

What's Happening with Broadband, Digital Equity, and Libraries?

PrairieCat Delegates Assembly | January 29, 2025



Some Unknowns...

Impact of executive orders and federal grant funding pause

Outcome of pending Supreme Court case(s) against USF

Illinois state budget factors

Rapidly developing field of work

Complex and interdependent timelines

Coordination between federal and state agencies



Some “Knowns”...

Access to technology and information is critical to our society

The digital divide exists

Libraries provide access to necessary tools and skills

The work is already happening on many fronts

We will stay the course

Action item: BREATHE



What is the Digital Divide?

The digital divide is the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not. As technology constantly evolves, the digital divide prevents equal participation and opportunity in all parts of life, disproportionately affecting people of color, Indigenous peoples, households with low incomes, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, and older adults.

National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions>





Digital divide is the issue.
Digital equity is the goal.
Digital inclusion is the work.



What is Digital Equity?

Digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy.

Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

DIGITAL EQUITY IS OPPORTUNITY

National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions>



What is Digital Inclusion?

Activities that ensure all individuals and communities have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies:

- Affordable, robust broadband internet service;
- Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
- Access to digital literacy training;
- Quality technical support; and
- Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.

Digital Inclusion must evolve as technology advances. Digital Inclusion requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional and structural barriers to access and use technology.



What is Broadband Adoption?

Broadband adoption has traditionally been defined as residential subscribership to high-speed Internet access. But for those in the field working to increase the digital capacity of communities, broadband adoption is daily access to the Internet:

- At speeds, quality and capacity necessary to accomplish common tasks,
- With the digital skills necessary to participate online, and
- On a personal device and secure, convenient network.

Why is broadband essential?

Agriculture

Commerce

Community

Creativity

Democracy

Disasters

Education

Entertainment

Government

Healthcare

Media

Workforce



Broadband Access Gaps in Illinois

Availability of broadband infrastructure



5%

5% of broadband-serviceable locations (BSLs) in Illinois do not have access to 25/3 Mbps internet service and are categorized as “unserved” by the FCC.⁸ Some 4% of BSLs do not have access to 100/20 Mbps internet service and are thus categorized as “underserved.”⁹

Affordability of internet subscriptions



17%

of Illinois residents find it difficult to afford their internet bill, and 14% have experienced interruptions in service because they had difficulty paying.¹⁰

Access to devices



~79%

or 3.9 million, of Illinois households have access to either a desktop or a laptop.¹¹

Low levels of digital literacy



11%

of Illinoisans report that they have difficulty completing at least one of the surveyed tasks related to the internet.¹²

2.9 million residents in 1.3 million households do not have high-speed internet at home



Broadband Access Gaps in Illinois

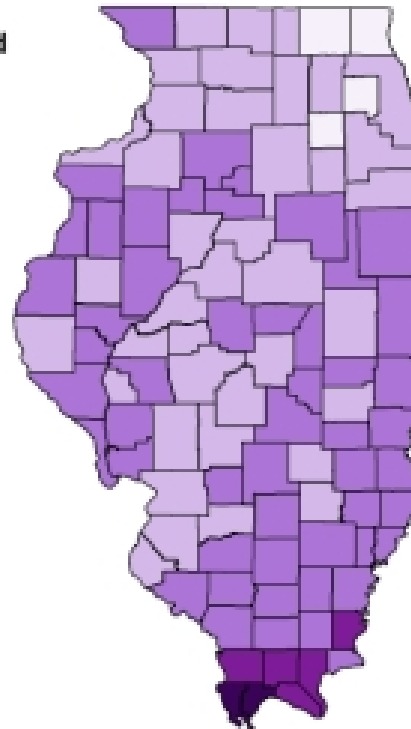
Sizing the digital divide in Illinois

DATA AS OF JUNE 2023

Households without a subscription to high-speed internet such as cable, fiber optic, or DSL service³

At least **2.9M individuals³** in **1.3M households (28%)** do not have a subscription to high-speed internet

% of household w/ a subscription



1. FCC Data Map, June 2023.

2. Eligible households is equal the number of households at/below 200% of the Federal poverty level, those who receive Medicaid or govt medical assistance, Supplemental Security Income, Public Assistance, or SNAP benefits. See details on methodology and source [here](#). Data as of Dec 2022.

