



Choose Columbia
Columbia Economic Development Corporation

Columbia County Board of Supervisor's Broadband Initiatives Report September 2024

BACKGROUND

In recent decades, it has become increasingly clear that access to high-speed internet is essential to economic prosperity and well-being. The Columbia County Board of Supervisors has recognized broadband expansion as a top strategic priority over the last decade and significant progress has been made to expand access to rural areas and higher density neighborhoods. New York State launched the "New NY Broadband" program in 2015 with \$500 billion in funding.

Anticipating upcoming opportunities, the Columbia County Board of Supervisors commissioned ECC Technologies to conduct a county-wide broadband survey in March, 2015, which was coordinated by Columbia Economic Development Corporation (CEDC). According to ECC's report there were over 3,000 unserved and over 10,000 underserved addresses in the county.

To organize efforts between municipalities, internet-service providers, Columbia Connect and other local broadband committees and other stakeholders, the Columbia County Board of Supervisors named CEDC as the County Broadband Coordinator in 2016 and established a Broadband Subcommittee.

CEDC launched a dedicated Broadband Newsletter that year to inform stakeholders in Columbia County about funding opportunities and developments.

Recognizing Columbia County as one of the highest-need counties in the state, Governor Cuomo announced a "Broadband for All" initiative in Hudson in August 2017. Collaborative efforts in the following years resulted in over \$20 million in state funding and additional investment from the Charter/Spectrum merger to expand broadband infrastructure in the county.

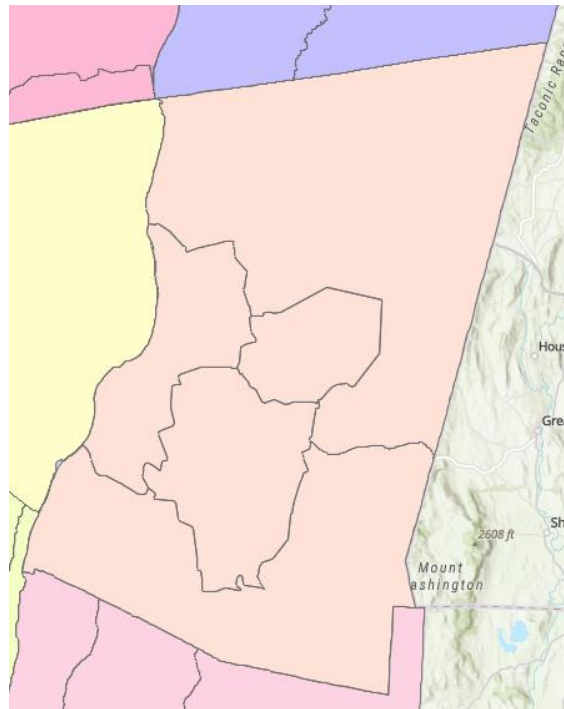
In 2021, as it appeared likely that significant federal investment in broadband expansion was forthcoming, CEDC engaged with MC Fiber Services to conduct an updated survey and ensure that Columbia County remained well-positioned for new rounds of funding. As of the time of that study, the number of unserved and underserved addresses in Columbia County had been reduced to 1,180 as a result of the funding secured by local internet service providers in the preceding five years.

In November of 2021, \$42.5 billion in broadband funding was included under the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD) with the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

In response, Governor Hochul launched the \$1 billion ConnectALL initiative in 2022 to deploy the state's allocation of BEAD funds, along with additional state investment and other sources of federal funding. Over the last two years, CEDC has been focused on positioning all stakeholders in Columbia County to be as competitive as possible for ConnectALL programs.

On September 5th, ConnectALL issued a notice seeking public comment on its second draft of proposed project areas for the ConnectALL Deployment Program. They indicated they will consider public comments when designating geographic boundaries of the project areas for which prospective Internet Service Providers grantees can apply. The deadline to submit public comment is **September 28, 2024**.

The Columbia County Map shows 5 proposed designated project areas:



Along with the Notice, ConnectALL indicated that 1,422 county addresses are eligible for BEAD funding. While they did not provide individual addresses, this conflicts with the Federal Communication Commissions list of 2,280 Columbia County addresses, as well as the most recent PSC data shows that Columbia County has reduced the number of unserved households to 824 unserved and unserved addresses.

The PSC data is consistent with recently updated CEDC field survey data performed by MC Fiber which identified 742 addresses, distributed throughout the county. Approximately 139 Canaan and New Lebanon addresses are anticipated to be served in with \$820,000 in USDA funding secured in by former Congressman Antonio Delgado in 2021.

