City of Chicago Strategic Broadband Planning

Request for Information

Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot

Issued by:
Jennie Huang Bennett, Chief Financial Officer

Issued on:
September 27, 2022

Responses Due:
No Later Than November 7, 2022

All responses must be emailed to: BroadbandEquityRFI@cityofchicago.org

To receive updates on this RFI, including responses to questions and informational webinar details, please complete the form available at this link.
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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

More than 206,000 Chicago households (approximately 17%) don’t have internet at home, and over 115,000 (roughly 10%) don’t have a computer. These disparities became more evident than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools, workplaces, and many parts of life shifted from in-person to remote, creating an unprecedented reliance on technology and connectivity.

The pandemic highlighted what was already becoming true in a rapidly evolving tech-centered world: Families need reliable, affordable high-speed home internet access – plus related support and skills – to fully participate in Chicago’s modern economy and civic life.

Over the past two years, Chicago has made historic progress in tackling digital disparities. Chicago Connected, launched in June 2020, is a first-of-its-kind broadband program which provides no-cost Internet to qualifying Chicago Public Schools (CPS) families for four years. In its first two years, the program has connected more than 60,000 households – equivalent to roughly 100,000 students – to at-home broadband. Chicago Connected has also made digital learning resources available to families for free, through partnerships with more than 20 community-based organizations.

Despite this progress, there is still work to be done to address the racial and economic disparities behind the digital divide. Communities with the lowest rates of internet connectivity are also those where more than 88% of residents are Black, and where the average median household income is less than $30,000. Digital disparities also make life more challenging for people with disabilities, public housing residents, immigrant communities, and more.

In May 2022, Mayor Lightfoot launched the Chicago Digital Equity Council (DEC), a cross-sector, community-driven effort to understand and overcome the nuanced barriers to digital equity by engaging those most burdened by digital inequities. After facilitating community conversations in Chicago’s least connected neighborhoods, the DEC is synthesizing findings to create community-driven, cross-sector recommendations, informing a citywide plan. In parallel, the City is standing up an Interagency Broadband Task Force to coordinate efforts holistically across departments and City agencies to inform and implement broadband initiatives.

Now, the City seeks ideas on how the private sector, philanthropic foundations, and non-profits can leverage City real estate assets and Chicago Recovery Plan resources to ensure every household has an affordable, quality broadband option that meets their needs.

Thanks to the Biden Administration’s historic broadband investments, paired with Mayor Lightfoot’s $28 million Chicago Recovery Plan allocation for neighborhood broadband initiatives, now is an opportune time for Chicago to take big, bold action to close the digital divide once and for all.

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1 American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates
1.2 Purpose

The objective of this Request for Information (RFI) is to gather recommendations for deploying affordable, quality, and reliable internet service options that meet the needs of communities most burdened by the digital divide. Specifically, the City seeks to understand how it can leverage its physical assets, Chicago Recovery Plan 2 funds, and other state and federal funding opportunities (as applicable) to increase broadband access citywide, particularly in historically underinvested communities with low rates of internet connection.

The City welcomes suggestions and proposals regarding a range of technologies and approaches, particularly where the respondent can describe the benefits of using a preferred technology. The City is investigating both short- and long-term solutions and invites project suggestions that could be quickly deployed in less than six months, in addition to projects that would require more than six months to deploy.

With this RFI, the City seeks additional perspectives to:

1. Identify how City resources (including real estate assets and Chicago Recovery Plan funds) can be made available to increase affordable residential broadband connectivity
2. Identify creative solutions and potential purpose-aligned partner organizations
3. Design initiatives that use federal and state funds to increase broadband connectivity

RFI responses should prioritize the following broadband standards and principles:

**Equitable Access:** Service and infrastructure advances equity, reversing historic geographic patterns of underinvestment and promoting business practices in line with Mayor Lightfoot’s goals around racial equity.

**Affordable Service:** Cost of internet service is not a barrier for Chicago residents to connect to the internet.

**High-Quality Performance:** Service is fast, reliable, upgraded as technologies advance, and resilient, designed to withstand equipment failures, power outages, natural disasters, or manmade disasters. Speeds of 100/20 mbps, scalable to 200/200, are delivered.

**Privacy:** Chicagoans must be able to determine how their data is or is not used.

**Choice:** Optimal infrastructure is designed to accommodate multiple service providers, and service options are not limited due to network capacity, physical space in network hub locations, or technology choices.

