggle to deliver outreach programs effectively. States and cities can address this issue by providing grants to organizations for paid outreach staff to increase ACP awareness.

Sustain Engagement with Communities

Sustained engagement with communities has also proven to be an essential aspect of awareness efforts. Local, frequent, and ongoing engagement from individuals and organizations already actively engaged in the community make it possible to address skepticism about free services with stories of community members who have benefited from the ACP. In addition, sustained engagement over several months provides the support applicants need to complete a multi-step process that requires households to create an ACP account, gather all of the necessary documentation, submit their ACP application, and then sign-up for home broadband service.

Ensure Outreach Campaigns are Multilingual

Over 350 languages are spoken in households across the United States, and at least three languages were used by a significant number of applicants at each of our pilot events. Through our work with cities, we have made ACP materials available in Arabic, Chinese-Simplified, Chinese-Traditional, Farsi, French, Haitian

5 Best Practices to Increase ACP Awareness

Creole, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. To make the ACP accessible, information should be available, and organizers should prepare outreach staff to communicate in the predominant languages used in their communities.

Use Multi-Channel Strategies and Provide Easily Customizable Outreach Collateral

Communications should always be multi-channel (e.g., paper, digital, phone, and in-person) and use clear, unambiguous language to better inform key constituencies and answer common concerns, including eligibility, hidden costs, and use of personal data. Local leaders should start by auditing the available communication channels and reach of community leaders and organizations (e.g., newsletters, flyer distribution, calling campaigns, events, social media, in-person meetings). Awareness partners should consider working with advertisers and media owners able to provide discounts on paid awareness opportunities (e.g., radio or TV spots, billboards, transit advertising, and online advertising).

Leverage In-Person Community Events to Raise Awareness

EducationSuperHighway and our community-based organization partners have found that in-person community events can effectively create broad-based community awareness of the ACP. They can also be a great way to build trust in the program and inform applicants about what to expect when applying and getting online, especially when ISPs send trained representatives to raise awareness of their affordable plans and explain how applicants can sign up for service. State

and local leaders can leverage this strategy by incorporating ACP awareness into popular community events, and ensuring community-based organizations have outreach materials, talking points, and pre-enrollment tools to make these events a success.

Train and Equip Trusted Messengers

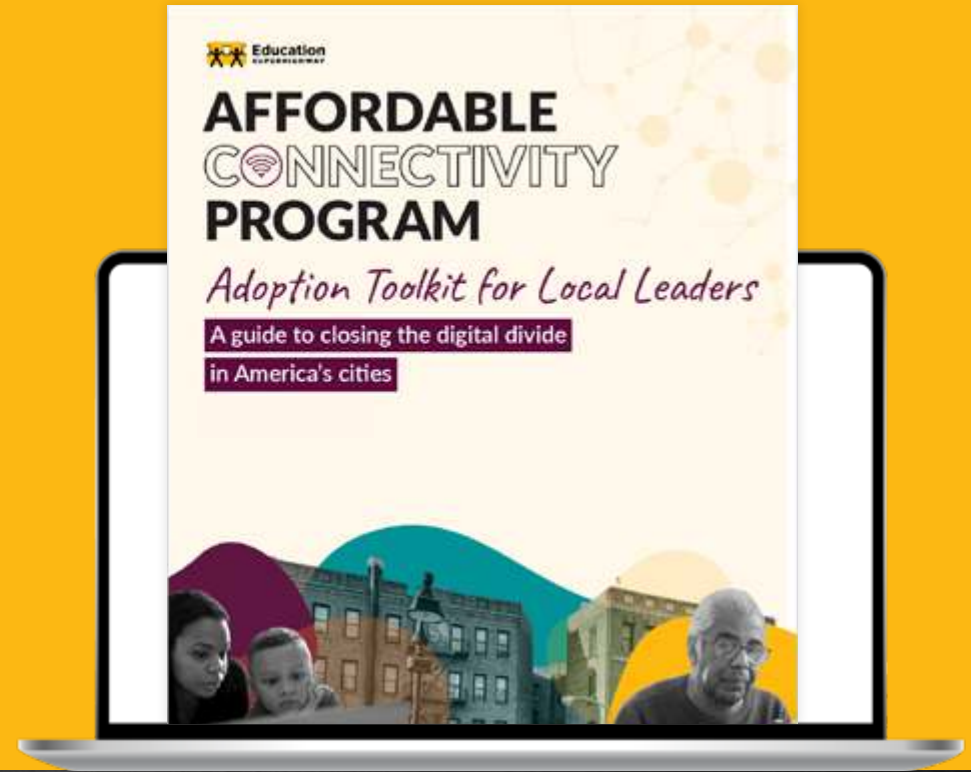
The ACP is a complicated program that has less than a year of history. In order to maximize the impact of partnerships with community-based organizations and trusted institutions, those responsible for ACP awareness building should ensure these partners are trained in how the program works and best practices for identifying and reaching unconnected households. Equipping trusted messengers with talking points and frequently asked questions (FAQs) enables them to easily share critical information and confidently help community members navigate questions about eligibility and enrollment.



