

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, layered effect. The overall composition is clean and modern, with the text centered on a white background.

# Federal Mapping and Funding Updates Digital Inclusion Planning

Anne Byers

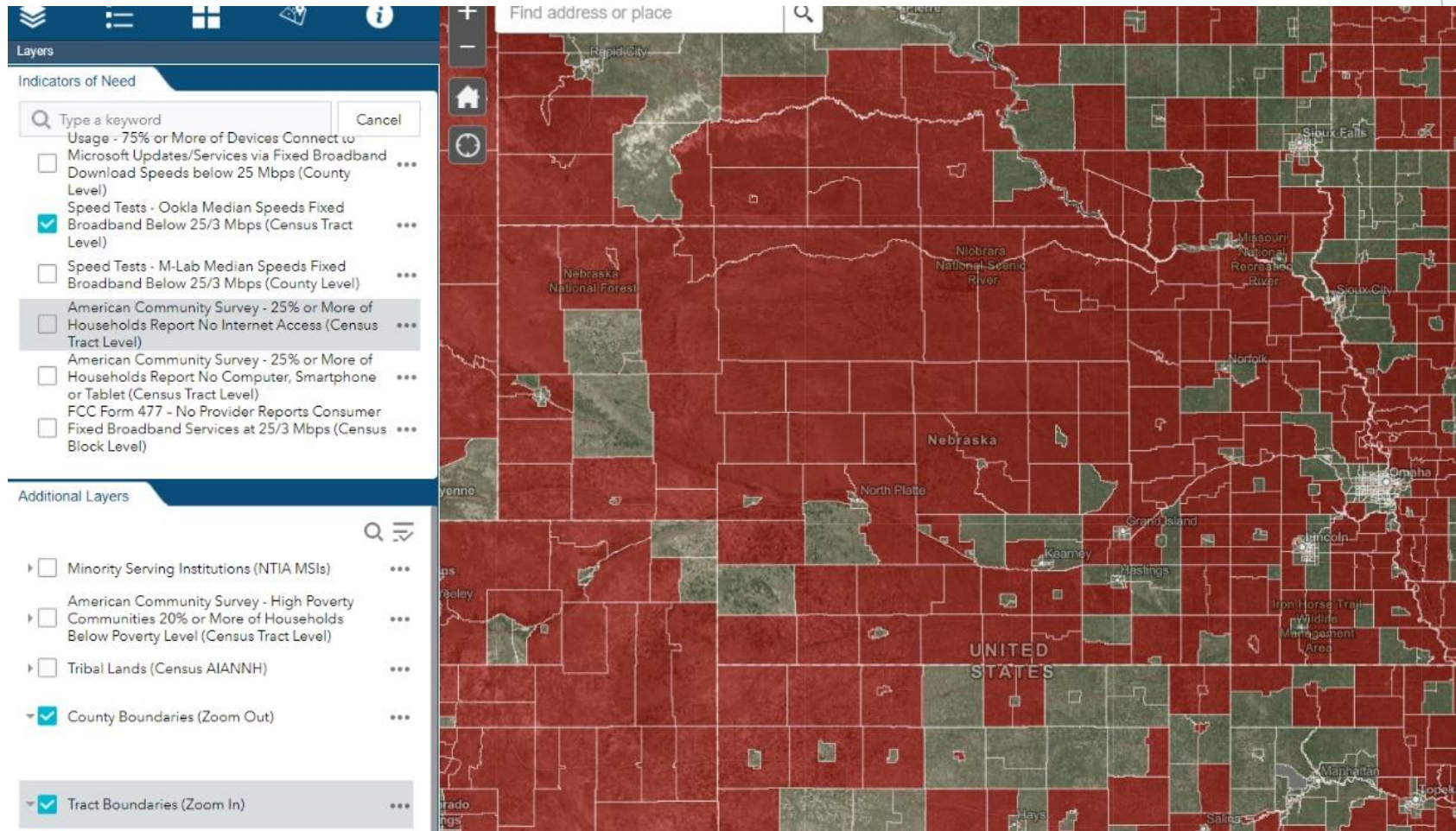
June 24, 2021

# Broadband Mapping and Funding Conundrum

- ▶ Lots of funding opportunities
- ▶ Broadband maps relying on Form 477 data
  - ▶ 96% of Americans and 85% of rural Americans have broadband available
  - ▶ 98% of Nebraskans and 94% of rural Nebraskans have broadband available
- ▶ Speed test data shows many consumers do not experience 25/3 broadband.

