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RURAL LISC PARTNERS WITH HEARTLAND FORWARD TO MAP UPTAKE IN EMERGENCY BROADBAND BENEFIT, HELP TARGET OUTREACH FOR NEW FEDERAL AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM IN 2022

New mapping tool can help governments, community organizations and digital navigators identify areas where eligibility for FCC's affordable internet program is high but previous enrollment was low

BENTONVILLE, ARKANSAS - Today, Rural LISC launched a new tool developed in collaboration with Heartland Forward that maps 2021 enrollment in the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program and helps target enrollment efforts for the new Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) that replaced EBB at year's end. The mapping tool, built by Liz Lima, a current American Connection Corps Fellow sponsored by Heartland Forward, is designed to aid Rural LISC digital navigators and other partner organizations in identifying the communities that can benefit most from outreach and awareness of the new federal discount on internet service for low-income households.

The interactive map overlays enrollment data from the EBB program with data on the communities that have the highest levels of eligibility for the program in order to show where there are large proportions of households who could take advantage of the federal assistance, but haven't yet. The eligibility feature of the map is based on Census data of households that are at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (one of the qualifiers for EBB). According to the map's estimate, the national average of EBB enrollment for households that were eligible was just 17%. In the new ACP program, eligibility increases to 200% of the federal poverty level.

In some geographic areas, eligible households may not have access to reliable internet service at their homes. Map users can toggle on a layer that shows broadband availability according to FCC data. However, where service is available, Rural LISC and Heartland Forward hope this tool will inspire organizations and community leaders to take action and help qualified households enroll in the program.

"The nation's historic investments in infrastructure, including broadband deployment and affordable access programs, will impact rural America for generations. As an intermediary, LISC is committed to helping communities navigate these novel opportunities to best meet local needs," said Christa Vinson, Rural LISC broadband and infrastructure program lead. "It's why we continue to enhance the impact of solutions like our Digital Navigator program with tools like this high-speed internet subsidy adoption map, so communities get real-time information on where they are and where they're headed, ultimately leading to better outcomes that help everyone thrive."



View the ArcMap version of the tool on the Rural LISC website at: <https://www.lisc.org/rural/our-work/broadband-infrastructure/emergency-broadband-benefit-snapshot/>.

The EBB program transitioned into the ACP program at the end of 2021, which provides a discount of up to \$30 a month toward internet service and a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers. This tool can inform outreach plans for local governments, agencies and organizations as they work to ensure eligible households know about and enroll in the ACP. Additionally, the tool allows policymakers and organizers to view where uptake has been successful, which could lead to useful case studies on the most effective strategies that can be replicated to increase program participation across the country.

“The Affordable Connectivity Program is an important initiative to help close the digital divide for people who are not connected because they can’t afford the cost of monthly internet service. Yet, we’ve found that so many people don’t know it exists and don’t know how to enroll,” said Angie Cooper, chief program officer of Heartland Forward. “It’s clear more outreach and awareness is needed, and taking a close look at uptake in the previous Emergency Broadband Benefit can help guide organizations like ours in finding pockets of greatest need. We’re proud of American Connection Corps fellow Liz Lima and her colleagues at Rural LISC for the impact they are making in helping families across the heartland get connected.”

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About Rural LISC:

Launched in 1995, Rural LISC is the rural component of LISC, the largest community development support organization in the country. Through a partnership base of over 145 organizations spread across 49 states, Rural LISC provides a wide range of services, including financial support, training, technical assistance and capital resources to help rural community partners and developers invest in rural communities. To date, Rural LISC has leveraged nearly \$3.3 billion from public and private sources to produce 35,000 affordable homes and apartments. Rural LISC investments have also produced over 4 million square feet of commercial and community space, including 20 early childhood care centers. Rural LISC technical assistance has touched more than 700 businesses, resulting in over 12,000 jobs supported and/or retained. Rural LISC is committed to ensuring equity and investment in rural America. Learn more at www.lisc.org/rural.

About Heartland Forward:

Heartland Forward is a nonpartisan, 501c3 organization whose mission is to improve economic performance in the center of the United States by advocating for fact-based solutions to foster job creation, knowledge-based and inclusive growth and improved health outcomes. Heartland Forward conducts independent, data-driven research and programs to facilitate action-oriented discussion and impactful policy recommendations. Heartland Forward’s funding of American Connection Corps Fellows in Arkansas, Illinois, Ohio and Tennessee is part of its three-year Connecting the Heartland initiative focused on ensuring families and businesses across America’s heartland have access to affordable, reliable high-speed internet service. To learn more about Heartland Forward, visit <https://heartlandforward.org/>; for more about Connecting the Heartland, visit <https://connectingtheheartland.com/>.