Here is a breakdown by town of the addresses CEDC is tracking:

Row Labels	Town Total
Ancram	42
Austerlitz	90
Canaan	57
Chatham	82
Claverack	49
Clermont	6
Copake	24
Gallatin	13
Ghent	36
Greenport	1
Hillsdale	168
Kinderhook	48
Livingston	3
New Lebanon	40
Stockport	12
Stuyvesant	67
Taghkanic	4
Grand Total	742

CEDC and MC Fiber continues to work closely with the ISP, updating lists based on continuous on-going build-outs and to determine if the preliminary designated “bid areas” best serve the county.

ConnectALL Program.

Overview of ConnectALL Program and Timeline:

In order to secure funding from the federal BEAD program, New York State has submitted a series of plans and proposals to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) in the last year.

These include:

- A [Five-Year Action Plan](#) (September 2023)
- An [Initial Proposal](#) (February 2024)
- A [State Digital Equity Plan](#) (May 2024)

Since the launch of ConnectALL in 2022, the state has launched a number of programs:

- A Pilot [Municipal Infrastructure Program](#) (2022).
- [Digital Equity Technical Assistance](#) Fund (2024)
- [Regional and Local Assistance](#) (2024)
- [Municipal Infrastructure](#) (2024).

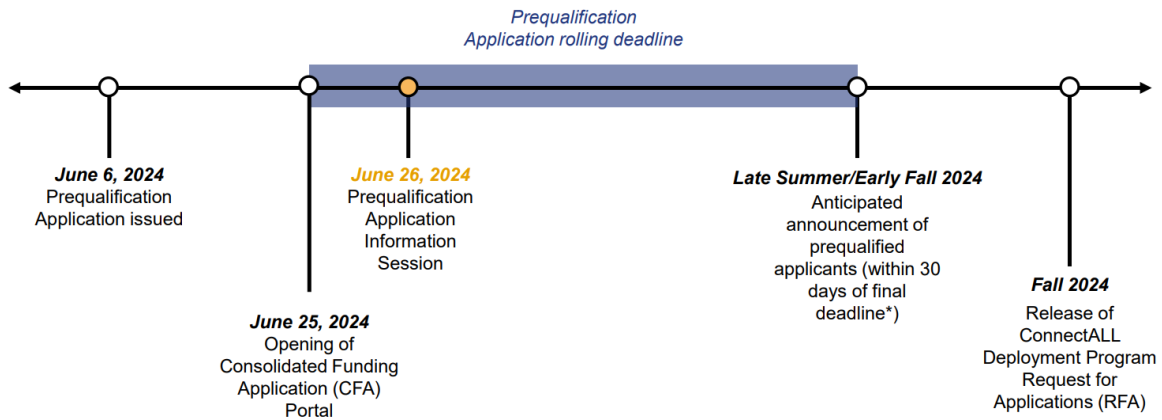
New York BEAD Funding Approval and Next Steps

On August 13, 2024, the NTIA announced that New York's Five-Year Action Plan (see above) for the BEAD program was approved and that the \$664 million allocated to New York would become available. The following programs, which utilize this funding, are in process or expected to open in the next year:

- The [Affordable Housing Connectivity Program](#) is open in its early stages.
- The prequalifying period for the [ConnectALL Deployment Program \(Latest Presentation\)](#) has a September 18th application deadline.
- The Connectivity Innovation Grant Program - details have not yet been released.

The ConnectAll Deployment Program will disburse the bulk of the \$664 million from the BEAD program along with additional state funding, for a total program budget of \$696 million. Corporations, local governments, development corporations, non-profits, and new partnerships are all eligible to apply. A Request for Applications is expected to be released with more program details in Fall 2024. New York will then award the funding to applicants over the following four years before the BEAD funding expires in 2028.

SELECTION TIMELINE



ConnectALL Signature Programs:

[Digital Equity Program \(SDEP\)](#) to support New Yorker's use of the internet to participate in our society, democracy and economy.

[ConnectALL Deployment Program](#) for areas that lack broadband infrastructure.

[Regional and Local Assistance](#) to assist local governments, counties, municipalities, Tribal Governments, and other government entities to plan or prepare for broadband deployment or other digital equity initiatives.

