



Newsletter, Winter 2024



Closing the Digital Divide

Started in 2020 by volunteers who saw the COVID-19 pandemic bring front and center the gap between Lake County communities that have access to modern technology and those that do not (known as the Digital Divide) ConnectLakeCounty's work expanded as the pandemic began to subside.

Today we strive to achieve digital equity using guidance from our communities to identify and implement efficient solutions that ensure

the under-resourced, disconnected residents of Lake County can successfully engage with evolving technology in all aspects of their life.

Our work includes helping residents subscribe to low-cost internet plans and subsidies, access free or low-cost devices and facilitating digital skill workshops. We also work with community leaders to plan and execute projects that address critical broadband issues throughout Lake County.



Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) to End

Due to the lack of additional funding, the FCC's ACP program will stop accepting new applications and enrollments on February 7.

The federal subsidy program provided a \$30/mo benefit to qualified households to make internet subscriptions more affordable.

Approximately 18,000 Lake County households currently receive the benefit which ends sometime in late April or early May. More than 10,000 affected Lake County households are in Waukegan, North Chicago, Zion, and Round Lake.

For more information please review the [ACP Wind-Down Fact Sheet](#) [ACP Wind-Down Fact Sheet Spanish](#) [FAQs](#) [FAQs Spanish](#). Residents who

have questions or need help during this wind-down of the ACP Program are encouraged to contact ConnectLakeCounty at (224)441-1930 English or (224)813-9085 Spanish.



Digital Inequity in Lake County

Digital inequity is the disparity in access, knowledge, and ability to use digital tools and technology, particularly harming lower income individuals and minority communities.

In Lake County more than 14% of households do not have home internet and 8% can't access the internet at all - not even from a mobile phone.

Without internet access Lake County residents can't find employment, take advantage of telehealth, expand access educational resources, and bank, shop or stay connected with family and friends.

At ConnectLakeCounty we believe access to the internet is a *necessity and basic right*.

We know that residents in low-income areas of Lake County lack sufficient devices at home because cost is a major barrier to ownership.

Approximately 50% of low-income families lack sufficient devices at home to access distance learning (The Education Trust) and research shows that while 80% of white adults own a desktop or laptop, ownership drops to 69% of Black adults and 67% of Hispanic adults.

Even for those with home internet and devices, the lack of adequate digital skill development shows up disproportionately in vulnerable communities.

The lack of digital skills then compounds existing challenges faced by residents.

With support from our trusted community partners, ConnectLakeCounty is doing what we can reduce digital inequity in Lake County's most vulnerable communities.



State Digital Equity Plan

In November, Illinois released the draft [State Digital Equity Plan](#). Public comments on the Plan will be open until *5pm CT on Wednesday, January 31*. Community input is critical and we encourage Lake County residents and community leaders to make your voices heard.

This is an important way to advocate for funding and other support for our communities. Click on the button below to add your public comment.

Add a Public Comment



2023 ConnectLakeCounty Highlights

The ConnectLakeCounty team spent 2023 helping our least connected and least resourced communities.

Our accomplishments include:

- Helped ACP enrollments in Waukegan, North Chicago, Zion and Round Lake reach almost 10,000 households.
- Saved Lake County residents at least \$1M on internet subscription expenses.
- Partnered with the Waukegan Public Library to distribute almost 600 devices (laptops/Chromebooks/tablets) to families.
- Launched 240 residents on their digital skill journey through workshops and 1:1 support.
- Partnered with North Chicago School District 187 and [EducationSuperHighway](#) to launch an ACP and Digital Skill Awareness Campaign in North Chicago.
- Partnered with the Lake Housing Authority to host more than 40 ACP enrollment events and digital skill workshops for residents receiving a housing subsidy.
- Provided ACP enrollment support and digital skill building workshops to almost 200 senior citizens so they can use the internet to improve their quality of life.

Digital Equity Initiatives Around the County



ConnectLakeCounty was happy to provide guidance to the Lake County Special Committee on Broadband as they developed the first-ever [Broadband and Digital Equity Action Plan](#). We were thrilled to see that of the seven critical priorities outlined in the plan, many are key areas in which we are already actively working and have assumed leadership roles. We are excited the County made this critical investment and look forward to continued collaboration.



EducationSuperHighway is leading a national effort to deploy free Wi-Fi to low-income apartment buildings. Read their [white paper](#) to learn more. ConnectLakeCounty is working with building managers, property owners and housing authorities in Lake County to identify apartment Wi-Fi projects. If you would like to join the discussion contact Candace Browdy at c.browdy@connectlc.org.

In partnership with the City of Waukegan we piloted a "Free Wi-Fi at the Beach" program to explore the impact of fixed wireless internet for public, open spaces. The City issued a statement stating in part, "*We believe that this pilot has been a valuable asset to the community and we look forward to continued partnerships that close the digital divide.*" Municipal leaders interested in public Wi-Fi solutions should contact Candace Browdy at c.browdy@connectlc.org.



Based on the [NDIA Digital Navigator Model](#), ConnectLakeCounty leads the only team of Digital Navigators (DNs) serving Lake County residents. Our DNs are trusted advocates who live in the communities we serve. DN services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device distribution, digital skill building and referrals to community resources. Anyone interested in joining our DN team should contact us at dig.nav@connectlc.org.

Leadership Beyond Lake County

While we are the only organization in Lake County solely dedicated to digital inclusion work, collaboration is at the core of our existence. Read on to learn how ConnectLakeCounty leveraged state and national partnerships.



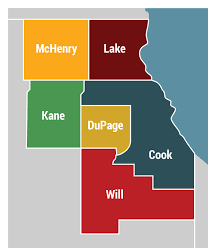
Candace Browdy, ConnectLakeCounty ED spoke on a panel at the [Connect20 Summit](#), an event aimed at facilitating conversations between digital navigators [and policymakers](#) as digital equity funds from the Infrastructure Act begin to flow. Watch the panel [here](#).



Last fall Nicole Ferraro, host of "The Divide" on the Light Reading Podcast interviewed national digital equity champions including ConnectLakeCounty's ED Candace Browdy and former Digital Navigator and Waukegan resident Elizabeth Ramirez. Listen to the podcast [here](#)



ConnectLakeCounty is a proud member of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance ([NDIA](#)) and our Executive Director serves on the National Steering Committee for Net Inclusion 2024. Visit [NI 2024](#) for more information on the nation's premiere digital inclusion conference.



The Illinois Cook and Collar County Workgroup, led by ConnectLakeCounty, is a team of local digital equity leaders who share industry perspectives and best practices for digital inclusion initiatives. More news coming soon on our initiatives.

Get In Touch With Us



If your organizations would like to host a digital skill workshop contact Taylor Ericson at (224)551-9655 or t.ericson@connectlc.org

Anyone interested in attending a workshop can contact Monica Morales at (224)813-9085 or m.morales@connectlc.org



To partner with us or arrange a visit from our DN Team contact James Harris at (224)441-1930
j.harris@connectlc.org

For employment or other inquiries contact Candace Browdy at c.browdy@connectlc.org

**Our new website will be launching soon! Check us out
at www.connectlc.org**

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