3. US Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year data.

4. Based on Illinois-wide internet use phone survey, conducted from May to July 2023.

Number of households impacted by the digital divide, by driver

Infrastructure availability¹ **238K**
Locations do not have access to 25/3 Mbps (underserved)

129K additional
Locations do not have access to 100/20Mbps (underserved)

Affordability of subscriptions² **~1.9M HHS (39%)**
Eligible for ACP
452k enrolled (23%)

Devices³ **~1.0M HHS (21%)**
without access to a desktop or laptop

Digital Literacy⁴ **~540K residents (11%)**
adults may lack digital literacy skills



Covered Populations

Identified by Census Bureau; defined in the Digital Equity Act

Overall have historically experienced lower rates of computer and internet use

Persons Aged 60+

Incarcerated
Individuals

Veterans

Persons with
Disabilities

Members of Racial
or Ethnic Minority
Groups

Rural Residents

Language Barriers,
English Language
Learners, Low
Literacy Levels

Household
Income Below
150% of Poverty
Level

72%+ of Illinoisians are in at least one of these categories!



Illinois Office of Broadband*

Connect Illinois
broadband
expansion

Digital Equity
Plan

Other
Programs

Illinois Broadband Lab

Rounds 1 – 3
state-funded

\$1.04B BEAD
funding for
round 4

Digital Equity
Capacity
Grant

Community
Engagement

ICN
Expansion

Broadband
Advisory
Council

Broadband
READY
regional
collaboration

Digital
Navigators

Maps & Data

**This chart is highly simplified! It is not an org chart nor a comprehensive summary of programs.*



Closing the Digital Divide: Access

BROADBAND EQUITY, ACCESS, AND DEPLOYMENT (BEAD) CONNECT ILLINOIS

- Expanding high speed broadband networks
- Connecting unserved and underserved residences and community anchor institutions
- Broadband affordability

