

Illinois Office of Broadband
Performance Report

Capital Projects Fund
2026 Report

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Executive Summary

The Connect Illinois Broadband Grant Program embodies an essential and strategic component of the all-inclusive 2019 Rebuild Illinois Infrastructure Program. The Capital Projects Fund (CPF) supports Connect Illinois Round 3, and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) funds proposals that support broadband deployment. The program's mission is to develop and strengthen existing broadband network infrastructure, health information technology, telemedicine, distance learning, and public safety.

The Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB) made significant progress during the 2026 reporting period, advancing its mission to expand reliable, high-speed internet access across underserved communities. Through strategic investments and collaboration with local partners, the IOB accelerated infrastructure development, enabling thousands of households and businesses to benefit from improved connectivity. Key outcomes included increased broadband adoption, enhanced digital equity, and meaningful contributions to local economic and workforce development. Notable challenges included supply chain delays and workforce shortages, but proactive engagement and flexible planning allowed the IOB to address these issues and seize new opportunities for growth and innovation.

The IOB has 41 CPF projects across 16 unique entities that were awarded grants. The total amount of the IOB CPF awards was \$239,994,025.09, with grantee projects that began execution as early as December 1, 2023. Projects are currently slated to be complete by December 31, 2026, noting that U.S. Treasury has granted up to a 6-month extension for grantees and states who request an extension and have filed a report; the IOB has submitted this set of requests. Grantees consist of CIRBN, Comcast, Crossville, Diverse Communications, Grafton Tech, Jo Carroll, Oneida, Protek, Strada, Troy Grove, Wabash Telephone, Shelby Electric, Gargoyle, Surf Air, and Frontier.

Uses of Funds

Summary of Connect Illinois grantees and projects:

Grafton Technologies Incorporated (GTI), a family-owned company since 1908, is committed to connecting Jersey County with high-speed internet. With support from Connect Illinois Round 1, GTI has already deployed 83 miles of fiber to serve 700 locations in Fieldon, Illinois. They are now expanding using Connect Illinois Round 3 capacity with 110 more miles to serve over 950 additional locations. GTI offers in-house up to 10-gig fiber built with local union support. These high-speed connections are transforming rural life by enabling telehealth in areas where hospitals are a 20-minute drive, supporting remote learning for kids with long bus rides, and helping farmers market livestock via Zoom. GTI remains committed to sitting down with residents, listening to local needs, and growing its footprint to ensure every home, business, and community anchor institution has access to fast, reliable internet.

Flat Rock Telephone Co-op, serving southeast Illinois since 1923, is expanding fiber-to-the-home service to 302 homes and businesses in Flat Rock through Connect Illinois Round 3, covering 26.6 miles. Construction began in June 2025, with completion expected by year's end, delivering fast, reliable 1 gig internet to this rural community. Managed by a dedicated local team and supported by Wabash Cooperative.

Crossville Telecommunications, formed in 1917 to bring telephone service to rural southeastern Illinois, began offering internet in 2015 to meet growing digital needs in its farming and oil-producing community. With assistance from Connect Illinois Round 3, the company is deploying fiber to serve 241 households through 61.1 miles of fiber in the Phillips Township and Crossville areas, with construction underway and completion expected by the end of 2025. The impact will be transformative: students in a consolidated school district will be able to participate in remote learning, farmers will use smart technology to boost crop production, and older residents will gain access to vital telehealth services, which is critical in a region where the nearest hospital is 60 miles away. Their commitment to quality and local service is ensuring that even the most rural households aren't left behind in the digital age.

Silo Communications, founded in 2020 by high school students in Winnebago Village, is led by a dedicated young team focused on expanding broadband for economic growth, healthcare access, and workforce development. Silo is focused on expanding broadband access for economic growth, education, and healthcare. With support from Connect Illinois Round 3, they're deploying 89 miles of fiber to connect 647 homes and businesses across Winnebago, broken into three manageable construction phases now underway. Their local roots and fast response times have already earned them trust in the community, where reliable internet is opening doors for remote work, virtual learning, and telehealth access. Silo's story is proof that with vision and energy, even the newest providers can make a lasting impact.

Surf Internet has been operating for 26 years and continues to expand its mission-driven commitment to serve communities across the Midwest with high-speed fiber broadband. With strong local roots—many of Surf's employees live, work, and raise their families in the very towns they serve—the company is leveraging Connect Illinois Round 3 to build critical infrastructure in Lee, Ogle, Whiteside, Putnam, Marshall, and LaSalle counties. Projects like Varna and Dixon are not only bringing fiber to hundreds of homes and businesses but also creating essential backbone connections that support regional economic development, enhanced 911 communications, and future connectivity to high-end data centers. As one customer put it, *"Not only are we getting fiber to the home—we're finally building the infrastructure our region needs to thrive."* Surf's work demonstrates how thoughtful public-private collaboration can accelerate digital equity while creating long-lasting economic opportunity.

