

21ST CENTURY COMMUNICATIONS: MICHIGAN BROADBAND UPDATES

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Communities across Michigan and the United States are looking to partner with internet service providers (ISPs) to encourage the submission of proposals to the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program. Of the \$42.45 billion available to expand high-speed internet access across the United States, Michigan was awarded \$1.5 billion (the fourth highest grant in the country) to connect 210,000 homes to high-speed broadband.



The Michigan High Speed Internet Office (MIHI) ([LEO - Michigan High-Speed Internet Office](#)) is responsible for developing and delivering the grant program for deployment of high-speed broadband across the state. MIHI has submitted a map of unserved and underserved locations which they have requested to be eligible for BEAD funding. An official map of eligible locations should be approved soon by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) who is responsible for administering the BEAD funding. The window of time for submitting proposals should be open soon, so stay alert for the announcement.

Another program administered by NTIA is the \$1.25 billion Digital Equity Competitive Grants Program aimed at supporting community efforts to address barriers to broadband adoption, including affordability, access to equipment and digital skills.

The State also received a \$20.5 million Digital Equity grant to implement the Michigan Digital Equity Plan ([LEO - Michigan Digital Inclusion Resources](#)) outlining a regional and community-based approach to close the digital divide in the form of a Digital Navigator Resource Network, which is formally known as Michigan's Inclusive Training, Technology, and Equity Network (MITTEN). MIHI has requested and received proposals for MITTEN funding which will establish regional resource hubs and host sites for Regional Digital Coordinators (RDC). Regional host sites will serve as the regional entities supporting the implementation of Michigan's Digital Equity Plan. The total amount of money available is \$13,726,540. The maximum amount per award is \$857,909 per region and the minimum amount is \$150,000. The announcement of these awards should be coming soon.

MIHI AND THE AMERICAN CONNECTION CORPS

MIHI is partnering with the American Connection Corps to increase the capacity of MITTEN. American Connection Corps (ACC) is an AmeriCorps program dedicated to connecting individuals, families and communities to high-speed internet. The ACC focuses on fields related to Economic Opportunity, Health, and Social Capital (<https://www.americanconnectioncorps.org/>). Each of these are closely related to the goals of MITTEN. ACC members will serve as the RDCs at the regional resource hubs and host sites. RDCs are expected to work closely with existing digital inclusion programs to identify local broadband needs and will support the establishment of resources appropriate for the region that align with the goals of the region and Michigan's Digital Equity Plan. RDCs will serve as a layer of support for Community Digital Navigators and as MIHI's direct connection to communities to advance progress in closing the digital divide.

MIHI RECEIVES PRAISE FOR THE MICHIGAN DIGITAL INCLUSION FUND

The National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) ([Home - National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#)) has praised MIHI for proposing an innovative strategy to use any money remaining from the BEAD deployment funds to establish a Michigan Digital Inclusion Fund. The fund is designed to complement and support the implementation of the state's Digital Equity Plan and sustain digital inclusion work throughout the state beyond the short-term federal investments.

The fund proposal has drawn praise from the NDIA who describes the program this way:

“The non-deployment funds would help launch the fund, and the MIHI team would work to direct state and philanthropic dollars toward the fund to increase its impact. MIHI would run a competitive selection process (adhering to all the BEAD subgrantee regulations of course) to select a fund manager to administer the fund and issue grants to expand and sustain digital inclusion work across the state. The fund manager would work collaboratively with MIHI to carefully align all the Michigan Digital Inclusion Fund's grants and efforts with the [State Digital Equity Plan](#) and the MIHI office's digital inclusion initiatives. In particular, the fund would leverage the digital navigator network MIHI will establish with its State Digital Equity Capacity Grant, providing a feedback loop for the digital navigators and digital inclusion practitioners to continue identifying their community's needs. While innovative, leveraging federal funds to establish a state-led endowment fund isn't unprecedented in Michigan. MIHI will model the endowment fund after similar successful initiatives within Michigan like the [Children's Trust Fund](#) (established in 1982).

NDIA applauds the MIHI office for so elegantly aligning and layering their BEAD and DEA funds, thoughtfully designing sustainability strategies to increase impact and effectiveness from the outset and prioritizing digital equity. We encourage all states, local governments, and the federal government to follow Michigan's lead and embed sustainability into your digital equity programs and plans.”

BROADBAND RESOURCES: NEW COMMUNITY NETWORK MAP SHOWS GROWTH OF COMMUNITY OWNED NETWORKS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance has released a new version of their Community Networks Map “showing where municipal networks operate across the United States and how they are acting to bring new service and competition to places around the country” ([New Resource: Our New Community Network Map Shows the Explosion of Publicly Owned Networks | Welcome to Community Networks](#)). The map which was first developed in 2011 identified 130 networks. The 2024 version identifies over 400 networks covering more than 700 communities, a third of which provide high speed internet to almost all addresses in those communities. The map is interactive, allowing users to filter by network business model and population size among other variables. It is of interest to note that nearly 200 communities are served by open access networks which increases competition between ISPs.


PENN STATE NATIONAL BROADBAND NAVIGATOR

Penn State Extension has just released the National Broadband Navigator ([Penn State National Broadband Navigator](#)) which is a “spatial analytics platform” containing demographic and broadband service availability data. This tool is designed to help empower communities with accurate data to better participate in the broadband developments in their communities. Data contained on the platform includes health care, workforce, business and education as well as current broadband availability data.

NEW BOOK: DIGITALLY INVISIBLE

Brookings Institution Press recently published a book by Dr. Nicol Turner-Lee titled *Digitally Invisible: How The Internet Is Creating the New Underclass*. Dr. Turner-Lee is a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies and the Director of the Center for Technology Innovation at the Brookings Institution ([Nicol Turner Lee | Brookings](#)). Dr. Turner-Lee spent three years talking with people and conducting field research in seven cities and small towns to “understand how people experienced the internet and the extent to which their access benefited them”. People shared how they navigate the internet in their daily lives and shared their future aspirations as they related to technology advancement. Unlike well connected individuals and communities, those with less access to broadband struggle to find jobs, access to quality health care and access to education and training opportunities. These are the people and communities Dr. Turner-Lee refers to as “digitally invisible”.

As the post-covid world emerged, the well-connected individuals and communities adapted and normalized the importance of internet access while the digitally invisible in urban and rural America “...are trapped by their own demography, geography, and circumstances”. The author highlights these individuals and communities “to bring attention to how disparate connectivity has become a social and economic determinant of one’s quality of life and well-being”. And with that attention it is emphasized that digital equity is crucial for America’s future and must be prioritized to offset the “unintended consequence of increasing digitization”.



“It is time to enact more appropriate policy and programmatic interventions that aggressively challenge and embrace the importance of universal access to the nation’s existing and emerging communications infrastructure. Equally important is to meet people where they are and acknowledge their individual and community aspirations for being connected into the future; their lives depend on it”.

Dr. Nicole Turner-Lee

[The realities of being digitally invisible in the 21st century](#)