A Playbook for **Activating State and City-Wide ACP Outreach**

State and 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 help them launch successful ACP awareness campaigns, we have created the [Affordable Connectivity Program Adoption Toolkit for Local Leaders](#).

The toolkit is a step-by-step guide that contains best practices and resources, including outreach templates, training materials, and action plans that enable leaders to make an immediate impact on increasing ACP awareness and adoption.



An action plan for boosting ACP awareness:



CONVENE local communities and ISP stakeholders behind a state or community-wide goal to raise awareness of the ACP.



ACTIVATE communication channels, including PR and social media.



PROVIDE resources to community-based organizations to amplify awareness and support.

6

Overcoming ACP Enrollment Barriers



6 Overcoming ACP Enrollment Barriers

Key Recommendations for Supporting ACP Enrollment

We must adapt the ACP enrollment process for the realities of the people the program is meant to help most.

Overcoming the accessibility and user-experience challenges that households face when enrolling in the ACP is critical to supporting adoption amongst unconnected households.

Organizations Best Suited to Conduct Awareness Are Often Not Well Set Up to Support Enrollment

While community-based organizations and trusted institutions can effectively raise awareness of the ACP with unconnected communities, many lack the capacity and expertise to support applicants through the ACP enrollment process. To effectively help ACP applicants, enrollment support staff must understand the ACP eligibility criteria and application process. Staff must be able to work with applicants who may not have experience with digital applications and guide them through each step. They must also help applicants through processes such as sending and receiving text messages, signing up for email accounts, and scanning and uploading documents to the National Verifier. Short-staffed organizations can struggle to deliver the support needed and rarely have the 30-45 minutes it takes to complete the application.

What Support Do Eligible Households Need to Navigate ACP Enrollment and Get Online?

1. Determining if they qualify for the ACP.
2. Understanding what documents will qualify them.
3. Accessing the documents they need to prove their eligibility.

4. Signing up for an email address (which is required by the National Verifier System).
5. Completing the ACP application form.
6. Finding “free with ACP” plans with no out-of-pocket cost for internet service.
7. Contacting an ISP to sign up for a plan by phone or online.
8. Navigating the ISP sign-up process, applying the ACP benefit, and arranging the installation of home broadband service.

CHART 7 | A roadmap for addressing ACP enrollment challenges

Simplify The Application Process	Offer Applicants Real-Time Support	Help Applicants Find 'Free With ACP Plans'
Reduce the time it takes to apply for the ACP by providing a guided enrollment experience that directs users to the easiest way to qualify.	Assist users with gathering the documentation they need to prove eligibility. Provide users with access to real-time support to reduce abandonments due to confusion.	Help users find ISP services that are free with ACP.

A combination of **technology, virtual, and in-person support** should form the foundation of a successful ACP enrollment support strategy and enable households to navigate the ACP enrollment process and sign-up for an available broadband plan.

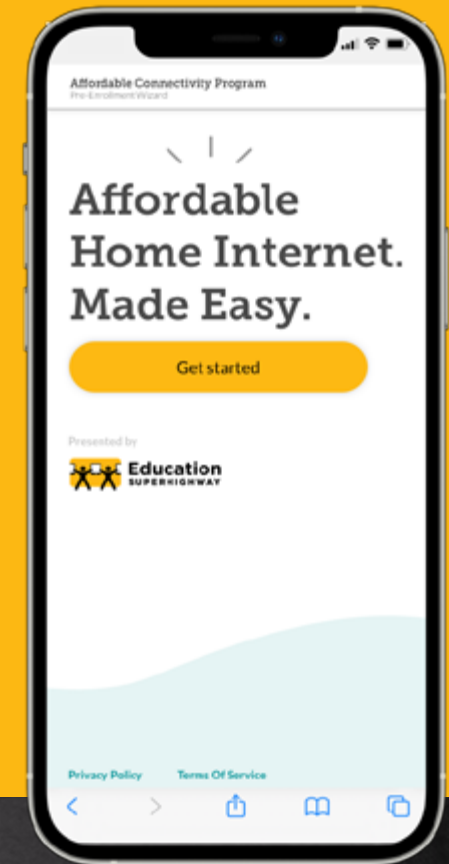
1. Technology

Technology can help overcome the barriers to ACP enrollment by giving applicants a choice of languages, quickly determining if households are eligible, helping them identify and gather the required documentation, and providing access to real-time support. Ideally, technology can also greatly simplify the application process using user-centered design principles. With 97% of Americans owning a mobile phone, a mobile website is a natural place to provide these enrollment support solutions.