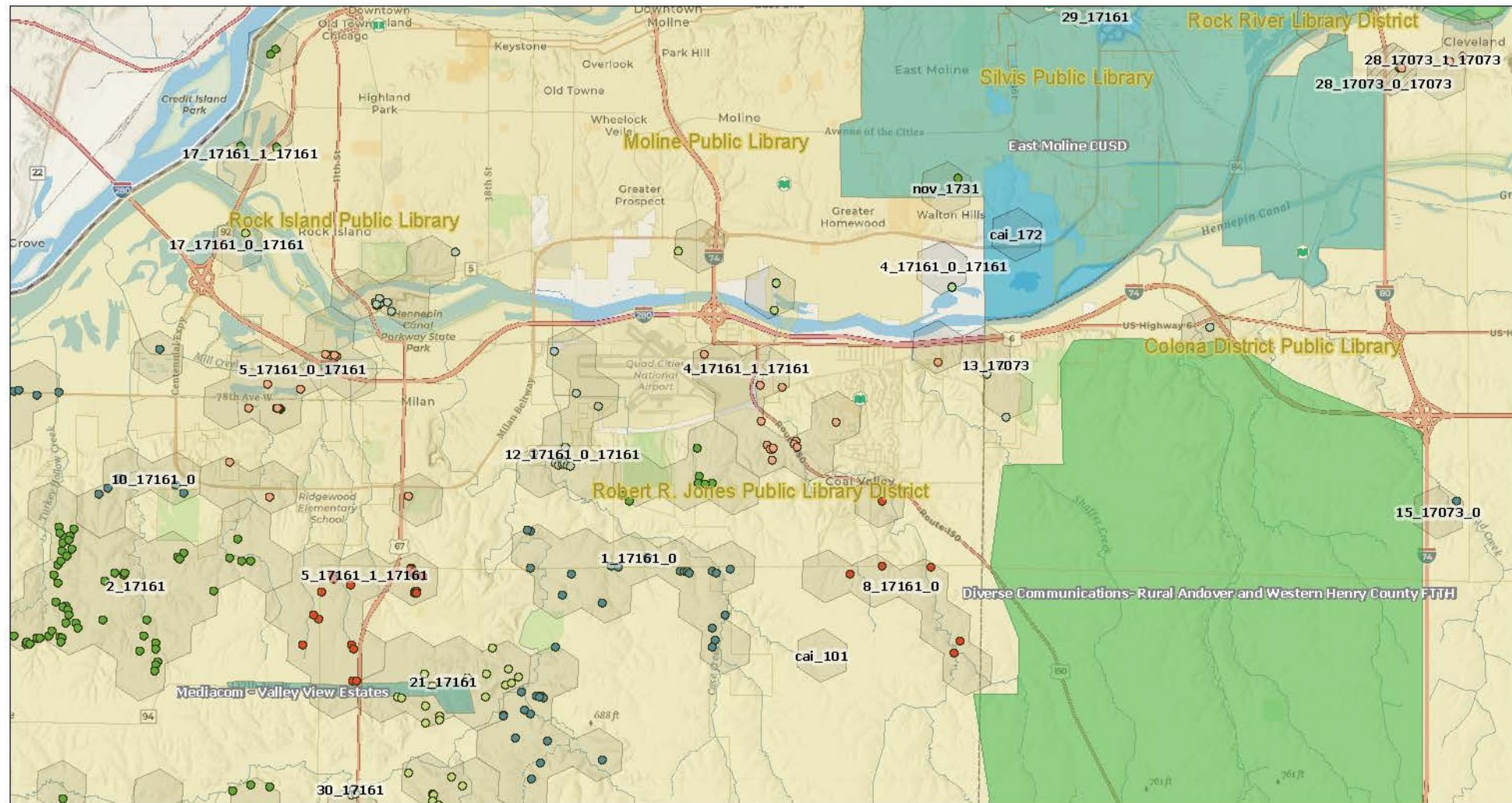
Action items:

Track projects and access in your area

Use IOB guidance to engage with ISPs applying for funds



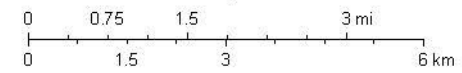
Illinois Broadband Map Detail



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- Library Service Areas
- PAU Aggregate Areas
- Connect Illinois Grant Rounds
- Libraries
- Shared Hexagons
- Round 2
- Round 3



Closing the Digital Divide: Adoption

DIGITAL EQUITY ACT

STATE DIGITAL EQUITY CAPACITY GRANT

- Digital navigation & skill development
- Device access and distribution
- Community capacity building

Action items:

Use available data to research your community

Cultivate partnerships

Watch for a Notice of Funding Opportunity

Stay tuned for RAILS, IHLS, CARLI collaboration



What is Digital Literacy?

ALA's Digital Literacy Task Force defines digital literacy as “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.”



What is a Digital Navigator?

Digital navigators are trusted guides who assist community members with ongoing, individualized support for accessing affordable and appropriate connectivity, devices, and digital skills.