Volo / Gargoyle's broadband infrastructure project, supported by the Connect Illinois grant, launched in May 2025 in Champaign County, aiming to deploy 110 miles of fiber backbone and connect 575 unserved homes and businesses. This expansion addresses critical telehealth needs, enabling remote patient monitoring and chronic disease management, which supports Medicare and Medicaid systems and reduces healthcare costs. Additionally, precision agriculture now has the connectivity required to support micro-networks in the field, and small businesses like a local travel agency can operate from home rather than paying for commercial space to access the internet. The project also includes a robust workforce development component through a partnership with Parkland College and BDI DataLynk, offering a fiber optic apprenticeship that pays participants to train and work in fiber installation and maintenance. Volo's investment is already generating strong community interest and will deliver lasting benefits across education, healthcare, and the local economy.

Connect Illinois Progress to Date:

IOB sub-awardees have approximately five months remaining until complete construction unless the grantees have filed for and are granted an additional six-month extension. The IOB is tracking progress through a variety of metrics. The Periodic Performance Report is submitted quarterly by grantees to demonstrate progress. The chart below shows this progress with the categories generally in chronological order, though this is not strictly necessary. Through June 2026, CPF projects have connected more than 8,604 households, farms, and businesses, contributing to more than 18,500 locations connected as a part of the broader Connect Illinois program.

Milestone	% of Projects that Completed Milestone
Environmental Review Approved	95%
Business Enterprise Plan Approved	98%
Illinois Works Budget Supplement Approved	100%
Design/ Engineering Complete	82%
Permits Submitted	83%
1st Order of Materials Purchased	92%
Construction Started	82%
Construction 50% (by miles)	50%
Passes Started	67%
Passes 50%	49%
Customers Turned On	64%
Completed Construction (Miles)	41%
Passes Complete	28%
Field Validation Ready	18%

Progress is also captured through the Connect Illinois [Deployment Dashboard](#), [Illinois Broadband Map](#), and [Illinois County Dashboard](#).

Digital Connectivity Project Summary:

As part of an approved Digital Connectivity Project, in FY26, the IOB executed an agreement to provide more than \$1M to the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) to purchase and deploy laptops, tablets, and related equipment to member libraries serving communities where affordability remains a barrier to broadband adoption. The Illinois Heartland Library System (“IHLS”) will purchase, configure, and deploy laptops, tablets, and related equipment to member libraries serving communities where costs remain a block to broadband implementation. IHLS

supports over 520 public, school, academic, and special libraries in 55 counties in central and southern Illinois, serving a population of approximately 2.16 million residents.

As one of two multitype library systems in Illinois, IHLS provides centralized infrastructure, delivery systems, and resource sharing capabilities that enable rapid and coordinated implementation of statewide initiatives. This project is specifically designed to enable access to work, education and health monitoring by providing devices that are deployed through structured programming and supervised access environments. Devices will be used to support workforce development, educational advancement, and telehealth access, consistent with Capital Projects Fund requirements.

This statewide project will utilize the statewide delivery service of IHLS, Reaching Across Illinois Library System (“RAILS”), and the Consortia of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (“CARLI”) to maximize reach and efficiency. Through this collaboration, the project is designed to extend access to digital connectivity resources to communities throughout Illinois, potentially reaching residents statewide outside of the city of Chicago.

[Addressing Critical Needs](#)

The IOB considers critical needs when selecting sub-awardees. Much of Illinois is in rural regions and does not have a stable broadband infrastructure. Connect Illinois is taking critical steps to eradicate that by building ubiquitous service available to all residents. Utilizing critical needs to select where to allocate funds was part of the program from the start. The first three criteria the merit review team considered for awards are based on critical need: Project Impact, Nonstate Match & Demonstration of Need, and Community Support. IOB received feedback from many residents expressing support and the need to bring broadband to their community. One project with Volo had sixty-seven (67) letters of support.

The work to close the critical need for broadband access for all residents is still in progress.

[Permitting](#)

The IOB has been committed to increasing awareness of the wide range of broadband-related jobs across Illinois to help address the workforce needs of the Capital Project Fund program. IOB’s goal is to ensure that enough individuals are both employed in and trained for broadband careers. To support this effort, the IOB has advanced several initiatives.

IOB participated in the development of the [Connecting the Heartland Jobs Board](#), in partnership with Heartland Forward, to aggregate broadband training opportunities and job postings statewide.

Through a series of virtual presentations, IOB engaged key workforce partners, including hosting a [Wednesday Webinar](#) with the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), presenting to organized labor unions and their contractors about broadband workforce requirements, and

briefing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) leadership on broadband workforce needs and emerging opportunities.