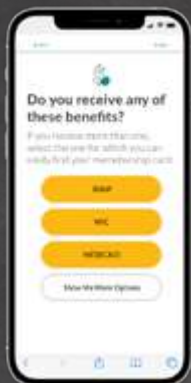
GetACP.org Shows How Technology and User-Centered Design Can Improve the ACP Application Process

EducationSuperHighway's new mobile website helps prepare households for ACP enrollment and provides on-demand support. When users visit [GetACP.org](https://getacp.org), they can quickly learn if they qualify, what documents they'll need to apply, and how to connect to home internet plans that are free with ACP.

Already available in four languages, **GetACP.org** asks users to answer a series of simple questions and then provides a personalized checklist that saves applicants time when they apply.



GetACP.org takes about a few minutes and helps applicants:



1 Determine the easiest way for a household to qualify.



2 Identify documents households will need to have available.



3 Identify "free with ACP" broadband plans available to a household.



4 Get a personalized checklist to help them navigate the enrollment process.



5 Access "on-demand" support through a live chat platform.

6 Overcoming ACP Enrollment Barriers

2. Virtual Support

The availability of real-time support, either through live chat or a phone call, can help households overcome many of the challenges they face enrolling in the ACP. Support teams can help applicants by confirming what documents they need to qualify, instructing them on how to obtain them, and answering questions when a household becomes confused during the application process. The proximity of these support structures to the enrollment process is also essential to identifying and resolving emerging technical issues and reducing incomplete or abandoned applications.

Blueprint: In-person support for the 15-20% who require it.

EducationSuperHighway has stood up our own contact center in response to the need from partner organizations and community members to have high-quality enrollment support to navigate the ACP enrollment experience. Our contact center is staffed with bi-lingual Enrollment Specialists who receive in-depth training on the ACP application and steps to apply for the benefit with ISPs and offers support via phone, text, and live chat.

Key Learnings

- Supporting an applicant through to the final steps of getting their application approved and the benefit claimed often takes more than one conversation and multiple means of communication (e.g., phone calls and text conversation). It's important that enrollment support partners are equipped to follow up with applicants, check on status, and track barriers.
- The most common barrier applicants served by our contact center face is related to providing eligibility documentation required by the application - whether it be knowing what document will qualify them, how to access the right document, or inconsistency in how uploaded documents are reviewed by program administrators.
- Our Enrollment Specialists often need to engage with USAC and ISPs alongside the applicants to troubleshoot application challenges and advocate on their behalf.

“We’ve got a generational chance to really make sure that no household, no person...in this country is left on the wrong side of the digital divide.”

FCC CHAIRWOMAN, JESSICA ROSENWORCEL¹⁰



3. In-Person Support

The National Verifier System and the ACP enrollment process are daunting, especially for unconnected households that are not comfortable with technology. Our first-hand experience and that of our CBO partners suggest that even with access to virtual support, 15-20% of applicants require in-person support to successfully complete the application. Therefore, providing direct one-to-one support can be crucial to ensure applicants get through the process. Having an individual, organization, or resource on hand to answer frequently asked questions makes it easier to address eligibility and identity verification concerns and explain what information is necessary and optional. If households that need in-person help can go to a trusted place in their community and get high-quality ACP enrollment support, they will be more likely to enroll. Support includes time to answer questions, troubleshoot issues, and provide in-person assurance that the applicant's data will be kept safe and secure.

Some trusted institutions that serve high rates of eligible households can also *proactively* provide eligibility documentation (or instructions on how to access it) that the ACP application accepts. For example, in many of our K-12 pilots, families were more likely to enroll when school districts provided them with the necessary eligibility documentation. (e.g., a letter from the school certifying that a student is participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program or meets the eligibility criteria for Community Eligibility Provision).

To successfully support in-person enrollment, trusted institutions need funds to cover the costs associated with walking applicants through the process and producing necessary collateral, such as forms and records, paying and training staff, and equipment such as tablets, computers, and printers. Our experience suggests that total costs across these support areas average \$30-\$40 per enrolled household.

6 Overcoming ACP Enrollment Barriers

Signing up for an Internet Service Provider's affordable broadband programs remains a significant barrier for unconnected households.

National ISPs have stepped up to ensure 37.9 million (74%) of ACP-eligible households are under an ISP coverage area, offering a free plan with the ACP benefit. ISPs should continue to work to reduce the barriers applicants face signing up for their plans by simplifying eligibility processes and automatically approving any household that has qualified for the Affordable Connectivity Program. In addition, ISPs should shorten the sign-up process by limiting the information collected to only that needed to provide service and minimize fraud.

How Can ISPs Support ACP Enrollment Efforts?



AUTOMATICALLY APPROVE ACP

beneficiaries for affordable broadband plans without an additional application process.