Core Library Values

Access

Equity

Intellectual Freedom and Privacy

Public Good

Sustainability

Digital Inclusion

Public computers

One-on-one help

Tech skills classes

Device and hotspot lending

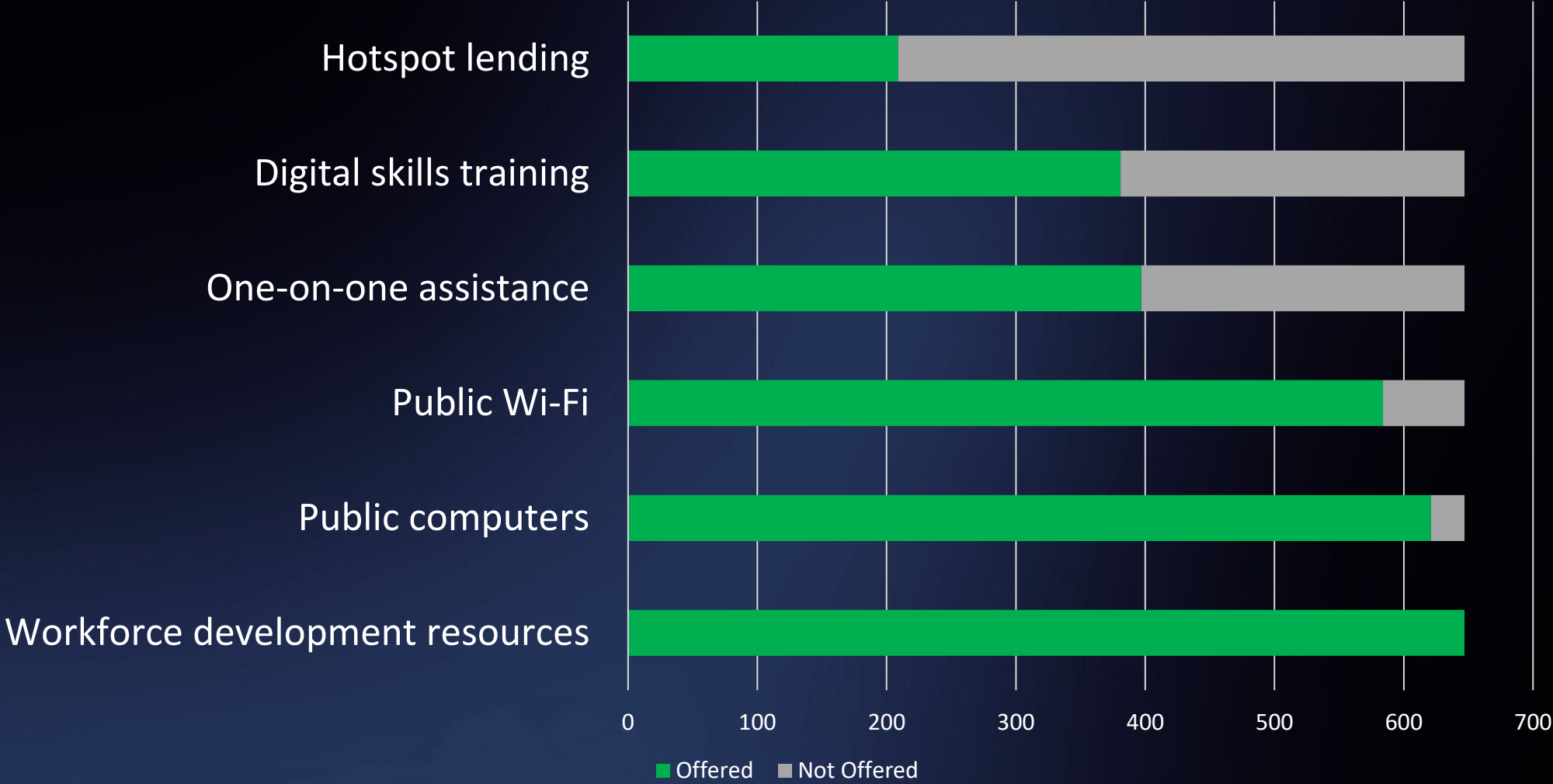
Free Wi-Fi

Staff tech competencies training

Adaptive technologies

Telehealth booths


Illinois Public Libraries in Action



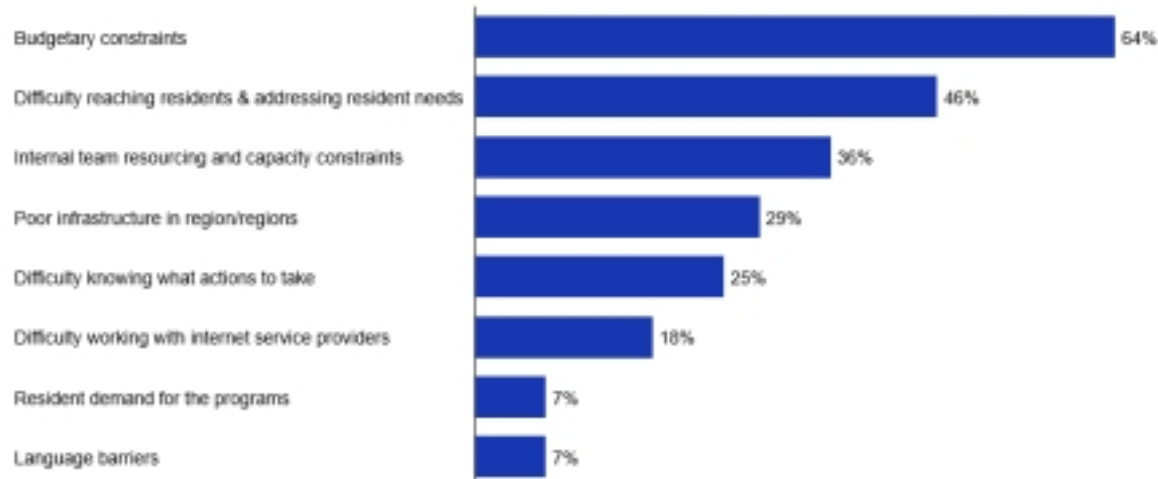
Barriers to Service

Figure 2. Challenge faced by organization, based on Illinois non-profit and community organizations web survey as of September 1, 2023

Actions and programs to close the divide

 **Question.** What are the biggest challenges faced by the organization when trying to increase access to affordable internet, internet capable devices, and digital skills?

Response N = 28¹



¹ Responses does not add up to N or 100% since respondents can select multiple options
Source: Illinois Residential Online Survey, conducted from May 2023 to August 2023

Plus...

Staff skills gaps

Facility issues

Digital navigator model

...and more?



PLA Digital Literacy Incentives

Helps libraries support digital skill development in their communities through workshops and/or digital navigator services.

<https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitalliteracy>

Congratulations Robert R. Jones Public Library!

...and other 2024 RAILS member library awardees:

Broadview Public Library District
Chillicothe Public Library
Gail Borden Public Library District (Elgin)
Highwood Public Library
North Riverside Public Library

Action items:

Watch for the 2025 round of applications

Check out [DigitalLearn.org](https://www.digitallearn.org) and other learning platforms



Counties and Regional Collaborations



Action items:

Investigate your county's broadband efforts

Connect with your region's Broadband READY lead



**What digital inclusion services does
your library provide?**

**What kind of support would help you
offer or expand your digital inclusion
services?**



Action Item: Join the Digital Equity Networking Group

Open to all Illinois library workers

