

# Closing the Digital Divide in Lancaster County

First Friday Forum

May 6, 2022

Hourglass



LANCASTER COUNTY, PA  
Economic Development Company

# Setting the Stage

“By 2025, the United States will have 25 million digital jobs—more than the number of manufacturing and construction jobs combined. These jobs will have a median salary of \$80,000, nearly double the national average, according to The Wall Street Journal. That said, if I was to make just one recommendation, one single suggestion on how a smaller community can sustain itself and grow, it would be this: Increase digital literacy by requiring that every K-12 student learn computer science.

Rural schools and urban schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students, continue to be less likely to offer computer science courses. **Foundational is giving young people, really all people, access to broadband internet. That's where it starts as it has become a basic utility like electricity.”**

*- Dean Barber, Barber Business Advisor & Publisher of “The Rising Tide”, February 6, 2022*

# Setting the Stage

**BROADBAND EXPANSION:** The promise of billions of dollars in federal investment under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act alongside the development of the statewide Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority have taken the necessary steps towards closing the digital divide. But now is the time for implementing strategic, thoughtful approaches to ensuring all Pennsylvanians have the access they need and deserve.

“We must work together with federal, state, local and private stakeholders to develop strategies for successful broadband expansion that maximizes resources and minimizes overbuild,” said Rob Postal, Mifflin County commissioner and chair of the CCAP Community and Economic Development Committee. **“The collective future of Pennsylvanians hinges on addressing the challenges to broadband expansion that are preventing access to opportunities and information to many of our residents.”**

*- 2022 County Government Priorities, County Commissioners Association of PA (CCAP), released January 27, 2022*

# Setting the Stage

## Three Key Focus Areas:

**Infrastructure – Is it Accessible?:** What is needed to ensure areas throughout the county without physical broadband assets are upgraded to support modern services?

**Affordability:** Is broadband service affordable, particularly for low- and moderate-income individuals and families in our community?

**Adoption:** The pandemic accelerated the reliance on technology (for school, healthcare, social interactions, banking, ordering food). What needs to be done to support individuals who are not comfortable using technology to adapt?

# Setting the Stage

## Internet Speeds:

**Unserved: <25/3 Mbps** is the traditional definition of broadband. Can't support the basic modern functionality of a single user, let alone multiple people online. Upload speeds can't support video conferencing or e-commerce applications.

**Underserved: <100/100 Mbps** is starting to be recognized as the minimum speed to meet modern internet needs.

**What is needed to be competitive in the future?** Fiber optic networks are considered "futureproof technology" with the ability to deliver beyond 10Gbps. Fiber will quickly become the standard.

# CTC Findings - Infrastructure

## Approximately 11,000 – 17,700 Addresses In Lancaster County Are Unserved

“We ended up abandoning our traditional distinction between Category 1 (large polygons of unserved addresses) and Category 2 (small islands of unserved within large areas that are otherwise unserved, or isolated houses down longer side roads where an incumbent didn't bother to extend a line). **The County doesn't really have any Category 1, but the Category 2 islands of unserved are larger than the usual small clusters and scattered across the entire County – which is very unusual. I can't think of another jurisdiction like this.** If I had to classify these unserved clusters, I would call them Category 1.5.”

*Ziggy Rivkin-Fish,  
Vice President for Broadband Strategy, CTC*

# CTC Findings - Infrastructure

## State and Federal Funding Might Enable the County to Fill Some of its Broadband Gaps

1. Pennsylvania will receive \$278 million through the Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund
2. Pennsylvania and Lancaster County received allocations from the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (ARPA)
3. Pennsylvania will receive at least \$100 million through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program

*It is anticipated most of the federal funds, passed down to the states, will require a local match, estimated to be up to 25%.*

# CTC Findings - Infrastructure

**Anchor institutions have expressed a need for additional fiber infrastructure and could strengthen market appeal.**

- Healthcare, higher education, and private partners expressed challenges and high costs to secure redundant infrastructure
- Several expressed a willingness to purchase access as part of a local partnership, none expected free access
- There is no logical owner for a dedicated anchor institution fiber network in Lancaster
- Compiling institutional and public sector fiber needs could make Lancaster county more appealing for service providers in an RFP process

"The Library System of Lancaster County (LSLC) struggles with unaffordable service and costly technological upgrades. Each of the libraries receives 50 Mbps downstream speeds and cannot afford better connections. They identified network access as the second-highest item in the library system's budget despite reimbursement through the E-Rate program."