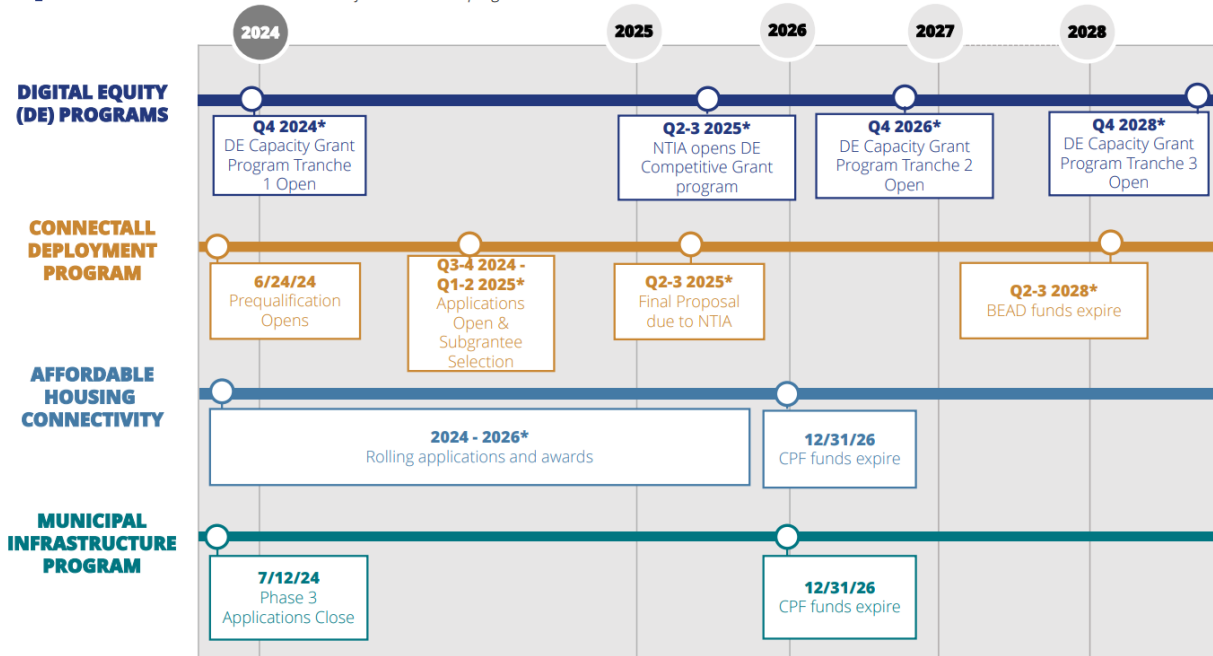
[Municipal Infrastructure Program](#) for municipalities, non-profits, municipal utilities, and other entities to construct open and accessible public broadband infrastructure.

[Affordable Housing Connectivity Program](#), a partnership with New York Homes and Community Renewal to retrofit affordable housing with broadband installations as part of the agency's overall housing plan.

Connectivity Innovation Grant Program to develop creative broadband solutions and ensure New York is a global leader in pioneering future breakthroughs.

CONNECTALL GRANT OPPORTUNITIES TIMELINE*

*Dates are tentative. This chart is not inclusive of all ConnectALL programs or initiatives.



[See 2024 Presentation](#)

CEDC Participation in ConnectALL Initiatives:

- CEDC has participated in all of the ConnectALL webinars and events and has been in regular contact with members of the ConnectALL office and NYS Public Service Commission (see below appendix).
- In addition, CEDC has worked closely with the Capital District Region Planning Commission, the ConnectAll Office Capital Region Coordinator.
- CEDC has consistently disseminated information on all funding opportunities to relevant stakeholders and the general public.
- CEDC, with support from the Columbia County Planning Department and MC Fiber, participated extensively in the FCC “challenge” process to ensure that all unserved addresses were included in the FCC list that would determine funding allocations. Final judgement on the challenge process is ongoing.
- CEDC also submitted an application for planning grant funds under the Regional and Local Assistance Program and has extensively explored other funding opportunities, many of which Columbia County was ineligible for.

Digital Equity:

Digital equity (the goal of ensuring equitable internet access, literacy, affordability, and choice) is a theme throughout all ConnectALL programs and the focus of several. In addition to the funding included in the BEAD program, the IJA also included \$2.75 billion for the Digital Equity Act.