CREATE AN ACP-SPECIFIC PLAN that

makes internet completely free after the \$30/month benefit and synchronize eligibility for low-cost plans with the ACP eligibility criteria.



CREATE A WEBPAGE WITH DETAILS ON ACP-SPECIFIC PLANS.

The webpage should be mobile-friendly and provide clear information on pricing and terms, equipment and installation, handling of existing debt, what is covered, and when the credit is applied to the customer's bill.



ESTABLISH A DEDICATED COMPANY CONTACT that can work

with communities and trusted institutions that launch ACP adoption campaigns to ensure that there is a clear process for enrolling in their ACP plans.



CREATE A DEDICATED ACP ENROLLMENT SUPPORT LINE and train

sales representatives on how to handle these calls.

Accelerating ACP Adoption Can Close The Broadband Affordability Gap.

Achieving national best practice ACP adoption rates can significantly accelerate closing the broadband affordability gap, connecting two-thirds of the 18 million households that have access to the internet but can't afford to connect. But to close the broadband affordability gap, we need to ensure that unconnected households know about the ACP and help them enroll and sign up for the affordable broadband services offered by ISPs.

State and local leaders can play a critical role by prioritizing ACP awareness and adoption in the communities they serve. They should also take immediate action to **launch ACP awareness campaigns and develop ACP enrollment support strategies** that leverage Digital Equity Act funds to enable outreach to and support for unconnected households by community-based organizations and trusted institutions.

We now need to activate a broad public-private partnership between governments, community-based organizations, trusted institutions, businesses, and the non-profit sector to facilitate awareness building and enrollment support in-person, virtually, and using technical assistance tools.

By working together to raise awareness of the ACP and provide support to overcome enrollment barriers, we can realize our shared goal of eradicating the digital divide and ensuring no home is left offline. EducationSuperHighway is ready to support this vital work. Our tools and resources help states and cities accelerate ACP awareness and adoption and meet the national best practice goal of 61% of eligible households enrolled.

- Our new [Affordable Connectivity Program Enrollment Dashboard](#) provides local leaders with the most up-to-date data on the number of ACP-eligible households, the number that have enrolled, and the number that still lack a high-speed home connection. The dashboard enables state and city planners to have an immediate impact on closing their digital divide, equipping them to effectively target new federal broadband funding to support ACP awareness and adoption efforts.
- Our [Affordable Connectivity Program Adoption Toolkit for Local Leaders](#) is a step-by-step guide that contains best practices and resources, including outreach templates, training materials, and action plans that enable leaders to make an immediate impact on increasing ACP awareness and adoption.
- Finally, [GetACP.org](#) is a virtual mobile assistant that simplifies the ACP enrollment process and provides access to real-time support. It helps households:
 - *Check their eligibility.*
 - *Determine the easiest way to qualify.*
 - *Identify the documents needed when applying.*
 - *Find "free with ACP" broadband plans available at their address.*

To learn more, visit www.educationsuperhighway.org

About the Data

EducationSuperHighway’s new [Affordable Connectivity Program Enrollment Dashboard](#) provides state and local leaders with the most up-to-date data on the number of ACP-eligible households, the number that have enrolled, and the number that still lack a high-speed home connection. The dashboard enables state and city planners to target their outreach efforts and DEA investments to their most unconnected communities where the potential to impact the digital divide is greatest.

For more about our data and metric calculations, please [view the full version of the methodology](#). In addition, a digital version of this report is available at nohomeleftoffline.org/acpdata.

Data Sources

1. Census-Designated Place (CDP) is a concentration of population defined by the United States Census Bureau for statistical purposes only.
2. The “balance” of county, is the county population minus the county population resident within incorporated places.
3. Digital Connectivity During the Pandemic: A national survey of low and lower-middle income households, a research partnership between EveryoneOn and John B. Horrigan, PhD, 2021.
4. U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office., GAO-21-235, FCC Has Implemented the Lifeline National Verifier but Should Improve Consumer Awareness and Experience, 16 (2021).
5. ACS 2021: ACS 1-Year Estimates, Language Spoken At Home S1601
6. Government Subsidy: At least one person in the household is a beneficiary of a governmental program: SNAP, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, Public Assistance Income; but does not qualify by household income, poverty rate:
 - 200% Poverty: Household qualifies within federal poverty guidelines but is not receiving any government subsidies.
 - 200% Poverty and Government Subsidy: Household is at or below 200% poverty level and is receiving one or more government subsidies.
7. Based on declarations by ACP applicants through the National Verifier.
8. “[What’s Old Is New Again: SMS Marketing](#)”, Forbes, Tom Wozniak, September 13, 2019
9. The White House, The Vice President, Letter to Governors, July 21, 2022
10. Internet Innovation Alliance, [Deleting the Broadband Affordability Divide](#), September 15, 2021



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 2012-2020 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.