# CTC Findings – Affordability & Adoption

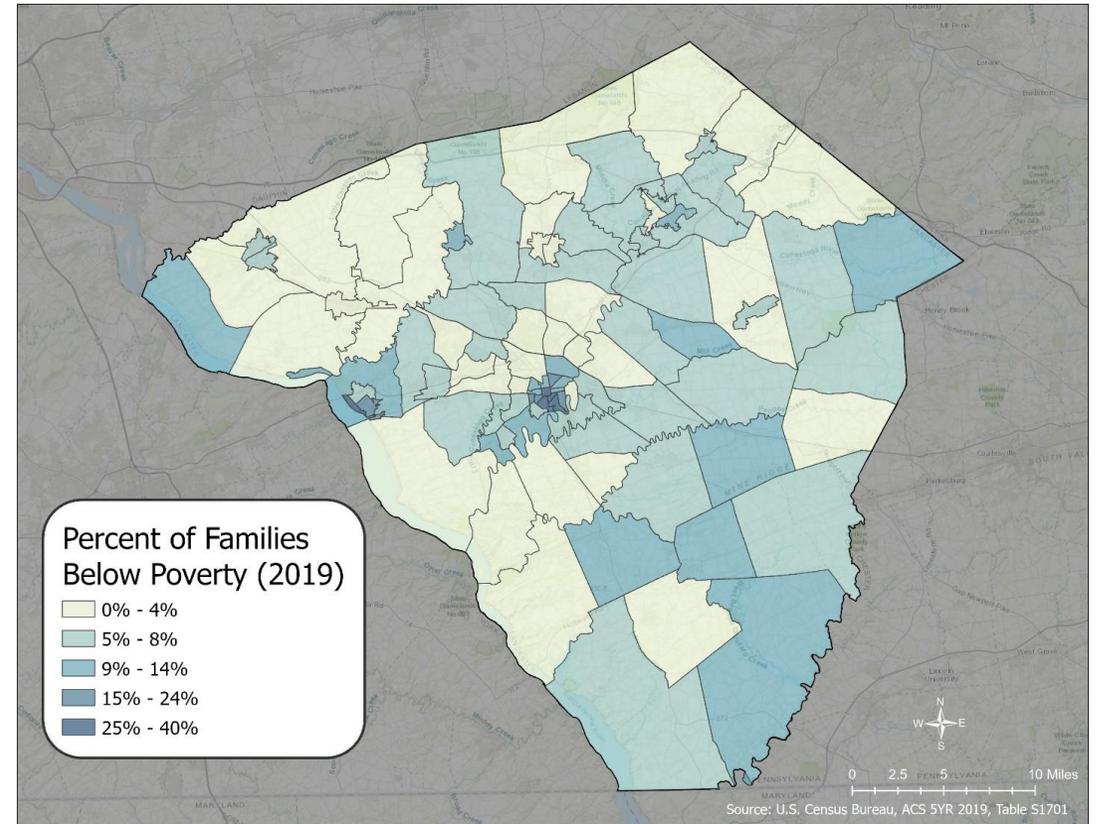
## Broad Stakeholder Groups Report Challenges with Affordability, Device Access and Digital Skills in Lancaster County

Stakeholder groups included:

- Healthcare
- Libraries
- Social Services
- K-12 Schools
- Higher Education
- Public Sector

“Students lacking suitable internet at home would frequently sit outside libraries and use bleed-through Wi-Fi to complete schoolwork.”

