

C1. Is Your Community Online: Why Digital Equity Matters in Planning

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Andy Waple, AICP
Associate Vice President
AECOM



About the Commission



We are the federally-certified Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Local Development District (LDD), and Economic Development District (EDD) serving the 10-county southwestern Pennsylvania region.

SPC helps our member counties and municipalities to access more than \$35 billion in state and federal transportation and economic development funds allocated to the region.

SWPA Connected

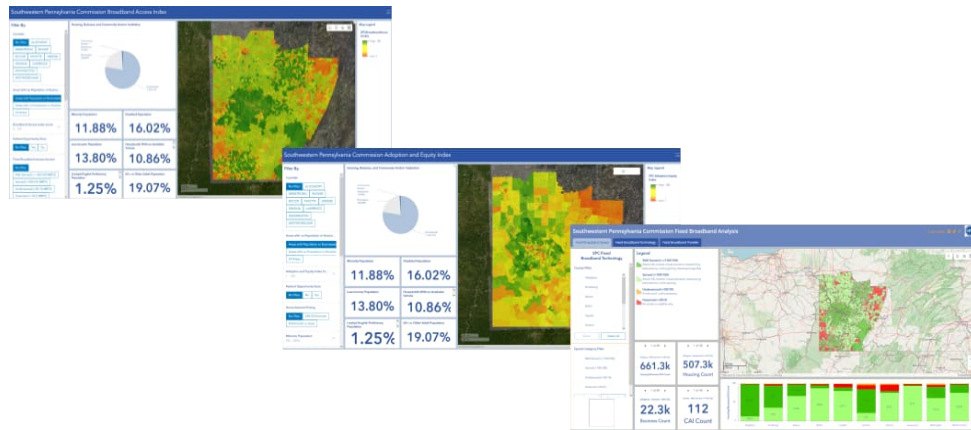


- *SWPA Connectivity Roadmap* developed in partnership with Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), Allies for Children, and a diverse group of regional partners
 - <https://www.spcregion.org/connected/>
- The *Connectivity Roadmap* - informed by a public survey, interviews with ISPs and local governments, plus workshops with regional stakeholders – designed to help identify and guide the deployment of equitable, high-speed connectivity programs and projects throughout the southwestern Pennsylvania region.

Fixed Broadband Access Index

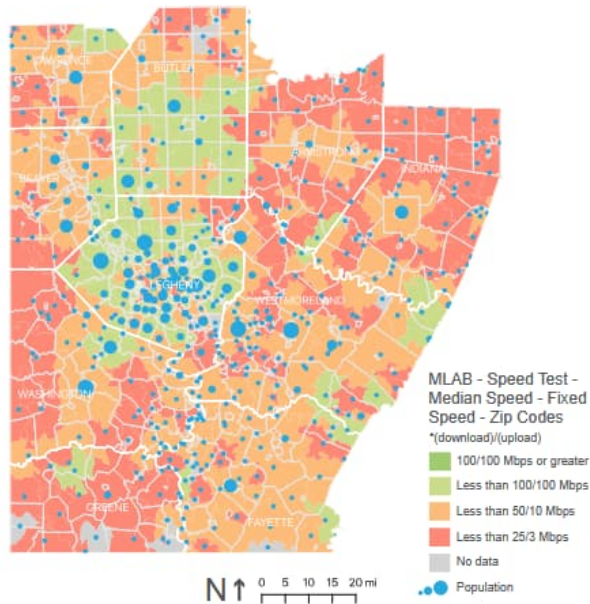
Adoption & Equity Index

Fixed Broadband Story Map



HOW MUCH OF OUR REGION HAS ACCESS TO BROADBAND?

The term broadband is used to describe a range of technologies that provide high-speed internet access. Broadband commonly refers to high-speed internet access that is faster than traditional dial-up access. Unlike traditional dial-up, which requires a telephone line to connect and is not always connected, broadband access is considered “always-on,” making it much more efficient to use.