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2 In response to the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, Congress appropriated $350 billion to the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (“ARP”). The City of Chicago was allocated $1.887 billion from the Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (“LFRF”) for expenditures incurred March 2021 thru December 2024. The City developed an integrated plan designed to drive transformational change called the Chicago Recovery Plan.
The City encourages respondents to present creative connectivity ideas that leverage community anchor institutions, such as schools, libraries, and community centers, and that directly benefit Chicagoans most burdened by the digital divide. These target populations include but are not limited to:

- Communities in areas of the city with low rates of household broadband connection / adoption (based on 2016-2020 American Community Survey, or other available data)
- Low-income households
- Households who live in public housing
- Communities with a high population of immigrants and/or non-English speakers
- Individuals with disabilities
- Communities with limited internet service options
- Neighborhood small businesses

**1.3 Eligible Respondents**

All interested entities are welcome to respond. Recommended respondents include, but are not limited to:

**Internet Builders, Operators, and Investors (BOI)**

a) *Internet Service Providers (ISPs):* Those currently operating in Chicago and potential new market entrants, including entities that are not traditional internet service providers but are interested in offering service under innovative business models

b) *Communications Infrastructure Providers:* Those currently operating in Chicago and potential new market entrants who own or lease infrastructure related to broadband deployment including both dark and lit fiber-optic cable, towers, small cells, PoPs, and data centers

c) *Managed Service Providers (MSPs):* Those who operate networks and provide service to residents and businesses by leveraging existing internet infrastructure or partner with construction entities to build networks

d) *Infrastructure Builders:* Those who construct and/or deploy broadband infrastructure assets and require an MSP partner to operate the network and serve end-users

e) *Broadband-Related Contractors:* These may include construction contractors, equipment manufacturers, and operations or maintenance service providers that are interested in working and investing in Chicago

**Non-Profit Organizations and Foundations/Philanthropy (NPF)**

f) *Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and Non-Profits:* Organizations with deep community relationships and trust with experience or interest in addressing Chicago’s digital divide through digital literacy training, device distribution, and/or outreach and trust-building promoting affordable internet adoption

g) *Workforce Development Organizations:* Organizations focused on workforce development and professional skills development, particularly organizations who prepare community
members for jobs in technology or the telecommunications industry (i.e., equipment installation and maintenance, IT, community outreach)

h) Foundations, Investors, and Funders: Stakeholders interested in investing in equitable and innovative broadband connectivity solutions.
2. Request for Information (RFI)

2.1 Instructions for Respondents

All questions in Section 2.2.1 are required for respondents. Submissions must include the following:

- (1) Cover Page:
  - Name of Organization
  - Name, Title, Email, and Phone Number of Contact Person
  - Date of Submission

- (2) Executive Summary: 1-2-page executive summary including a description of your idea(s), the category(ies) your organization falls into (choose all that apply from a-h, listed in Section 1.3), and the role your organization plays or could play in connecting Chicago residents to the Internet. If you are submitting a response in partnership with another organization, please indicate the categories each party falls into and briefly describe how your organizations would collaborate. If you include a specific project recommendation in your responses, please provide an overview of the project and indicate whether it is quick-to-deploy (shorter than six months to deploy) or a longer-term concept (longer than six months to deploy).

- (3) Question Responses: Typed responses to one or more of the questions below, in numerical order, and labeled with the section number and name, and question number. For any questions to which you do not wish to respond, please write “N/A” next to or beneath the question.

2.2 RFI Questions

Questions in Sections 2.2.2-2.2.8 are optional. Respondents may address questions most relevant to their submissions and expertise, however, the City encourages respondents to answer any questions for which they have a perspective.

To make it easier for respondents to determine which questions are relevant to them, questions are marked as [BOI] when relevant to internet builders, operators, and investors; and [NPF] for non-profit organizations and foundations/philanthropy respondents.

2.2.1: Respondent Profile (required for submission)

Organization and its relevance to this RFI.

1. [BOI] [NPF] Please provide your organization’s name and a short statement describing the organization.

2. [BOI] [NPF] Please describe any relevant experience or expertise that informs your responses.

2.2.2: Current Presence

Areas and communities you currently serve.
3. [BOI] [NPF] If you already serve Chicago residents, how many households do you serve and in what Community Areas do you have a presence? See Information Resources for list of Chicago Community Areas.

4. [BOI] [NPF] If you do not serve Chicago residents, what is the largest geographical area that you serve and how many households do you serve there?

5. [BOI] [NPF] Are you either an ISP that participates in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) directly or a digital equity organization that assists residents in subscribing to ACP? If yes, how many Chicagoans have you connected through ACP?

2.2.3: Recommendations for Home Internet Service Options
Project ideas and residents your suggested projects would serve.

6. [BOI] [NPF] If the City assets described in Section 3.1 were made available to your organization, what project(s) would you pursue to increase connectivity in Chicago communities with low rates of at-home broadband connectivity?

7. [BOI] [NPF] Which communities would you be interested in serving through the suggested project(s)? Why these communities?

8. [BOI] [NPF] How many households would you be able to serve through the suggested project(s)? Please provide a range.

9. [BOI] [NPF] How would the suggested project(s) align with the City’s goals for improving access to affordable, reliable, high-speed service?

2.2.4: Network Systems and Architecture
Technical approach underlying your suggested connectivity projects.

10. [BOI] What types of technologies would you employ for a potential project(s) in Chicago (e.g. fiber, fixed wireless, 5G, etc.)? Please describe why you indicated those technologies.

