Understanding Digital Equity & Inclusion

New York State Library and
The State Education Department

Francella Ochillo

Executive Director | Next Century Cities
francella@nextcenturycities.org | @franochillo

Next Century Cities

NCC is a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan nonprofit that supports local efforts to provide affordable, reliable, and widespread broadband access.

We support mayors and other local officials in our network who are committed to connecting every resident in every community.

All recognize the far-reaching impact of ubiquitous high-speed connectivity and importance of addressing both broadband access and adoption.

Next Century Cities

Member Municipalities in New York

- Albany
- Jamestown
- Rochester
- Saratoga Springs
- Schenectady
- Syracuse

Next Century Cities

Broadband Access vs. Adoption

Access refers to proximity to digital infrastructure that enables high-speed internet connections. Connections that meet or exceed the 25/3 Mbps speeds are classified as broadband.

Adoption refers to whether an individual or household subscribes to broadband. Affordability, access to equipment, and gaps in digital literacy are among the primary obstacles to adoption.

Next Century Cities

NY Recognizes the Importance of Widespread Broadband Access

- In 2015, the Broadband for All program aimed to connect every New Yorker to Broadband.
- The Governor cited broadband is "as vital a resource as running water or electricity."
- State lawmakers also recognized the far-reaching impact that broadband has on New York's economy, education, and public safety programs.

Next Century Cities

New York State Efforts to Expand Broadband Access

2015: Governor Cuomo announced the Broadband for All program.

2020: Governor Cuomo appointed a 15-member Commission to improve broadband access and telehealth opportunities for New Yorkers.

June 2020: NCC submitted recommendations. We urged the State to:

- improve broadband mapping data in order to identify which communities are still in need;

- fund local solutions and municipal networks that can fill-in service gaps; and

- invest in community-based organizations instead of crafting incentives for providers.

2015

May 2020

June 2020

Next Century Cities

Increase Broadband Adoption

Digital inclusion programs help to bring broadband within reach for the most under-resourced households in our communities.

Digital equity requires acknowledging that some populations need more support than others in order to get online. Addressing affordability, equipment barriers, digital literacy, and/or technical support are key success factors.

Next Century Cities

Digital Equity Challenges

- Discussing this issue may be a first for some communities.
- It is difficult to define "affordable broadband."
- The benchmarks for digital literacy continue to evolve and will require ongoing community-level partnerships.
- Local officials are often focused on immediate problem-solving and lack the resources to implement long-term strategies.

Have you made room at your table for new voices?

Next Century Cities

A Shared Vision for What Digital Equity Means in Your Community

- Identify a goal. For example, "All residents, including the most disadvantaged, must have access to a broadband connection, the requisite tools, and training opportunities that enable them to fully participate in a digital society."
- Collect data on connectivity and barriers to adoption.
- Assess which community resources are available.
- Engage a variety of stakeholders.
- Identify specific metrics for success.

Next Century Cities

High Broadband Adoption Rates

improve educational outcomes

increase economic mobility

provide a platform to upskill our workforce

improve access to healthcare and overall well-being

promote civic engagement

facilitate emergency response and recovery efforts

Next Century Cities

How Can States Support Local Connectivity Initiatives?

- Help improve broadband mapping.
- Identify and help eliminate barriers to expanding access and increasing adoption.
- Support local connectivity solutions including municipal broadband or broadband cooperatives.
- Provide resources for anchor institutions and community programs that are working to close the digital divide.

Next Century Cities

How can State and Local Officials Leverage Support from the FCC?

- **Get involved** in federal policy-making.

- **Share your community success stories** and statewide challenges.

- **Make specific asks.** For example, the FCC should incorporate pricing info into the broadband data collection process or reevaluate the 25/3 Mbps benchmark speeds.

Next Century Cities

Digital Equity & Inclusion Strategies Require Long-Term Partnerships.

"The work is not done. Everybody discovered over the last six months that connectivity is a must have, and people who may not have been that interested or didn't see the immediate need are now pressed into understanding that we have a need for connectivity. We are scrambling to fill in those gaps of failed federal policies that have not made digital connectivity universally available and affordable to all."

--Mike Lynch, Cable and Broadband Officer, City of Boston