# Indicators of Broadband Need

<https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/indicatorsmap>



# Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

- ▶ The Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds provide substantial flexibility for each government to meet local needs—including support for households, small businesses, impacted industries, essential workers, and the communities hardest hit by the crisis. These funds can also be used to make necessary investments in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure.
- ▶ <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds>

# Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

- ▶ FAQs were updated on June 17 and 23, 2021
- ▶ Give local governments and states latitude in determining if an area lacks **reliable** 25/3 broadband
- ▶ Clarify that unserved or underserved households or businesses do not need to be the only ones in the service area funded by the project.
- ▶ <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRPFAQ.pdf>

# Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

- ▶ 6.11. For broadband infrastructure investments, what does the requirement to “reliably” meet or exceed a broadband speed threshold mean? [6/17]
- ▶ The use of “reliably” in the IFR provides recipients with significant discretion to assess whether the households and businesses in the area to be served by a project have access to wireline broadband service that can actually and consistently meet the specified thresholds of at least 25Mbps/3Mbps—i.e., **to consider the actual experience of current wireline broadband customers that subscribe to services at or above the 25 Mbps/3 Mbps threshold.** Whether there is a provider serving the area that advertises or otherwise claims to offer speeds that meet the 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speed thresholds is not dispositive.

## Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

- ▶ When making these assessments, recipients may choose to consider any available data, including but not limited to documentation of existing service performance, federal and/or state-collected broadband data, **user speed test results**, interviews with residents and business owners, and any other information they deem relevant.



## Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

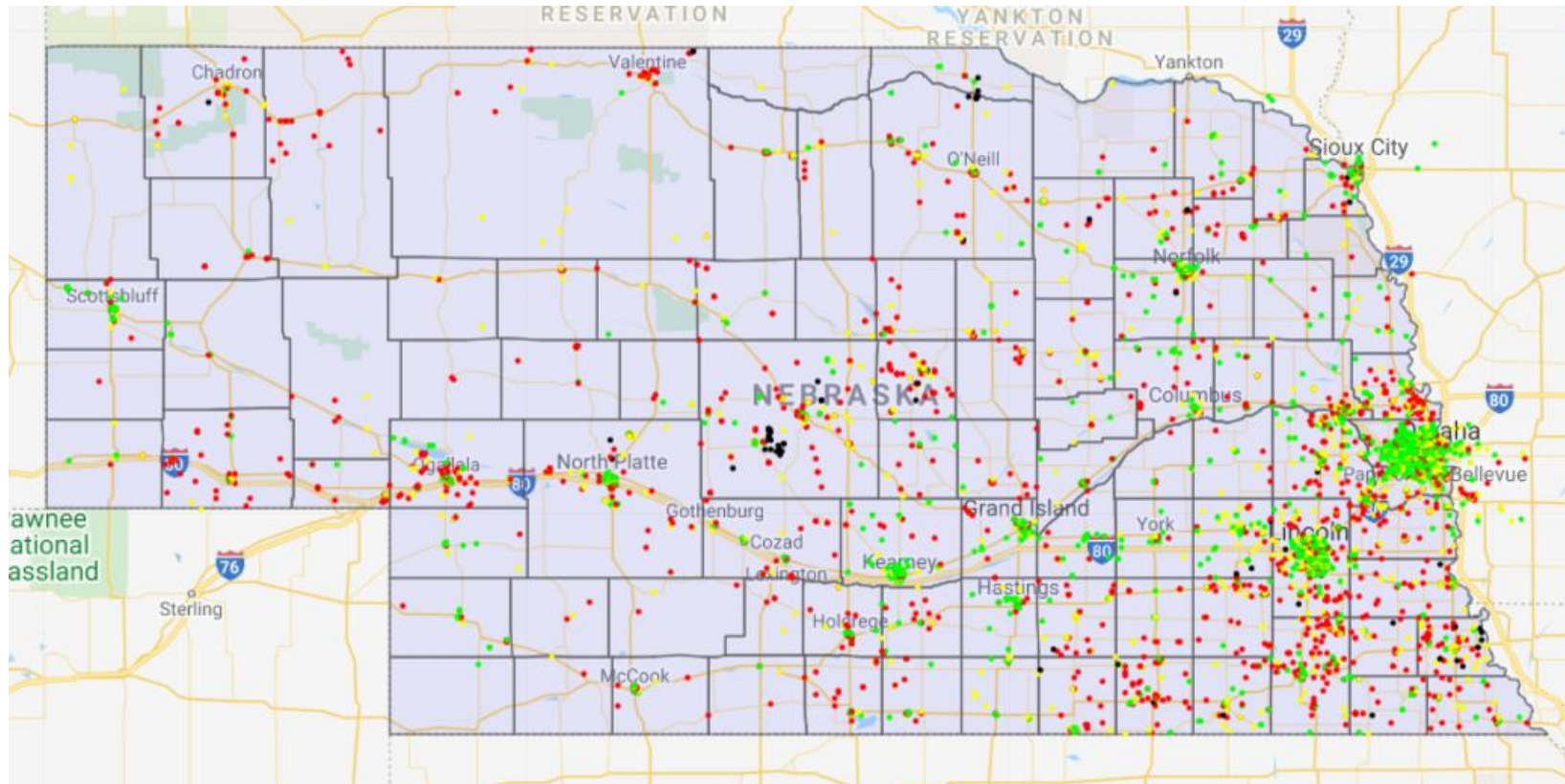
**6.9. For broadband infrastructure to provide service to “unserved or underserved households or businesses,” must every house or business in the service area be unserved or underserved? [6/17]**