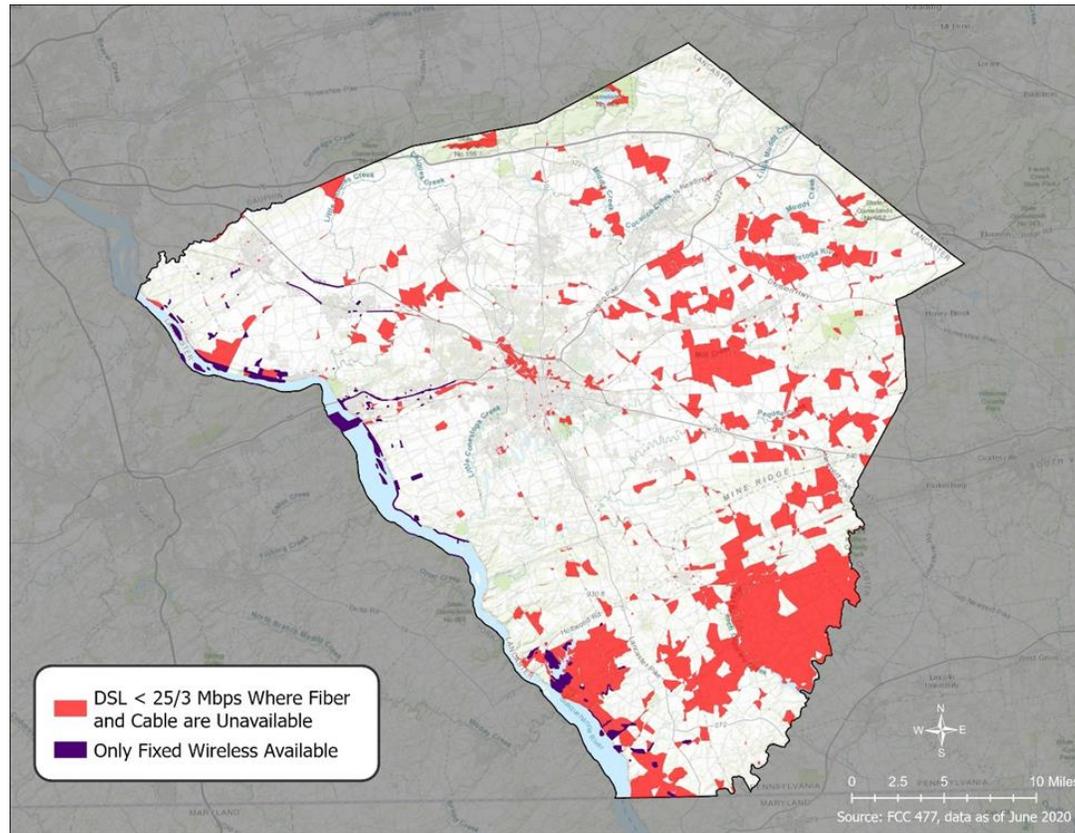
“Organizations as diverse as the Salvation Army, ARC of Lancaster-Lebanon, Community Services Group, and Solanco Neighborhood Ministries said older residents, residents with disabilities, lower-income residents and immigrant/refugee populations faced particularly acute challenges with respect to obtaining affordable access and mastering the skills necessary to use broadband and computers.”



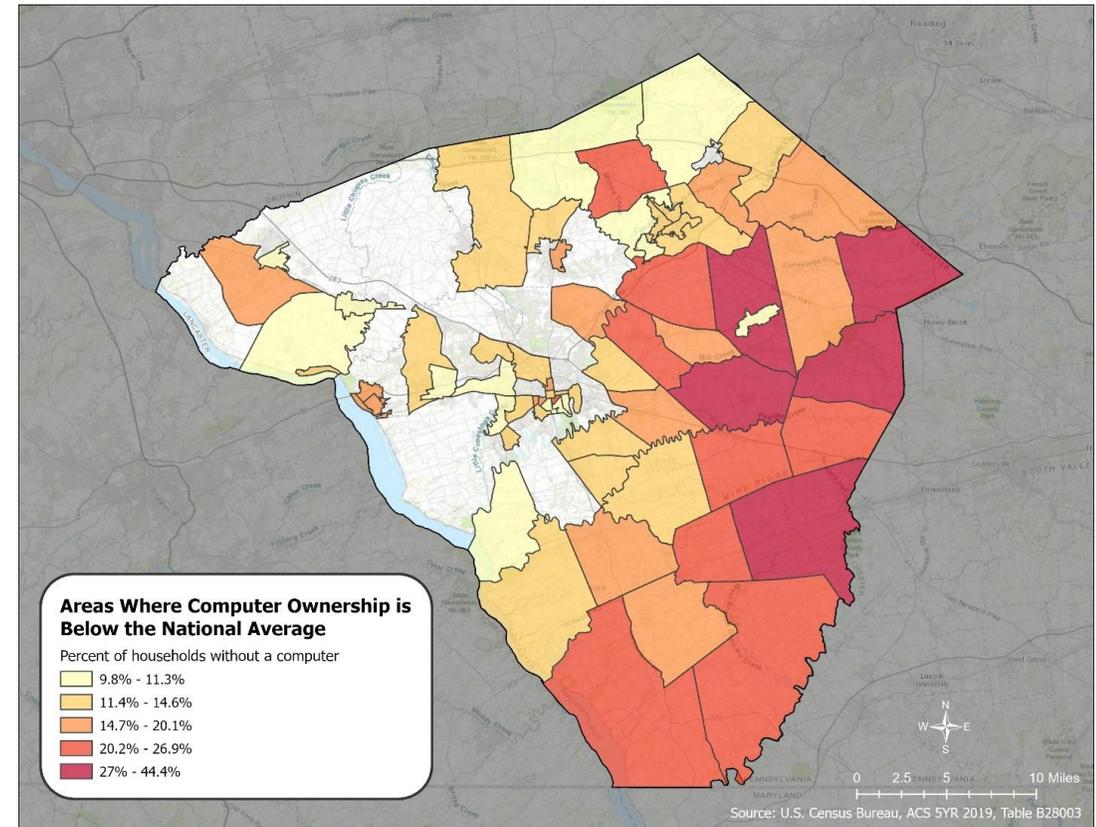
Poverty rates in Lancaster County

# CTC Findings – Affordability & Adoption

CTC's analysis found investment in networks—specifically, fiber deployment or the upgrade of DSL networks to reach higher speeds—has not occurred consistently throughout the county. These low-investment areas correlated in part with areas that experience higher rates of poverty.



