



Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

JB Pritzker, Governor

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Pritzker Administration Awards \$250,000 in Broadband READY Grants

The Broadband Regional Engagement for Adoption + Digital Equity (READY) program supports research, planning, and program integration to empower regions and communities across the state

SPRINGFIELD - Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today announced the second cohort of the Regional Engagement for Adoption + Digital Equity (READY) program. Through Broadband READY, five regional entities have been selected to receive a total of \$250,000 to support planning, research, and data collection as they work to eliminate the digital divide.

Broadband READY grants empower regions to explore opportunities for equitable advances in the areas of broadband access, adoption, and utilization. Each grantee will create deliverables that provide a comprehensive assessment of the broadband landscape in their respective region, which will guide program integration and resource investment to close gaps in broadband equity and inclusion.

“Our Connect Illinois program has emphasized the role communities can play in making their visions for better broadband a reality,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “Thanks to our Broadband READY program, statewide community and regional broadband planning is off to a strong start in Illinois. I’m grateful that our READY participants are working to ensure community and regional perspectives across the state are part of our broadband expansion and digital equity efforts.”

Broadband READY is designed to identify current digital inequities as well as next steps in creating a digital inclusion ecosystem through regional collaboration among community and economic development organizations, educators, local leaders, and other related stakeholders. It seeks to provide scalable solutions for broadband utilization across Illinois.

“We are ensuring all communities are uplifted in broadband expansion efforts by giving them the tools they need to have a direct impact in closing the digital divide,” **said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton**. “Our administration will continue to empower communities to realize our collective vision of digital equity, because we know they hold the wisdom to create solutions.”

Through the READY program, five institutions with regional ties were awarded a total of \$250,000 (\$50,000 each) to conduct research and outreach on digital equity:

- Bloomington-Normal EDC (North Central Region)
- Chicago State University (Northeast Region)
- Northern Illinois University (Northwest Region)
- Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (Southwest Region)
- Western Illinois University (West Central Region)

“Developing regional and community driven approaches to closing the digital divide equitably is critical to the success of our Connect Illinois broadband expansion program,” **said DCEO Director Sylvia I. Garcia.** “Under Governor Pritzker’s leadership, our state is deploying resources to mobilize regional partners across Illinois to help bring better broadband access to those that need it most.”

Together with the four participants from the first cohort, the Broadband READY program is actively engaging in regional planning across the state in preparation for statewide broadband expansion and digital equity programming.

“The Broadband READY program is crucial for accurately identifying our state’s needs for broadband equity and access,” **said Gerald C. Blazey, Vice President for Research and Innovation Partnerships at Northern Illinois University and Chair of the IIN Council.** “I’m delighted by the IIN membership’s response to this opportunity that will provide significant impact for the people of Illinois.”

“SIUE is a leader in our community on many fronts, so it’s fitting for the university to lead on broadband expansion opportunities across the Metro East region,” **said Sen. Rachele Crowe (D-Glen Carbon).** “The funding from Broadband READY will support efforts to research, plan, and coordinate as we move forward in our mission to ensure every household in the state has access to the 21st Century economy.”

“We are collectively working to break the digital divide for our communities – especially those most impacted by the pandemic,” **said Rep. Nick Smith (D-Chicago).** “Thank you, Governor Pritzker, for working with higher education institutions like Chicago State University to conduct research, improve outreach and put us on the road to affordable, high-quality internet in every home.”

The Broadband READY program is part of a comprehensive Digital Equity Package announced by Governor Pritzker in 2020 to boost broadband capacity while addressing existing broadband equity gaps. The READY program and other investments to enhance community planning and equitable implementation complement the Governor's ambitious Connect Illinois program, a \$400 million plan to deliver universal access to high-speed internet statewide.

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