The IOB also provided in-person presentations and participated in events across Illinois. At the Workforce Summit in Peoria, IOB met with workforce professionals from Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois Works, American Job Centers, and community colleges to discuss the Connect Illinois program and broadband job pathways. IOB presented to Illinois-based contractors at the Underground Contractors Association Conference in Addison, focusing on broadband workforce requirements. Additionally, at the Teen Achievers Workforce Event in Joliet, IOB shared information and resources with rising high school juniors and seniors to help them understand available broadband job and training opportunities.

As an outcome of many of the workforce presentations, IOB has created a strategic plan to work closely with the American Jobs Centers across the state to promote broadband job awareness through joint initiatives.

The IOB has also developed a comprehensive suite of broadband permitting resources to support efficient broadband deployment across Illinois.

The [Broadband Permitting Starter Guide](#) provides an overview of the state's permitting landscape, including the types of permitting entities involved, strategies for engaging with them, a step-by-step overview of the permitting process, best practices, and links to additional resources throughout. The guide was informed by extensive online research, focus groups, one-on-one meetings with permitting entities, and stakeholder feedback.

To complement the guide, IOB created the [Broadband Permitting Directory](#), a centralized spreadsheet containing contact information for permitting entities across Illinois. IOB also developed the [Broadband Permitting Map](#), an interactive tool that combines multiple data layers including Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) roads, railroads, county and municipal boundaries, waterways, and protected lands to help internet service providers identify which permits may be required. The map also links users directly to relevant permitting contacts and guides initiating the permitting process with each entity.

Finally, the Broadband Permitting Roundtables Guide offers a step-by-step framework for internet service providers interested in hosting permitting roundtables, including considerations for determining whether a roundtable is appropriate, planning and facilitation best practices, and customizable resources such as a sample agenda and email invitation template to support successful execution and foster more efficient permitting coordination.

Labor

All IOB grantees must comply with all requirements of the Prevailing Wage Act, including but not limited to, inserting into all contracts for construction a stipulation to the effect that no- less than

the prevailing rate of wages as applicable to the project shall be paid to all laborers, workers, and mechanics performing labor under the award and requiring all bonds of contractors to include a provision as will guarantee the faithful performance of such prevailing wage clause as provided by contract. Grantees are required to report on Prevailing Wage Act compliance monthly.

Grantees must also obtain approval of their [Business Enterprise Plan](#) (BEP), which requires grantees to meet a goal that a percentage of grant funds be expended with a minority- or female-owned business. Expenditures can include subcontractor and/or material purchases. The Office of Broadband also hosts quarterly update meetings with the labor community and is exploring publishing a job board to promote apprenticeships, trainings, and careers in broadband deployment. It is also a labor requirement to have 90% of hired workers be Illinois residents when unemployment is high.

Community Engagement

The IOB has established a dynamic process for incorporating community and stakeholder feedback into the selection and implementation of CPF Projects. This method prioritizes transparency, accuracy, and active engagement within affected communities. The Office initiated a critical "mapping review" tool that allows applicants to review and challenge the accuracy of the Grant Eligibility Map, which is part of the Illinois Broadband Map. Correspondingly, existing broadband providers can challenge a grant application's eligibility based on current service availability or imminent deployment plans. This method is predominantly vital for areas where the map may simultaneously designate proposed Connect Illinois broadband deployment and potentially under-represented existing service points.

The IOB used a mapping analysis as a transparent, all-inclusive exchange between the Office of Broadband and Connect Illinois stakeholders. The Office is committed to ensuring that no awards are finalized without thorough discussion of the mapping and service levels under consideration. In evaluating project applications, community support plays a substantial role, with up to 20 points allocated based on evidence of local backing. The Office considers several key factors: 1. The extent and depth of community endorsement; 2. Diversity and personalization of support letters from community members 3. Project alignment with established community strategic plans. 5. Recent, statistically significant community surveys demonstrating need and support. Documentation of outreach efforts to assess community interest. 6. Additional feedback illustrating pressing need and project endorsement. Importantly, the Office notes that a lack of evident community support may result in no points being awarded in this category, emphasizing the critical nature of local engagement.

The IOB has networked with numerous rural stakeholders across the state, ensuring they are aware of the internet service providers that may apply to the program in their region and have the resources and support to participate in community broadband planning and provider evaluation. As Round 3 projects move through the construction, implementation, and completion phases, IOB is dedicated to maintaining continuing communication with impacted communities. Through continuous dialogue, the Office can address concerns promptly and integrate feedback throughout the grant's project lifecycle. Round 3 projects are underway, and IOB is working diligently with sub-recipients to ensure they connect with local leaders and municipal government to increase awareness of the deployment, build trust, and create momentum to support adoption.