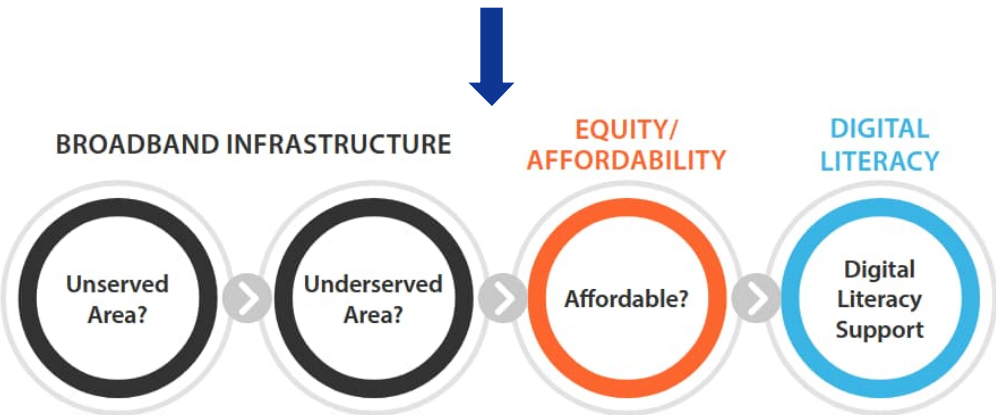
SWPA Connectivity Broadband Speed Map
Source: Open source data gathered by Measurement Lab, 2021



While many residents did state they have home internet access of some kind...

12% OF THE POPULATION rely on their cellular data plan for their main home internet, and **2% HAVE NO HOME INTERNET ACCESS AT ALL.**

Source: SPC Public Survey - Fall 2021



Sounding the Call for Digital Equity in SWPA:

BROADBAND SHOULD BE AVAILABLE AND AFFORDABLE TO THE SOUTHWEST PA REGION

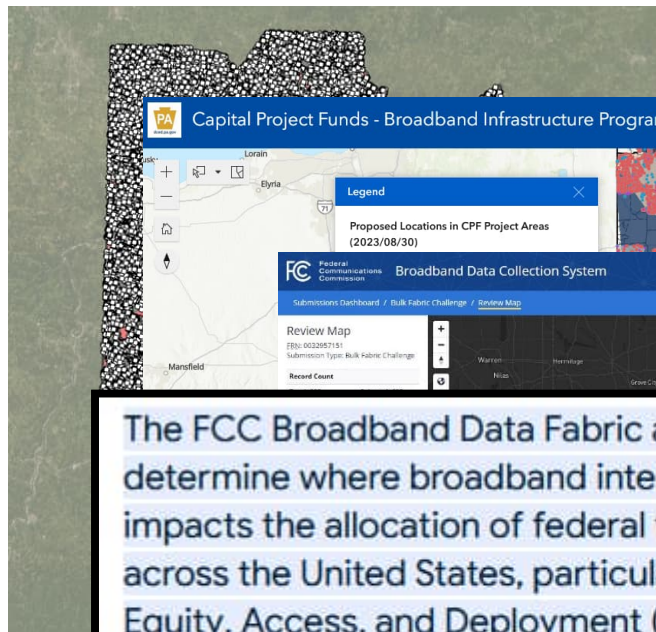
Rural and urban areas in our region are lacking affordable access to internet and equipment that is fast and reliable. This impacts the quality of life for our residents and communities.

- **Rural issue** – high-speed broadband service is oftentimes unavailable.
- **Urban issue** – affordability where low-income households cannot afford access.



The southwestern Pennsylvania region will collaborate to invest efficiently and equitably in high-speed internet networks and programs that are **AVAILABLE, ACCESSIBLE, and AFFORDABLE** to all to ensure our region is connected and thriving socially and economically.