Low-investment areas in Lancaster County

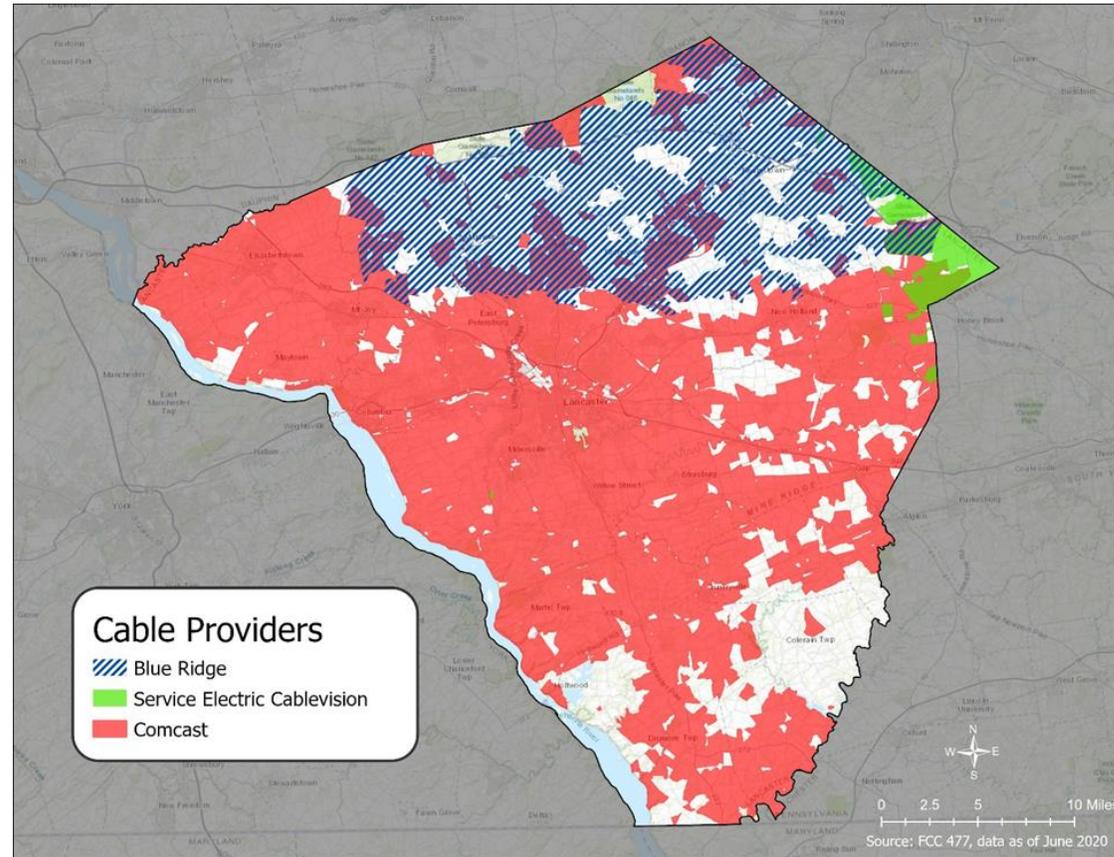


Computer ownership rates in Lancaster County

# CTC Findings – Affordability & Adoption

Comcast is the only provider that offers a low-cost program available only to eligible low-income households. The Internet Essentials program is available at \$9.95/month.

Comcast, along with all the other cable and fiber providers, offer a range of services, typically starting around \$50/month to get 25/3 Mbps or greater. Most include additional fees for equipment or activation.



# CTC Findings – Key Recommendations

1. Engage in a competitive process to identify one or more ISP partners to address the County's unserved areas and explore institutional user options.
2. Ensure Lancaster County residents are accessing federal subsidies enabling low-income individuals to access broadband services
3. Consider a bulk-purchase agreement with Comcast for Internet Essentials to support low-income residents
4. Develop a County-wide coalition of stakeholders to drive solutions around affordability and adoption

# EDC/STEM Alliance Next Steps

1. Distribute final report to funding partners and key stakeholders and convene for discussion
2. Connect with internet service providers in the County
3. Brief key public and private sector partners
4. Develop implementation plan for key recommendations