Many grantees are electric cooperatives and local governments that already have existing relationships with and access to community members in the project area. As additional grantee projects make progress, IOB will continue to support providers in community outreach and relationship building to ensure services are executed, utilized, and of respectable quality. Opportunities to participate in Connect Illinois Round 3 were promoted through the Illinois Broadband Lab's bi-weekly newsletter, which has an audience of more than 3,900 subscribers, as well as through public webinars and tailored emails to Illinois' internet service provider community. Awards are publicized through the Office of Broadband website and through other community engagement events and meetings.

The IOB maintains a transparent, easily accessible public platform on its website with regularly updated public information about ongoing projects and guidance documents for grantees and other public stakeholders. In addition to these efforts, the Office of Broadband encourages recipients to track the frequency and reach of engagement activities, such as the number of public meetings held, attendees at workshops, and distribution of informational materials. Regular reporting on partnerships formed and feedback collected ensures that the community's voice remains central to program operations. By quantifying engagement, recipients can demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of their outreach, providing valuable insights for continuous improvement and future planning.

The public is knowledgeable of the IOB program as seen by the support letters that have come in and the attendees at the numerous community events held over the past year. IOB has also enhanced the Community Engagement Unit to strengthen community awareness and support of the program. IOB staff routinely attend municipal council meetings, public forums, or communicate one-on-one to share updates and opportunities. IOB continues to share press releases which spread the news about projects. The IOB website also features regularly updated information for stakeholders. There is a bi-weekly e-newsletter that goes out to subscribers full of information to communicate with the public on the progress of the sub-awardees. In addition, sub-awardees are incentivized to market new broadband availability to their networks. Much of this will begin once construction nears completion, but some awardees have already started celebrating the completion of their projects in the community.

Gargoyle, operating as Volo, broke ground on their Connect Illinois-funded rural fiber project with partner CONNECT Champaign County in June 2026. The event not only celebrated the upcoming connectivity for the area but also reinforced awareness for the community. 50 attendees learned more about fiber splicing, broadband infrastructure technology, and critical uses in rural areas such as precision agriculture, telehealth applications, education, and emergency services.



Other partners have been proactive in communicating with communities in their project areas, sending out mailers, advertising with local media, and cultivating partnerships with local service organizations. Not only are they hoping to connect with potential customers, but also learn more about their neighbors' needs in the broadband and technology realms.

Some demonstrable outcomes include service to communities which underscores the success of IOB's subgrantees. ProTek Communications celebrated the official launch of their Connect Illinois project in Marion on May 14. Over 50 attendees enjoyed the event, with community members joining the scheduled speakers to congratulate the company and share how ProTek's dedication to rural connectivity has changed their lives. In just two years, ProTek grew from a single wireless tower to more than 700 miles of fiber across Southern Illinois, extending high-speed internet access to over 7,000 homes, farms, businesses, and community anchor institutions throughout the region.

Community Engagement highlights from FY26:

The IOB has on-going quarterly meetings with Connect Illinois grantees and working with grantees on project communication and promotion.

July 2025

- Engaged with community members at Decatur Summit of Hope to promote broadband adoption, access, and use
- Testified at the House of Representatives Veterans' Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Technology Modernization Oversight Hearing
- Traveled Jackson and Union Counties, meeting with local broadband champions and raising awareness about local infrastructure projects

September 2025

- Spoke at the Gig Certification and Smart Rural Community event with Wabash Communications in Salem IL
- Attended fiber demonstration

October 2025

- Attended One Shawnee Community Economic Development Conference
- Presented at DCEO Regional Economic Development Roadshows – highlighting broadband access and digital equity work across Illinois
- Presented at and attended Access Amplified Symposium in Cook County

November 2025

- Promoted Connect Illinois at Illinois Regional Economic Development Roadshows
- Presented to Illinois Association of Regional Councils (ILARC) Board of Directors

December 2025

- Compiled the Broadband Advisory Council Annual Legislative Report highlighting Connect Illinois achievements
- Spoke at Connect Elmhurst Network Launch Event with Grafton Telecommunications

February 2025

- Attended Institute of Rural Affairs Conference in Springfield

March 2025

- Presented Lunch and Learn about broadband infrastructure and digital equity to Illinois Economic Development Council

April 2025

- Presented to Tri-State Development Action Committee regarding broadband infrastructure projects in Illinois

May 2026

- Attended and spoke at Protek Communications Network Launch Event
- Presented at IL Reentry Statewide and Community Reentry Taskforce Meeting – highlighting the importance of digital access resources for communities with a critical need

June 2026

- Presented at Volo fiber groundbreaking event in rural Champaign County
- Presented twice to Southeastern Illinois broadband champions regarding upcoming projects



