



# 1. Executive Summary

Illinois is home to over 12.7 million individuals in approximately 4.9 million families who speak over 20 languages. These families live in 102 counties that range from the dense urban areas found in Cook, DuPage, and Lake counties to the rural areas in Pope and Stark counties; from Illinois's manufacturing centers like the Quad Cities, Rockford, and Greater Peoria regions to the farmlands of Gallatin, White, and Sangamon counties. Common to all of these communities and geographies is the way we stay connected to each other and to the broader global community; how we access healthcare, education, and other essential services; and, increasingly, **how we sustain our livelihoods within the digital economy: by using high-speed internet in our homes and community anchor institutions.**

Whether parents are helping their child research topics on the internet for a school assignment, recent immigrants are accessing online government services that have been translated into multiple languages, a sick family is connecting with their healthcare provider remotely, a young person overseas is talking to an aging grandparent on a video call, farmers are using internet-enabled precision agriculture to increase their crop yield, or a worker is taking an online coding class to develop skills for new job opportunities, **all Illinoisans must be enabled to use the internet effectively, confidently, safely, and equitably.**

Today, 2.9 million Illinois residents in 1.3 million households lack a subscription to high-speed internet in their homes. This gap may be caused by one or more inter-related factors (see Section 3.2, Needs Assessment):

### Availability of broadband infrastructure

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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. Some 4% of BSLs do not have access to 100/20 Mbps internet service and are thus categorized as “underserved.”

### Affordability of internet subscriptions

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17%

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

### Access to devices

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~79%

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

### Low levels of digital literacy

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11%

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

These gaps are even more stark among Illinoisans who are members of covered populations (Section 3.2.3, Covered Population Needs Assessment):

<p><b>9.9M</b> or <b>78%</b> of Illinois are members of at least one covered population.</p>	<p><b>Individuals who live in covered households</b> are <b>7%</b> more likely than the average Illinoisan to believe that having internet service is “not worth the trouble.”</p>	<p><b>Racial and ethnic minority Illinoisans</b> are <b>3%</b> less likely to have access to broadband internet than white Illinoisans.</p>
<p><b>Black or African Americans</b> are <b>5%</b> more likely than the average Illinoisan to experience service interruptions due to difficulties in paying for service.</p>	<p><b>Hispanic Illinoisans</b> are <b>14%</b> more likely than the average Illinoisan to find it difficult to fit a monthly internet bill into their household budget.</p>	<p><b>Asian Illinoisans</b> are <b>12%</b> more likely to have access to broadband internet and devices to access internet than the average Illinoisan.</p>
<p><b>Aging individuals</b> are <b>14%</b> more likely than the average Illinoisan to worry about how to use computers and the internet.</p>	<p><b>Individuals in rural areas</b> are <b>4%</b> more likely than the average Illinoisan to have trouble getting internet services installed at their residence.</p>	<p><b>Individuals with a language barrier</b> have <b>limited access</b> to digital resources for device troubleshooting and digital literacy training.</p>
<p><b>Veterans</b> are <b>5%</b> less likely to adopt broadband as compared to the average Illinoisan.</p>	<p><b>Individuals with disabilities</b> are <b>15%</b> less likely to adopt broadband and 15% less likely to have access to internet-enabled devices as compared to the average Illinoisan.</p>	<p><b>Incarcerated individuals (including all justice- and system-impacted individuals, per the state’s use of this term)</b> have <b>extensive needs</b> for digital learning as part of re-entry into society and to support their efforts to find and acquire jobs.</p>

Illinois is proud that many local governments, libraries, community organizations, non-profits, philanthropies, and private companies have already commenced local initiatives to tackle these disparities. At least 18 counties and local governments have published local digital equity plans for which they assessed their baseline, convened stakeholders, established goals, and developed strategies and roadmaps toward digital equity. Many of those local plans have drawn from the expertise of digital equity practitioners who have been working on the ground and in communities for years. In Illinois, over 62 programs across the state focus on broadband expansion and digital equity (see Section 3.1.3, Existing Digital Equity Programs), and 55 broadband adoption programs support topics ranging from basic digital skills training to device-lending programs (see Section 3.1.4, Broadband Adoption Programs). Moreover, 10 broadband affordability programs offer discounted internet services or raise awareness of the affordability programs (Section 3.1.5, Broadband Affordability Programs). **But there is still more work to be done.**

To achieve this outcome, we must leverage new and existing resources for adoption and use through targeted strategies for digital inclusion and sustainable outcomes in broadband equity. Doing so will help communities identify and address current gaps in broadband equity. We also must continue to push for universal access to high-speed broadband infrastructure, which is essential to realizing our aspirations for digital equity. The details of that push are articulated in the Illinois Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Five-Year Action Plan.

We envision an Illinois in which all Illinoisans are empowered to use and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society.





Suburb of Belvidere, Illinois

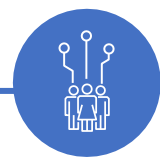
This push has formed our vision of the future. Over the next 10 years, we intend to measure and track our progress toward meeting these vision statements:(Section 2, Introduction and Vision for Digital Equity):



Ensuring universal access to high-speed broadband that is affordable, reliable, and fully scalable.