SPC Broadband Data Challenges (2023, 2024)



- 2023 FCC data fabric availability challenge
- 2023 CPF-BIP challenge
- 2024 BEAD challenge

The FCC Broadband Data Fabric acts as the foundational dataset used to determine where broadband internet service could be installed, which directly impacts the allocation of federal funding for broadband expansion projects across the United States, particularly through programs like the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program; essentially, the more unserved locations identified on the Fabric map, the more funding a region receives to address the digital divide.



Development of SPC Digital Assistance



Southwestern Pennsylvania Digital Assistance Program Finder

Program FinderDemographic Map

Find Programs by County

- All Counties -

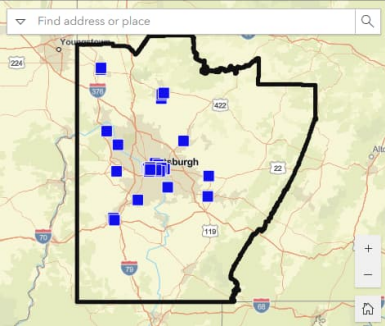
Find Programs by Category

- All Categories -

Find Programs by Targeted Audience

- All Audiences -

Find address or place



Computer Reach - Computer Classes and Support

Countries Served: Allegheny, City of Pittsburgh, Westmoreland

Program Categories: Digital Literacy Classes

Cost: Free

Program Info: Computer Reach is a non-profit organization based in Pittsburgh that provides access to technology for those who need it the most through refurbished equipment, computer literacy training, and support. The organization offers a Digital Navigator Program, digital literacy classes, and free, refurbished desktops through its computer lottery program. Computer Reach has established in-person digital navigator programs in Allegheny and Westmoreland Counties.

Targeted Audiences: Low Levels of Literacy, Members of a Racial or Ethnic Minority Group

Eligibility Requirements: None (Open to all residents of Allegheny and Westmoreland Counties)

Operating Days: Monday through Friday

Go To Website

Contact Info
Kyle Spangler
(412) 444-8816 x1
kspangler@computerreach.org
7800 Susquehanna St., Ste. 106, Pittsburgh, PA 15208

Literacy Pittsburgh - Computer Basics and Internet Basics

Countries Served: Allegheny, Beaver

Program Categories: Digital Literacy Classes

Cost: Free

Program Info: Literacy Pittsburgh offers free, personalized learning in Allegheny and Beaver Counties. Digital skills are included in their offering through free basic computer classes designed to improve computer literacy in Microsoft Office, email, job searching, online safety, and more. They offer free in-person classes in several locations across two counties. Certificates from Northstar Digital Literacy can be earned.

Targeted Audiences: Low Levels of Literacy, Members of a Racial or Ethnic Minority Group

Eligibility Requirements: None (Open to all residents of Allegheny and Beaver Counties)

Operating Days: Allegheny: Offers computer classes, Monday through Thursday, by sign-up.
Beaver: Offers in-person classes at PA CareerLink Beaver two Mondays/month. Beaver residents may also register for virtual courses.

Go To Website

Contact Info
Adrianna Wright
(412) 209-8468
digitalpgh@literacypittsburgh.org
411 Seventh Ave., Ste. 525, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania - Goodwill IT Training Program - CompTIA IT Fundamentals+

Countries Served: Allegheny, City of Pittsburgh

Program Categories: Workforce Development

Cost: Free

Program Info: This eight-week training program is designed for individuals with no prior tech experience and who are interested in pursuing an IT career in areas ranging from entry-level IT support to advanced specialized fields. Participants are prepared to sit for the CompTIA IT Fundamentals+ certification exam.