Next meeting in March

Email discussion list

<https://railslibraries.org/networking/groups/113376>



Action Item: Advocate

<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/show-up-for-our-libraries>

HB 1062

Provides that the Illinois Century Network (ICN) Act shall prioritize the connection of anchor institutions according to the type of institution, starting with schools and libraries.

Bill status:

<https://ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocNum=1062&GAID=18&DocTypeID=HB&LegId=157078&SessionID=114&GA=104>



Affordable library broadband = E-rate?

FCC & ALA Learn Without Limits initiative adds:

- Hotspot lending for libraries

- Hotspots on school buses

- Cybersecurity for libraries

Summer 2025:

Supreme Court case decision on Universal Service Fund constitutionality



Additional Resources

American Library Association (ALA): <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/broadband/digital-equity-resources>

Benton Institute for Broadband and Society: <https://www.benton.org/>

Illinois Broadband Lab (IBL): <https://broadband.uillinois.edu/>

Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB)

Website: <https://dceo.illinois.gov/broadband.html>

Weekly newsletter: <https://illinois.us17.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=977be54447f66cf16e0c961f3&id=10c33722e1>

- National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA): <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/>
- National Skills Coalition (NSC): <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/digital-equity-at-work/>
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
 - BroadbandUSA website: <https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/>
 - Newsletter: <https://ntiacrmgrants.my.site.com/broadbandusanewsletter/s/>
- Public Library Association (PLA) resources: <https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitalliteracy>
- Schools, Health, & Libraries Broadband Coalition (SHLB): <https://www.shlb.org/>



Reach Out Any Time

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