Leveraging new and existing resources for targeted digital inclusion strategies and sustainable broadband equity outcomes

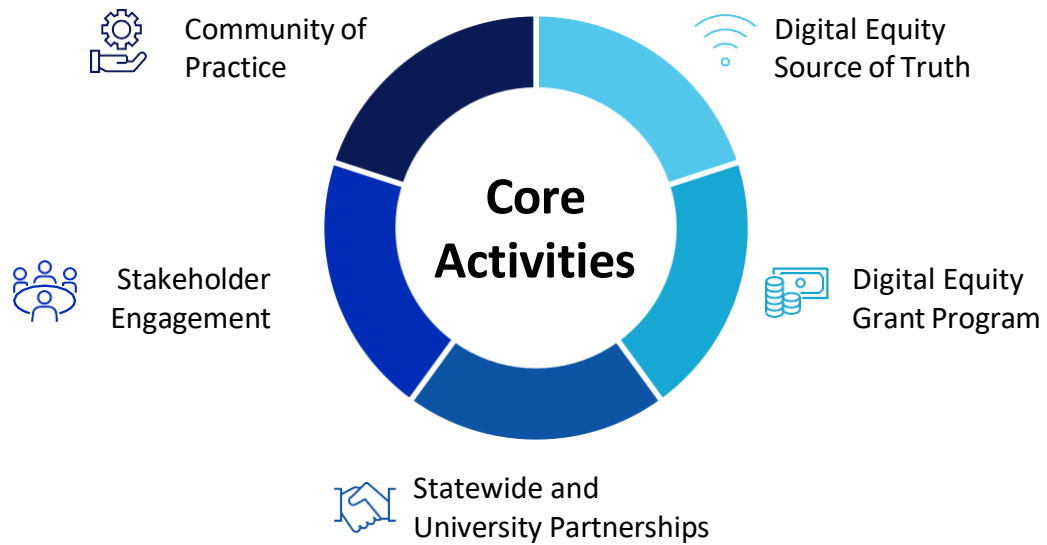


Empowering all Illinoisans to use and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society.

- Ensuring universal access to high-speed broadband that is affordable, reliable, and fully scalable for residences, businesses, and community anchor institutions (CAIs) across Illinois by 2030.
- Leveraging new and existing resources to advance the adoption of internet use through targeted digital-inclusion strategies and sustainable broadband-equity outcomes to help communities identify and address current gaps in broadband equity.
- Empowering all Illinoisans to use and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society.

These goals have been set with Illinois’s current state of digital equity in mind (Section 3.2, Needs Assessment). The current state was assessed by analyzing quantitative data from the American Community Survey, National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s Indicators of Need, and data from a statewide telephone and online survey. The goals themselves were inspired and shaped by insights from residents, local governments, digital equity practitioners, non-profits, community anchor institutions, and service providers through statewide listening sessions (Section 4, Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement), as well as the goals and roadmaps defined in local digital equity plans (Section 3.1.2, Existing Digital Equity Plans).

To fuel and sustain efforts to meet these goals and objectives, and in partnership with the digital equity practitioners and other stakeholders in the state, the Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB) plans to (Section 5, Implementation):



- **Maintain and make available Illinois’s digital equity data sets to serve as a common source of information.** To provide a common fact base for the state’s digital equity practitioners, the IOB and the Illinois Broadband Lab (IBL) will create and maintain a publicly available dataset and tools for practitioners around the state; a public-facing dashboard to track key metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs); a public-facing asset inventory; and ongoing updates to the IL State Digital Equity Plan (SDEP).
- **Execute a statewide digital equity grant program.** The IOB/IBL will facilitate a statewide digital equity grant program to fund and provide resources for digital equity programs around the state.
- **Lead select statewide programming and university partnerships.** The IOB/IBL will coordinate programming on high-priority statewide and regional projects and establish research partnerships with universities, some of which will be coordinated with other state agencies.
- **Conduct ongoing stakeholder outreach and engagement.** The IOB/IBL will conduct and support stakeholder engagement across regions and in communities to ensure that the voices of residents and digital equity practitioners continue to be heard and to shape digital equity priorities and approaches.



- **Support and sustain a digital equity community of practice.** The IOB/IBL will foster partnerships and collaboration between new and existing organizations so that they may share their knowledge and resources to expand their impact.

We **realize that this vision depends on a wide range of Illinois stakeholders.** Most important are the voices of the residents who are most impacted by digital inequities and whom we seek to serve and empower. Also deeply important are the digital equity practitioners who have been working in Illinois communities and have established trusted relationships that can foster connection, learning, and growth. The vision further depends on partnerships with other state agencies whose missions will be enabled by ubiquitous broadband access and digital inclusion, and who will work with us to accomplish digital equity outcomes in telehealth, access to essential services, and economic mobility through technologies like digital manufacturing and digital agriculture. It depends on the work of universities, private companies, and philanthropic partners who will innovate in this space. And it depends on the digital ecosystems that are growing across the state and through these various partners to serve the Illinoisans who are most disadvantaged by historical inequities at the center. Together, we can achieve our vision of universal access, advancement of internet adoption, and empowering all Illinoisans to use and participate fully in an increasingly digital economy and society.