ABOUT THE ACC

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

THE OBJECTIVE

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

14 GRANT APPLICATIONS PURSUED

2,000 HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATED IN FELLOW-LED SPEEDMAPPING INITIATIVES

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

500+

4,000+ EBB AWARENESS MATERIALS DISTRIBUTED

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

94 FELLOW-LED PARTNERSHIPS

48 DIGITAL LITERACY

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

**Cohort at a Glance**

**Geographies, Trainings, and Focus Areas**

**Trained and Mentored By**

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

**Project Scope Focus**

- 43% Broadband Development
- 61% Digital Access
- 45% Digital Literacy
In addition to her EBB awareness initiative where she distributed over 1,800 EBB flyers to community members, Carly Fitz in Perry County, OH is also bringing internet access to over 500 households.

After meeting with Technology Directors at her local school districts, Fitz saw an opportunity to use their data to inform local ISPs. The Tech Directors were able to identify roads within their districts that didn't have internet access when students were learning remotely during COVID lockdowns. Fitz took the list of road names to a local ISP who was able to put in lines, bringing access to 500 new households. This plays into her long-term vision for Perry County "to increase retention of high school graduates so they stay and continue to help the county grow, recruit businesses by being competitive with our accessibility and workforce, and bring increased digital literacy skills to all so they can discover education, healthcare and online work options they'd never been able to consider before."

Carly Fitz
Buckeye Hills
Regional Council
This quarter, Michael Dwiggins and Oliver Borchers-Williams had 600 households participate in their speed mapping initiative with Southeast Nebraska Development District (SENDD). SENDD launched an ongoing statewide initiative to better understand the current status of broadband and how to increase connectivity. By empowering county commissioners to act as broadband advocates for community-wide speed-mapping, Oliver and Michael are helping create a statewide glance at accurate, real-time data to inform ISPs and government officials. As they manage the relationships between the counties, ISPs, state government officials, economic developers, universities, and more, they are serving as a vital central unit to expand broadband access in the 16 counties they serve.
James Clark is using technology to help preserve the Ojibwe language and culture among the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (MN). Clark has distributed tablets to aide in his educational initiatives.

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

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

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

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

ENGAGING FUNDERS

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

14 GRANTS PURSUED IN FIRST 3 MONTHS

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

Wesley Smith
Knoxville Chamber

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

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

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

DIGITAL ACCESS SURVEYING

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

2,600+
RESPONSES ON FELLOW DIGITAL ACCESS SURVEYS
LEADING PARTNERSHIPS

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

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

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

Aaron Moss
Morrow Co., OR

Alex Young-Williams
Project 1590
Fairmont, MN
When the Kansas State Department of Education announced new standards for digital competencies, **Amalia Murguia** in Wabaunsee County (KS), initiated outreach with the school districts to develop new curriculum. Through her research and resource mapping, Amalia is helping these local schools reach these new digital competency and computer literacy standard. These standards also include developing technical skills, successfully curating a professional online presence, and general safety practices in the digital sphere.

**Liz Lima** at Rural LISC (OH) played a key role in training a recent class of Digital Navigators. Lima trained 30 Navigators, representing eight (8) organizations that each play critical service roles in their communities. Through this initiative, Lima and the Rural LISC team were able to equip Navigators to raise EBB awareness, provide devices and tech support in their communities.

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

---

**Amalia Murguia**  
Wabaunsee Co, KS

**Liz Lima**  
Rural LISC, OH

**Grace Clucas**  
Peoria EDC, IL

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

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

MENTORSHIP

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

2021 ACP STORYTELLING GOALS

SPARK PASSION FOR CONNECTIVITY THROUGH OUR AUDIENCE’S PASSION FOR SOLVING PROBLEMS:

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

ACTIONS TAKEN TOWARD GOALS

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

RESULT HIGHLIGHTS

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

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

**Sparking a dialogue**
- Posts by fellows earned a **13.7% engagement rate** (marketing posts typically receive 1-5%)
STORY STUDIO
IMPACT TO DATE

EARNED MEDIA

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

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

SOCIAL MEDIA

Fellows grew their posting frequency:

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

And they activated their communities online:

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

Four fellows placed across Illinois to improve digital literacy, broadband access

ON HOW DIGITAL DIVIDES HURT STUDENTS IN RURAL AMERICA

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

Herencia Hispana: Empower Evergreen

Congress must pass a bipartisan infrastructure plan to close the digital divide
By Laura Kelly and Stan Stark Special to Gannett Kansas

TCCA announces placement of American Connections Corps fellows

6 ACC Fellows to broaden internet connectivity in rural Minnesota