The Black Belt Community Foundation

DATA IMPACT CENTER

The Black Belt Bulletin

WHAT IS BROADBAND?

The term broadband commonly refers to high-speed Internet access that is always on and faster than the traditional dial-up access. Broadband internet is delivered through several different technologies with varying availability based on location.

Why is broadband access so important?

Education

Broadband networks enhance educational experiences by providing students and teachers access to an array of online resources. Broadband access also allows students to participate in distance learning opportunities at any time from any location they can access the internet.

Healthcare

Broadband makes remote access to clinical services possible for patients and provides significantly improved, cost-effective access to quality health care. It also allows physicians to monitor their patients through innovative home health devices.

Public Safety

Broadband, particularly wireless broadband, is becoming increasingly indispensable to the interoperability of police, fire, health and other government entities. This includes rapid disaster response systems, effective early warning and public alert systems, and disaster preparation programs.

Economic Development

Broadband enables local communities, regions and nations to develop, attract, retain and expand job-creating businesses and institutions. It also improves the productivity and profitability of large, small and home-based businesses and allows them to compete in local, national and global markets.
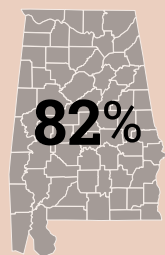
Broadband in the Black Belt

In today's world, affordable, reliable, high-speed Internet access has never been more important, yet many homes in Alabama's Black Belt Region lack sufficient connectivity. Both availability and affordability contribute to significant gaps in broadband coverage in these Black Belt cities making them unable to support the long-term goals related to workforce, healthcare, economic development and education. To achieve these goals, high-quality, resilient, and future-proof Internet service must be fully accessible to every resident.

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) is working to achieve full Broadband access in the state over the next few years. ADECA has held a series of meetings with local leaders and citizens to produce insights and the data needed to build broadband planning and deployment capacity. According to Marcus Campbell, chair of the Sumter County Commission, "Alabama will receive 181 million dollars throughout the course of 2024-25 where internet service providers can apply for these funds and provide services to make sure every citizen in Sumter county who wants Broadband will be able to have it. Alabama Power and a team at the University of West Alabama (UWA) have been working together to get connectivity to all of their citizens", states Campbell. [UWA recently received a $1.65 million federal grant to train residents about digital skills and increase broadband access for residents of Sumter and Greene counties.] Sumter County Commissioner Drucilla Russ-Jackson (District 1) said "the Broadband expansion will help schools and economic development". The Association of County Commissions of Alabama voted to make Broadband access their number one priority for the upcoming year.

> If you live in rural Alabama, please consider taking the internet speed survey at the link below to help us locate gaps in broadband service:
> **broadband.alabama.gov/speed-test/**

Alabama Broadband Internet Subscriptions (2017-2021)

82%

82% of Alabamians have access to high-speed internet (on avg.)

Several counties in the Alabama Black Belt are well below the state average for percentage of residents with subscriptions to broadband internet (Note: Some residents have access to internet but cannot afford an ongoing subscription fee)

Greene	Lowndes	Perry	Bullock
55.8%	**55.8%**	**57.3%**	**59.4%**