Targeted Audiences: Low-Income Households, Limited English Proficiency, Underserved Minority Communities, Populations with Disabilities, Members of a Racial or Ethnic Minority Group

Eligibility Requirements: Able to travel to Lawrenceville once a week to attend classes (location is accessible via bus line or free parking lot); have access to the internet at your home and a laptop or desktop (if needed, a loaner device can be arranged); must either have either a high school diploma or equivalent or be enrolled in a program that will lead to obtaining one of these

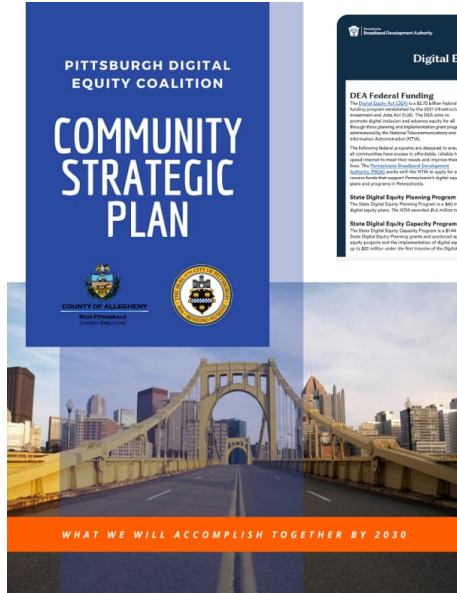
Operating Days: Monday through Thursday

Go To Website

Contact Info
Welcome Center
(877) 499-3526
welcome@goodwillswpa.org
118 52nd St. Pittsburgh, PA 15201

SPC's Digital Navigator Resource & Mapping Tool is a user-friendly web application designed to assist residents of our ten-county region in accessing essential digital resources and assistance programs.

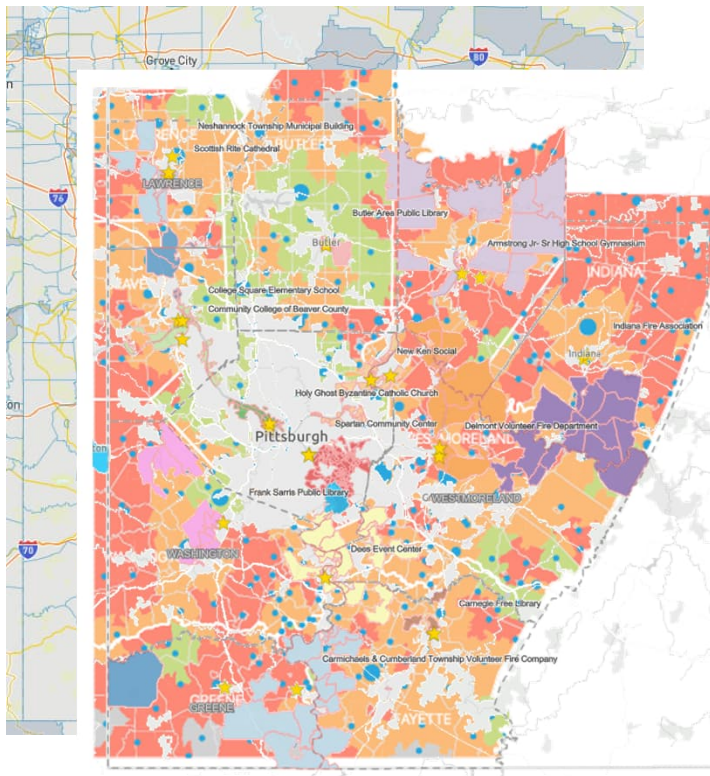
Regional DE Partnerships



- <https://gpdia.org/>
- The **Greater Pittsburgh Digital Inclusion Alliance** is a “community-wide, multi-sector committee of organizations and a proud affiliate member of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)”
- SPC provides ongoing support and technical assistance to Alliance members for state and federal funding applications (such as the federal DE grant), data coordination and more



DE Lessons Learned: EPA CPRG Outreach



- SPC is currently planning outreach in 2025 to communities in each of the ten counties as part of their \$1M EPA *Climate Pollution Reduction Planning Grant* – to develop a regional climate action and resiliency plan
- Outreach is prioritized in Justice 40 Census tracts as identified using the federal Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool
- Virtual or hybrid meetings with high technology needs or digital deliverables will be *less effective* in communities without sufficient broadband access and support
- ***Digital Equity is a critical component of any public outreach efforts in planning!***



Thank You!

     @spcregion

