# Notice of Collaboration Opportunity
# Illinois Digital Navigator Program

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**2021 Illinois Digital Navigator Program Application**

**Up to 20 Applicants selected**
**Application period opens:** February 1, 2021
**Submission deadline:** March 15 , 2021

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## ✓ Prepare application

- **Read this entire document carefully**
- **Follow the format templates to complete the project cover sheet and application body**
- **Attach and label all application appendices correctly**

## ✓ Submit application

- **Submit the complete application package at any time during the open application period**
- **Applications that arrive after submission deadline will <u>not</u> be accepted**
- **Applications must be submitted either in electronic or paper copy form:**
  - **One (1) electronic PDF copy submitted to broadband@illinois.gov by the application deadline OR**
  - **Three (3) paper copies received by hand delivery or courier service or post marked by the application deadline, addressed to:**

    Illinois Office of Broadband
    Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
    500 E. Monroe Street, 8th Floor
    Springfield, IL 62701

## ✓ Confirm receipt of your application

- **Email receipt via broadband@illinois.gov to confirm application submission**

## ✓ Any questions?

- **Contact the Office of Broadband team at 217-782-5968 or broadband@illinois.gov**
- Additional information regarding this program, including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), are available at: https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/ConnectIllinois. The website, including FAQ, may be updated during the application window.

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## A. Program Information

### 1. Background

The $400 million Connect Illinois Broadband Grant Program is an historic opportunity to improve broadband access throughout Illinois. The competitive matching grants will fund qualified applicants – such as providers, cooperatives, local governments, or public-private partnerships – beginning in 2020 and continuing through subsequent funding rounds in the years ahead.

As the largest state broadband competitive matching grant program ever, Connect Illinois seeks to achieve what no other state or federal approach has accomplished: ubiquitous broadband access to homes, business, and community anchor institutions in every corner of the state. In order to help Illinoisans both access and use broadband, the Illinois Office of Broadband offers related programming to add value to the state's infrastructure investment.

In order to help Illinoisans both access and use broadband, the program will promote digital equity and inclusion through new or improved "Digital Navigator" capacity created at the community level through direct engagement and strengthened through ongoing support and programming.

### 2. Definitions

For purposes of the Illinois Digital Navigator Program, the terms broadband *access*, *adoption*, and *utilization* have the following meaning:

- ***Broadband Access*** refers to the availability of basic broadband service, currently defined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as wireline service of at least 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download and 3 Mbps upload.
- ***Broadband Adoption*** refers to daily access to the Internet: at speeds, quality and capacity necessary to accomplish common tasks; with the digital skills necessary to participate online; and on a personal device and secure, convenient network.
- ***Broadband Utilization*** refers to how broadband is used by individual households, businesses, or community anchor institutions – be it for improved quality of life, employment or commercial opportunities, economic development, or any number of related applications in areas such as distance learning, telehealth, or precision agriculture.

The term "affordability" is often used when considering the price facing consumers for devices, broadband service, and related installation fees. As a result, affordability impacts broadband access, adoption, and utilization alike.

### 3. Program Description

Historically, most individuals have had to "navigate" home access to internet, devices, and technical support on their own, which leaves some unable to fully participate in our society, democracy and

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economy. COVID-19 has widened certain digital equity gaps, such as traditional in-person digital skills building and technical support.

The Illinois Digital Navigator Program seeks to engage individual communities, organizations, and/or other eligible Applicants to identify and close digital equity gaps through targeted digital equity asset mapping, training, and support.

Specifically, this Notice of Collaboration Opportunity (NOCO) introduces a competitive selection process to target funding, expert instruction, and related resources to promote digital equity and inclusion through creation of "digital navigation" capacity at the community and/or organizational level.

"Digital equity" can be defined as a condition in which all individuals and communities have the broadband access and digital skills capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy.

"Digital inclusion" refers to the activities taken to build a strong digital inclusion ecosystem – such as: access to affordable in-home broadband service; adequate and affordable personal computers and/or devices; free digital literacy training and quality technical support. In order to develop a strong digital inclusion ecosystem, the Illinois Digital Navigator Program will help select communities and organizations embark upon the digital inclusion process, which includes:

- Identify and map digital inequities
- Identity digital inclusion assets
- Identify digital inclusion programming gaps
- Build a broad-based digital equity coalition
- Create a digital equity plan
- Implement the digital equity plan

"Digital Navigators" are individuals who address the whole digital inclusion process with community members — home connectivity, devices, and digital skills — with community members through repeated interactions. In almost any community, a dedicated Digital Navigator is a key component of any successful digital equity plan.

