Rural America needs solutions now to address the digital divide.

Microsoft estimates 157 million Americans either can’t access or don’t regularly use the internet at broadband speeds. Rural markets have been stuck with the slowest technologies (DSL, satellite), and many common functions are not possible on poor rural internet connections. Across urban and rural geographies, a reliable and adequate home internet connection (versus a smartphone) is often unaffordable for low-income individuals and families. Lack of access to digital literacy training that enables confident technology use compounds the challenges historically marginalized populations face reaching quality social services, and health, job readiness, and financial wellness resources.

We’re expanding digital equity through three partner-led strategies.

Collaborative Stakeholder Planning: Bringing Access to Infrastructure to Rural America

Rural LISC offers strategic broadband planning assistance to support a localized and comprehensive approach to building out broadband networks as a driver of community and economic development. Community-based organizations lead a stakeholder process that identifies state or federal infrastructure financing, attracts an internet service provider, and maximizes the benefits of broadband to small business growth, individual quality of life, and the economic competitiveness of rural places.

Train and Resource Digital Navigators: Making Technology Access Affordable to Low-Income Families and Individuals

Rural LISC cross trains trusted organization staff as Digital Navigators to provide digital inclusion supports to local residents, raising community wide accessibility, affordability and literacy for the 21st century digital economy. We take data learned on the ground and continuously improve LISC’s approach – particularly in surfacing the relationship between digital equity and economic mobility. To date, over 2,000 individuals have been provided with digital literacy supports, more than 1,000 internet-enabled devices have been distributed and hundreds of new broadband internet connections have been made for rural community members.

Predevelopment Capital: Closing a Market Gap for Financing Rural Broadband Planning

Rural LISC is developing a predevelopment loan product to fill a gap in the market for low-cost money to plan for and assess broadband feasibility analysis and planning in un- and underserved rural markets.