CEDC has contributed to the goal of digital equity in Columbia County through many of the same activities listed above for the general ConnectALL initiative, but more specifically by:

- Participating in state and regional digital equity meeting and webinars.
- Distributing information on digital equity programs, such as the recently announced [Digital Equity Competitive Grant](#).
- Partnering and regularly communicating with the Capital Region Digital Equity Task Force.
- Partnering with digital-equity focused organizations such as Albany Can Code.
- Attendance at the NYS Digital Equity Coalition Convening in Syracuse on August 13, 2024.

Municipal Infrastructure Program:

CEDC explored the feasibility of applying for funding to construct publicly owned broadband infrastructure in 2021 with the announcement of the NYS Municipal Infrastructure Program. Cost estimates were compiled by MC Fiber Services for an initial build-out. It was determined that given the lack of geographic concentration of underserved addresses, the cost of building and maintaining the infrastructure, the progress made in recent years, and the alternative avenues for funding, that a publicly owned broadband network was not the appropriate path for Columbia County. Initial awards under the program in 2024 were given to communities with either thousands of unserved addresses in more densely concentrated addresses.

Detailed activities with MC Fiber:

CEDC retained MC Fiber Services (MFS) to serve as its technical consultant on the project in June 2021 with a scope of work to identify existing Service Providers service areas and perform field surveys to identify unserved and underserved addresses in Columbia County, which is served by multiple Internet Service Providers (ISP):

1. Charter
2. Consolidated Communications
3. G-Tel/Archtop
4. Mid-Hudson Cable
5. Verizon

Unserved and underserved addresses were provided in Excel and KMZ format divided into Towns.

- Criteria was based on Residential Dwellings only – Businesses were not included in the survey.
- Fabric was based on the NYS 911 Data Base for each address to include, physical address, Township, Longitude and Latitude. Property owner names were excluded.
- 911 addresses were assigned to various non dwelling locations, to include Exits along the Taconic Parkway, the NYS Thruway and vacant lots. These addresses were not included in the survey.
- A total of 1,270 unserved addresses were identified in Columbia County Unserved is defined as an address/residence having wireline service of not more than 25 Megs per second down load speed.
- Served addresses/dwellings were defined as having a minimum of 100 Megs of Download speed available and 25 Megs of upload speed available at the curb or edge of Public Row.
- Initially dwellings with 100 Meg available at the curb but did not have service due to excessive cost to build a lengthy lateral from the curb to the house were excluded from the list but these addresses with lengthy laterals are now being added to the Unserved list.
- CCEDC Unserved lists were continuously forwarded to Service Providers, the NYS CAO, and the NYS Public Service Commission.
- Service Providers have continuously used our unserved lists to plan Line extensions in areas where multiple unserved addresses are grouped.
- Over 500 addresses from these lists have had service extended to from the existing service providers.

Throughout this process, CEDC has worked closely with internet service providers in the County to inform them of the findings and update the lists as many extended service to previously unserved locations at their own expense. The cooperation and work of the County ISPs have been invaluable to the progress made in reducing gaps in broadband coverage in recent years.

Other initiatives with MC Fiber have included:

USDA Funding Opportunities

- Opportunities were explored for funding via a teams Call with senior USDA staff.
- Most funding opportunities with the USDA are dedicated to applications submitted directly by Service providers.
- A funding opportunity for Municipal and Government agencies was explored but it capped at \$5 Million and required matching capital from the County.
- Columbia County was determined ineligible for several programs requiring the area have over 50% unserved addresses

- New funding opportunities are now available that are being explored for Project Management and Planning and Digital Equity initiatives.

New York State Public Service Commission (PSC)

- CEDC coordinated early on with PSC staff in an effort to insure unserved and underserved addresses were on PSC lists.
- CEDC arranged for MC Fiber to review the PSC lists and update field survey date to assist insure that the PSC had the most accurate data.
- The PSC list and CCEDC list were merged to create a single list of Unserved and Underserved Addresses.

NYS ConnectAll Funding Opportunities (NYSCAO)

- NYS rollout has experienced delays in providing funding to extend these services.
- The first comprehensive list of Unserved Addresses was provided by the NYS CAO in February of 2024.
- A challenge period was available to add unserved addresses to the NYS CAO list that were not originally included.
- Again with significant technical assistance from the County Planning Department and MC Fiber, a detailed comparison of the CEDC List and the NYS CAO list was completed in March of 2024 and it was determined that all unserved and underserved addresses were included in the NYSCAO list.
- In February of 2024 the NYS CAO provided their List of Community Anchor Institutions.
- County Planning Staff and MC Fiber determined that over 80% of CAIs do not have the recommended 1 Gig down Load/Up Load speeds
- A challenge period was provided to add CAIs to the NYS CAO list
- An additional 28 CAIs were added to the NYS CAO list via the Challenge period.
- CEDC submitted an application for a \$150,000 NYS CAO Regional and Local Assistance Program Grant Application was submitted on July 15, 2024.