No. It suffices that an objective of the project is to provide service to unserved or underserved households or businesses. Doing so may involve a holistic approach that provides service to a wider area in order, for example, to make the ongoing service of unserved or underserved households or businesses within the service area economical. **Unserved or underserved households or businesses need not be the only households or businesses in the service area receiving funds.**



- ▶ Speed tests are now being recognized as a valuable tool.
- ▶ Their value increases with more speed tests.
  - ▶ Social media, stickers on pizza boxes

<https://nebraskaspeedtest.org>



Contact your local economic development district for assistance with speed test data.

<https://www.nrocne.com/members>

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# Digital Inclusion Planning

# What is digital inclusion?

- ▶ **Digital inclusion** is a term to describe the goal of having all members of a community able to access and use online information, resources, and services.

- ▶ Digital inclusion requires
  - ▶ Connectivity
  - ▶ Computing device
  - ▶ Skills to access online information, resources and services
- ▶ A good plan should address all three needs

# Broadband Subscription

- ▶ 12% of Nebraskans or 215,000 individuals do not have a broadband subscription at home.
  - ▶ Includes mobile subscriptions and any speed greater than dialup.



# Broadband Subscription

215,000 individuals do not have a broadband subscription at home. This includes:

- ▶ 32,000 individuals under 18 years old
- ▶ 102,000 individuals between 18 and 64 years old
- ▶ 81,000 individuals 65 years old or older

# Broadband Subscription

- ▶ Subscription rates vary by:
  - ▶ Age
  - ▶ Race and Ethnicity
  - ▶ Education
  - ▶ Income
  - ▶ County

# Top 10 Nebraska Counties

| County            | % Population with Broadband Subscription | Margin of Error |
|-------------------|--|-----------------|
| Sarpy County      | 94.2                                     | 0.4             |
| Thomas County     | 92.9                                     | 3.2             |
| Lancaster County  | 91.5                                     | 0.6             |
| Polk County       | 90.3                                     | 2.1             |
| Wayne County      | 90.1                                     | 2.3             |
| Washington County | 89.8                                     | 1.6             |
| Cass County       | 89.6                                     | 1.5             |
| Hamilton County   | 89.6                                     | 2.3             |
| Seward County     | 89.1                                     | 1.4             |
| Douglas County    | 88.9                                     | 0.4             |