Digital Navigators can be volunteers or cross-trained staff who already work in social service agencies, libraries, health, and more who offer remote and socially distant in-person guidance. Often at trusted community-based organizations, Digital Navigators are familiar with resources that build digital equity.

The Digital Navigator Program will begin with digital inclusion asset mapping, continue with the development of processes customized to each site, and result in more connected local communities with stronger digital inclusion resources. A trained Digital Navigator will be able to assess community member needs and provide competent guidance towards resources that are suitable for community member skill level and lifestyle.

The Illinois Office of Broadband and program partners will identify local, regional, and statewide digital inclusion resources; provide training to the Digital Navigator(s); and introduce the Digital Navigator(s) to

the full Illinois Digital Navigator peer community network. Digital Navigator Network communities will have an opportunity for continued training, ongoing consultation with the Illinois Digital Navigator peer community network, and additional support and/or resources.

## B. Funding Information

The Illinois Office of Broadband may award membership in the Illinois Digital Navigator Program as a non-monetary prize to eligible Applicants. Additional complementary programming and non-monetary resources may be available for member communities.

The release of this NOCO does not obligate the Department to establish the Digital Navigator Network or provide programming to any or all program applicants.

## C. Eligibility Information

**Eligible Applicants.** Eligible applicants for this program include any of the following Illinois-based entities serving Illinoisans: local governments; libraries; schools; churches; or similarly oriented nonprofit organizations already serving communities with low broadband adoption, including institutions of higher education.

The Department complies with all applicable provisions of state and federal laws and regulations pertaining to nondiscrimination, sexual harassment and equal employment opportunity including, but not limited to: The Illinois Human Rights Act (775 ILCS 5/1-101 et seq.), The Public Works Employment Discrimination Act (775 ILCS 10/1 et seq.), The United States Civil Rights Act of 1964 (as amended) (42 USC 2000a-and 2000H-6), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC 794), The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 USC 12101 et seq.), and The Age Discrimination Act (42 USC 6101 et seq.).

## D. Application Submittal Information

1. **Address to Request Application Packet.** Application forms are available at the web link provided in the "Grant Application Link" field of this announcement or by contacting the Program Manager:

> Illinois Office of Broadband
> Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
> 500 E. Monroe Street, 8th Floor
> Springfield, IL 62701
> Phone: 217-782-5968
> Email: broadband@illinois.gov

2. **Content and Form of Application Submittal Information.** Completed applications and all required supporting documentation – including one (1) electronic PDF copy submitted to broadband@illinois.gov

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OR three (3) paper copies – must be received via email, hand delivery, courier service, or post marked by the application deadline be deemed eligible for funding.

The paper copies of the completed application packages with all associated documentation must fit on 8.5" x 11" paper. This size restriction includes all paper copy versions of maps and tables.

A standard application package must be submitted to and reviewed by DCEO. Each package must contain the following items:

> a. Cover Letter
>
> b. Application Information
>
> c. Uniform Application in fillable PDF format. (print, sign and scan signature page with submission)
>
> d. Conflict of Interest Disclosure
>
> e. Mandatory Disclosures

3. **Submittal Dates and Times.** The Illinois Digital Navigator Program application window will open upon publication of this NOCO.

## *All applications must be received on or before the application deadline of: March 15, 2021.*

Failure to meet the application deadline may result in the Department returning application without review or may preclude the Department from making the award

4. **Submittal Address.** Application materials must be submitted to the Department via:

a. One (1) electronic PDF copy submitted to [broadband@illinois.gov](mailto:broadband@illinois.gov) by the application deadline OR

b. Three (3) paper copies received by hand delivery or courier service or post marked by the application deadline, addressed to:

> Illinois Office of Broadband
> Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
> 500 E. Monroe Street, 8th Floor
> Springfield, IL 62701

Files containing Application packets and supporting documents that are too large to send via standard email may be shared using the CMS data sharing link (https://filet.illinois.gov/filet/pimupload.asp). This link provides a secure platform to transfer large files to Illinois employees. Applicants must confirm receipt of the application and documents by contacting the program contact listed in this NOCO.

Electronic submissions including links to documents stored in Google Docs or other cloud-based servers are not allowed.