Next Steps

CEDC will continue the following activities in line with past ConnectALL involvement regardless of the outcome of the grant outcome:

- Hosting a Broadband Forum at the Board of Supervisors Broadband Subcommittee meeting on Monday, September 23rd at the County Office Building with the opportunity to participate via ZOOM.
- Attending all ConnectALL events and webinars.
- Disseminating information to the public and relevant stakeholders.
- Provide updates to Board of Supervisors.

- Track ongoing ConnectALL programs and future opportunities: Deployment, Connectivity Innovation, Digital Equity, etc.
- Support the County's Internet Service Providers in accessing BEAD funding.

CEDC hopes to use funding from grant award to extend MC Fiber's contract to assist in continuing to provide technical support and in planning to insure all Columbia County addresses are served. This will include:

1. Field Survey: Ride routes and survey pole lines and new line extensions to determine what has been completed and what remains to complete.
2. Update KMZ Mapping: Create KMZs showing addresses and CAIs that have been completed and those that are still unserved.
3. Review Regulatory Updates: Monitor and review NYS CAO, USDA and FCC updates.
4. Participate in NYS CAO Webinars: Stay up to date with the latest developments from the CAO and USDA.
5. Respond to Elected Officials: Provide updates to official stakeholders with interest in the NYS CAO progress.
6. Respond to Residents: Provide updates to local residents with interest in the NYS CAO progress.
7. Coordinate with Providers: Provide assistance to providers with updated data collections and mapping.
8. Prepare Updates: Prepare quarterly updates on the status of federal, state and local efforts.

Appendix 1: ConnectALL Events Attended by CEDC Representatives:

ConnectAll Stakeholder Forums

November 13, 2023: Virtual Forum: BEAD Planning Update for Planners from New York’s Large Municipalities, Counties and Regions

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#)

November 16, 2023: ISP Virtual Forum: BEAD Planning Update

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#)

November 29th, 2023: State Digital Equity Planning Update

[View Presentation Slides](#)

January 5, 2024: Affordable Housing Connectivity (AHCP) RFA Information Session for ISPs and Broadband Deployment Entities

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#)

January 30, 2024: Affordable Housing Connectivity Program Virtual Forum for Property Owners

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#)

February 1, 2024: Municipal Infrastructure Program RFA Information Session

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#)

March 6, 2024: Panel Discussion on Pilot Projects that Informed ConnectALL’s Municipal Infrastructure Program

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video recording on YouTube](#)

March 21, 2024: NYS Broadband Challenge Virtual Forum for Government Entities and Non-Profit Organizations

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#) *Note: The Challenge Portal demo has been removed from this recording.*

March 21, 2024: NYS Broadband Challenge Virtual Forum for Internet Service Providers

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#)

Note: there is an error in the title slide shown. The title slide should read “New York State Broadband Challenge Process Virtual Forum for Internet Service Providers.” Additionally, the Challenge Portal demo has been removed from this recording.

April 23, 2024: ConnectALL Deployment Program – County Partnerships RFA Information Session

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#)

May 1, 2024: NYS Broadband Challenge Process Virtual Forum: Rebuttal Phase

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#) *Note: The Challenge Portal demo has been removed from this recording.*

June 24 & 27, 2024: Digital Equity Technical Assistance Fund RFA Information Session

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#)

Jun 25, 2024: Regional and Local Assistance Program RFA Information Session

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View video Recording on YouTube](#)

Jun 26, 2024: ConnectALL Deployment Program Prequalification Information Session

[View Presentation Slides](#)

[View Video Recording on YouTube](#)

Appendix 2: General Resources:

[About ConnectALL | ConnectALL Office \(ny.gov\)](#)

[ConnectALL Office \(campaign-archive.com\)](#)

[ConnectALL Events | ConnectALL Office \(ny.gov\)](#)

[Five-Year Action Plan \(ny.gov\)](#)

[Draft Initial Proposal Vol. 1 for Public Comment \(ny.gov\)](#)

[Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program | BroadbandUSA \(doc.gov\)](#)

[Columbia County Broadband - Choose Columbia \(columbiaedc.com\)](#)

[Broadband Study for Columbia County \(columbiaedc.com\)](#)