ARKANSAS DIGITAL CONNECTORS

Seven diverse, deeply rooted community-based organizations are helping individuals and families get connected

The Food Bank of North Central Arkansas partnered with the local emergency housing provider to host digital skills trainings.

El Centro Hispano's team of Digital Connectors delivered desktop computers to low-income families allowing students to complete assignments and conduct online research.

Rural Community Alliance provided hotspots and Chromebooks to a parent group to support student learning and provided its Youth Network with computers to support community outreach campaigns for voter registration and health events.

Members of the **Tri-County Rural Health** community health worker team completed Northstar Digital Literacy training that includes computer, internet and telehealth application skills, empowering them to better serve community members.

Grant support is enabling **Garland County Library** staff to provide one-on-one tech assistance for community members on topics ranging from understanding new technology to resume building and navigating public benefits like the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Residents can book appointments at gclibrary.com/support/.

With funding from the Carl B. and Florence E. King Foundation, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, Arkansas Community Foundation, Walmart, and Rural LISC, seven nonprofits are implementing a flexible, adaptable model that is **helping Arkansans get connected.** Their approach raises **social capital** by meeting community need where they find it – and they're expanding the reach of their mission through technology in the process. The Arkansas Digital Connector pilot project includes a **food bank, a library, a community health provider, an opportunity youth educator, an advocate for rural life, and two immigrant service providers.**

Why digital inclusion matters—and how the Arkansas Digital Connectors are helping

Organizations that have the trust of a local community are best positioned to identify—and resolve—the barriers that prevent Arkansans from using the internet to improve their lives.

Public awareness campaigns highlighting the positive impact of having a reliable internet connection can **complement the value direct service providers bring**. The Arkansas Digital Connector pilot is currently offering the **following digital services to hundreds of Arkansas residents**:

- signing up for internet service

- taking advantage of internet subsidies such as Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and Lifeline

- getting devices connected to the internet

- troubleshooting equipment problems

- understanding how to use digital platforms and applications (telehealth and online banking)

- providing access to resources to build computer skills

- using technology to support jobs, lives, and livelihoods

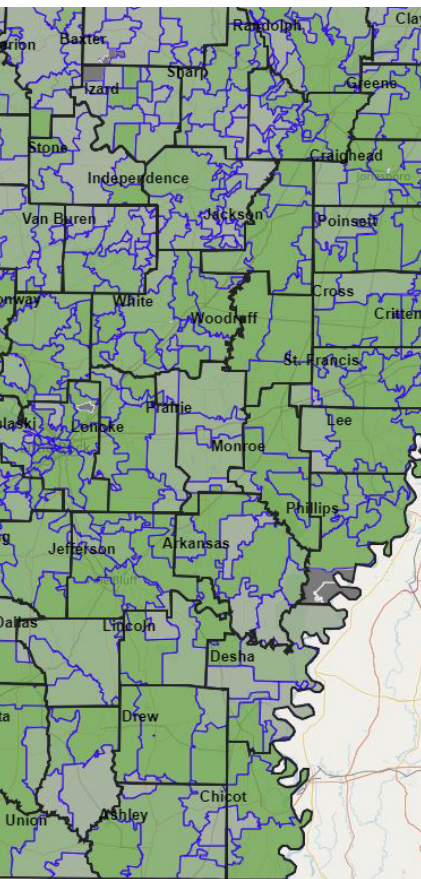- subsidizing the cost of a reliable computer

The challenge ahead

Beyond infrastructure, tackling broadband is an affordability issue and a digital skills issue. The barriers to digital inclusion that disproportionately confront too many Arkansans of color, those with lower educational attainment or living in poverty, and many older adults, are diverse and mutually-reinforcing, requiring a range of **strategies, tools, and trusted local partners to resolve**.

Taking the lessons learned from the Arkansas Digital Connector pilot and looking ahead, there is a need for public and private funders to come together to ensure:

- New infusions of funding to support existing Digital Connectors in their ongoing effort to meet local need

- New funding and training resources to engage new nonprofits in this work across the state

- Public and private investment in the coordination and collaboration of resource providers to ensure evenly disbursed resources and widely shared opportunity

> " We have the ball on the 20 yard line, but we have 80 yards to go to a digital equity touchdown. Otter Creek, Pike, Glen View, and College Station — all communities in Pulaski County— have families who are behind with computer skills and connectivity. We can help guide them to good paying jobs and a career pathway with our digital inclusion work."
>
> -- Larry "Coach" Clark,
> Life Skills for Youth

A ROAD-MAP TO CONNECTIVITY

As part of its training, Rural LISC created a **map to show the number of households enrolled in the Affordable Connectivity Program** (ACP) as percentage of those eligible.

Lightest green color equals locations that have a high number of households not enrolled in the ACP. Working to increase affordable internet adoption in these locations can be a priority for the community outreach specialists supported by the Digital Connector grant.

(Data Source: Rural LISC calculations of USAC and Census data)