5. **Submission Confirmation.** Please email the Illinois Office of Broadband at broadband@illinois.gov to confirm that each complete application package has been mailed or delivered for receipt on or before submission deadline.

# E. Application Review Information (100 points possible)

1. **Criteria.** The Illinois Office of Broadband will award Digital Navigator Network membership to Applicants that help advance the Connect Illinois vision through digital navigator capacity. Applications will be reviewed and scored by a merit-based review committee ("Committee") led by the Illinois Office of Broadband. This Committee will use the following criteria and associated point values (100 points possible) to assist in systematically scoring applications and awarding Digital Navigator Network membership. These criteria will be applied to information provided by the Applicant in response to the requirements of this NOCO. To ensure that an application receives the highest possible scoring, please be sure to provide complete and comprehensive responses for all information requested.

The team will strive to achieve geographic balance throughout the state in awarding Digital Navigator Network membership. As a result, applications may be considered on a regional basis per the 10 designated state economic development regions of Illinois.

To be considered a qualified applicant, a community or organization must comply with all of the specifications and respond to all items listed within the application instructions.

**Evaluation Criteria:**

Applications will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- The level of commitment and appropriate skills of the lead organization to house a Digital Navigator – 25%
- The commitment to be actively engaged in multiple training sessions and program-sponsored online events over the program period – 25%
- The level of demonstrated support from key community organizations, including local government, chamber of commerce and/or economic development groups, school districts, health care providers, libraries and others – 25%
- The level of demonstrated need for improved broadband adoption, and/or utilization – 25%

**2. Review and Selection Process**

Applications will be graded using the merit-based review process and scored on the criteria specified in Section E.1. The Department will designate a merit-based review Committee to grade each application received for this funding opportunity. The final score of each Committee member will be calculated and an average of all scores will be the final score. Each applicant will then be ranked by their score. The Merit

Based Review process is subject to appeal. However, competitive appeals are limited to the evaluation process. Evaluation scores may not be protested. Only the evaluation process is subject to appeal. The appeal must be submitted in writing to the Department within 14 calendar days after the date that the award notice has been published. The written appeal shall include the name and address of the appealing party, the identification of the and a statement of reasons for the appeal. To file an appeal, applicants must submit the appeal in writing and in accordance with the Merit-Based Application Review Appeals Process listed on the Grant Opportunities page of the DCEO website: https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/AboutDCEO/GrantOpportunities/Pages/MeritAppReview.aspx.

# F. Award Administration Information & State Award Notices

Upon completion of the merit-based review process, the Illinois Office of Broadband will notify all Applicants of the merit review determination. A list of successful Applicants will be posted to: https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/ConnectIllinois.

## Appendix: Application Instructions

Applications should be no longer than eight pages (excluding Applicant biographies, financial statements, other legal documents, and letters of support) and contain the following information:

1. Cover letter that introduces the Applicant, identifies the community, and makes a clear link between participation in the Illinois Digital Navigator program and

    a. Community need.

    b. The vision articulated in the statewide Connect Illinois Broadband Strategic Plan.

2. Applicant Information

    a. Complete contact information, including Applicant name, primary contact name, title, address, email address, phone number, and website address.

    b. Summary of Applicant's history, including the date established or incorporated.

    c. Summary of Applicant's mission and goals.

    d. List of the Applicant's key project staff and anticipated Digital Navigator, including brief bios and qualifications relevant to the Digital Navigator program.

    e. Description of Applicant's current broadband-related programs or activities, including any service statistics and strengths or accomplishments (if applicable).

3. Community Description

    a. Describe the community's demographics.

    b. Summarize the opportunities and challenges that exist in the community, and how they might be addressed through the Digital Navigator program.

    c. If applicable, describe any work done previously or currently underway toward improved digital equity and/or broadband access, adoption, and/or utilization.

4. Program Impact

    a. Information regarding how the Applicant and community expect to benefit through participation in the Digital Navigator program.

    b. Description of additional current or future broadband support, technical assistance, or related programming and/or services that the participation in the Digital Navigator program may enable.

5. Description of supporting organization(s), affiliated companies, strategic partners or joint ventures (if applicable). This should include:

    a. Legal name, mission statement, services and programs, addresses, and staff contacts.

    b. List and describe the local/regional organizations that have provided letters of support and participation; include any letters as attachments.