



Chicago - August 28, 2020 [The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Office of Broadband](#) named [The Network Neighborhood Alliance \(The NNA\)](#) of South Shore as one of 12 recipients of the first Illinois Connected Communities cohort grant that includes four school districts, two community-based organizations, two local governments, two county-level organizations, and two economic development groups.

Illinois Connected Communities is a partnership of the Illinois Office of Broadband, the Evanston-based Benton Institute for Broadband & Society, and local philanthropy. The program is designed to engage the first-year cohort of communities through best practice curriculum, and expert consultation. The program was created to assist some of the most underserved areas of the state with building broadband capacity, according to Gov. Pritzker's Office.

"Now more than ever, access to reliable high-speed internet is a necessary tool for our communities to support their residents and businesses in competing in an ever-changing and increasingly digital world," said Michael Negron, former acting Director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

"South Shore has been left on the wrong side of the digital divide, and we can no longer afford to leave our community residents behind. Lack of access to reliable, high-speed internet has a critical social impact and we need to ensure we all have access to telemedicine, education, resources and connections to others" said Val Free of The NNA.

South Shore Connects is the project team powered by The NNA, and aspires to help remove the barriers and resulting inequity which exists within our neighborhood by bringing broadband to our area. In order for an individual, family, or business to compete in the 21st-century digital economy, they must have reliable, robust broadband access just like our homes in America have electricity.

By the end of the 12-month program, each Illinois Connected Community will have completed a community-driven, a broadband strategic plan that articulates the community's broadband vision and identifies an action plan for progress toward improved broadband access in the areas of community and economic development, education, civic engagement, healthcare, agriculture, and more.

We believe having robust and strategically deployed broadband will maximize our community's economic development goals, attract future industry, enhance our education and youth organizations, and promote jobs in a broadband-driven industry. Our vision of the future for the South Shore Connects project includes providing program curriculum focused on availability of free or low-cost broadband access, and help with adoption and utilization.

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