# Bottom 10 Nebraska Counties

| County           | % Population with Broadband Subscription | Margin of Error |
|------------------|--|-----------------|
| Deuel County     | 78.1                                     | 5.0             |
| Hitchcock County | 76.1                                     | 4.1             |
| Loup County      | 75.4                                     | 9.2             |
| Cuming County    | 75.3                                     | 3.3             |
| Pawnee County    | 74.0                                     | 4.8             |
| Sioux County     | 73.9                                     | 6.8             |
| McPherson County | 72.2                                     | 9.4             |
| Thurston County  | 70.2                                     | 2.5             |
| Hooker County    | 68.7                                     | 9.9             |
| Garfield County  | 67.6                                     | 7.7             |

# Connectivity Strategies

- ▶ Hot spot lending programs
- ▶ Low-income broadband assistance programs
- ▶ Locations such as **libraries** which offer access to WiFi and computers
- ▶ Locations which offer small conference rooms equipped with a computer capable of videoconferencing for job interviews or telemedicine consultations

# Computing devices

- ▶ 10% of Nebraska households don't have a computing device
- ▶ 6% of Nebraska households have only a smart phone.

# Computing Devices Strategies

- ▶ Programs which refurbish and distribute computers or other devices
- ▶ Programs which provide subsidies for devices for low-income individuals and families.
- ▶ School districts which provide devices for all students.
- ▶ Locations such as **libraries** which have computers or other devices available for use by the public.



# Skills, Knowledge, Confidence Strategies

- ▶ Free or low-cost classes on using the internet and common applications such as e-mail or social media often at the **library**
- ▶ Individual support through digital navigators or mentors
- ▶ Tech support services through a virtual help desk or weekly sessions

## Library Broadband

- ▶ Just under half of the libraries in Nebraska have internet service at speeds below 25 Mbps down.
- ▶ 86% of Nebraska libraries have broadband service below 100 Mbps down.

## Digital Inclusion and Broadband Bridge Program

- ▶ Underserved areas with a digital inclusion plan are eligible to apply for funding to deploy broadband scalable to 100 Mbps up and down or greater through the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program. In its order [opening the docket on the program](#), the Commission proposed the following requirements:

## Digital Inclusion and Broadband Bridge Program

- ▶ *For the purposes of the application, the Commission proposes to require that a digital inclusion plan provides information about how information and communication technologies provided as a result of the grant will be made available to all individuals and communities within the coverage area, and specifically how the project will include methods for access by those that are disadvantaged within the community. Specifically, the Commission proposes to look at how carriers are going to make broadband service plans affordable to consumers and advertise those services regularly in a way to reach low income consumers. The Commission also seeks to disqualify any digital inclusion plans where the carrier would impose data caps on consumer usage.*

## Digital Inclusion and Broadband Bridge Program

- ▶ This suggests a couple of possible strategies:
  - ▶ Assistance for low-income consumers
  - ▶ Improving library broadband or broadband at other community locations
- ▶ Broader community digital inclusion plan could include other strategies.

## Digital Inclusion Planning Guide and Workbook

- ▶ Nebraska Digital Inclusion Planning Guide and Workbook, Sample Plan Template, and spreadsheet make it easy to develop a digital inclusion plan.
- ▶ Data from the American Community Survey and the FCC's Form 477 is included in the appendix.

# Workbook helps you determine:

- ▶ **What percent of residents of my county have a broadband subscription at home?**
- ▶ **How many households in my community, county or region have only a smartphone or no computer?**
- ▶ **Is broadband of at least 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up and preferably at least 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up available to all areas of my community, county or region?**
- ▶ **If broadband isn't available to all areas of my county or region, where isn't broadband available?**
- ▶ **Is broadband affordable?**
- ▶ **What assets are in my community? What are the gaps?**



## Digital Inclusion Planning Guide and Workbook, Plan Template and Spreadsheet

<https://ruralbroadband.nebraska.gov/resources/index.html>

Go to [ruralbroadband.nebraska.gov](https://ruralbroadband.nebraska.gov) and click on Resources