11. [BOI] What speeds would your suggested network architecture deliver to residents? Are there particular circumstances (inclement weather, line-of-sight, etc.) that would interrupt service or result in lower speeds? What is your anticipated service availability to households per month?

12. [BOI] To what extent and in what manner would your suggested project involve: 1) integrating with or interconnecting existing fiber and wireless networks; and/or 2) coordinating with other planned network installations? How would these integrations support your suggested project(s)?

2.2.5: Use of City Assets
The ways in which your suggested projects would seek to leverage City assets.

13. [BOI] What kinds of City or other governmental / public assets would be used for your suggested project(s)? Please share your ideas about any of the following: fiber optics, conduit, points of aggregation, public buildings and rooftops, city-owned light poles, street furniture, other.

14. [BOI] Are there particular City buildings, poles, or facilities that would be of greatest use for your suggested project(s)?
15. [BOI] For assets like buildings, what conditions, such as an amount of space or existing wiring pathways, would be needed to make the asset easily useable?

16. [BOI] Based on your suggested approach, what permits or licenses do you believe would be required to implement the project(s) described in your response? Does your organization already have any of these licenses or permits confirmed or in the approval process?

17. [BOI] Are there any components of the permitting or licensing process that you would recommend the City evaluate or modify to accelerate the process of deploying your suggested project? Please describe how this modification could affect your project implementation timeline.

2.2.6: Project Deployment and Implementation
The logistical components of deploying your suggested projects.

18. [BOI] Please provide an overview of your potential deployment/construction approach for your suggested project(s).

19. [BOI] How should construction be phased or sectioned to achieve the greatest benefit for Chicagoans while progressing towards the overall goal?

20. [BOI] Do you anticipate any challenges with your approach to construction and deployment based on current City processes or policies? If so, how would you propose the City accommodate your desired approach?

21. [BOI] What method(s) of building entry would you recommend for serving single and multi-family buildings and businesses through your suggested project(s)?

22. [BOI] [DEO] What is your estimated timeline for delivering the services described in your suggested project(s)?

2.2.7: Cost Estimation
The estimated cost of your suggested projects.

23. [BOI] What capital cost per household do you estimate would be required to implement your suggested project(s)? If the household connection cost differs significantly by single and multi-family units, please distinguish between the two.

24. [BOI] [NPF] What is the ongoing operational cost associated with each household in your suggested project(s)? If there any fixed implementation and/or operational costs in your suggested projects(s) not included in your per household estimates, please also share.

25. [BOI] [NPF] To make your project feasible to implement, what level of upfront financial support would you require and from which parties?

2.2.8: Digital Equity
Your suggested project’s alignment with the City’s digital equity goals.

26. [BOI] [NPF] What companion initiatives would you incorporate to ensure adoption and use of residential internet service offerings?

27. [BOI] [NPF] What strategies or resources would you deploy to engage residents with limited digital literacy skills?
28. [BOI] [NPF] What approaches or resources would you use to reach non-English-speaking residents?

29. [BOI] [NPF] Do you have any experience partnering with affordable housing properties? If so, please describe your experience with such partnerships, serving older buildings, connecting public spaces within housing developments, and managing resident engagement.

30. [BOI] [NPF] Would your suggested project(s) serve any public housing communities? If so, would your service offerings or adoption strategy differ in public housing developments?

31. [BOI] [NPF] Does your suggested initiative include a partnership between a service provider and community-based organization? If so, please describe and include information about existing relationships.

3. INFORMATION RESOURCES

The City of Chicago has aggregated the following information to inform respondents’ submissions.

3.1 Real Estate Asset Information

The City is open to leveraging public assets to support connectivity efforts. Examples of these assets are listed below. Note that use of these assets or the terms of any such use cannot be guaranteed at this time; rather, they are being presented to inform creative responses to this request for information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buildings</th>
<th>Asset Type</th>
<th>Citywide Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chicago Housing Authority</td>
<td>947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chicago Public Schools</td>
<td>900 facilities, including 636 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chicago Fire Departments</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chicago Public Libraries</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poles and Transit Assets</th>
<th>Asset Type</th>
<th>Citywide Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CDOT Street Light Poles</td>
<td>191,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CDOT Traffic Poles</td>
<td>12,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CTA Rail Stations</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CTA Facilities</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vacant Lots &amp; Public Spaces</th>
<th>Asset Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City-owned vacant lots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Publicly-owned fieldhouses and recreation centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subset of fieldhouses and recreation centers to provide publicly available Wi-Fi*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*The Chicago Park District is piloting the delivery of free, public Wi-Fi in fieldhouses and their surrounding areas at two locations -- Garfield Park and the South Shore Cultural Center. The Park District will be expanding its free public Wi-Fi to up to 60 additional fieldhouses and will be seeking backhaul services, ideally over fiber. This project has the potential to support connectivity in the areas surrounding the selected fieldhouses.*

3.2 Current Chicago Equity Initiatives

The City of Chicago has an Equity Statement of Principles that underlies its approach to addressing policy challenges and improving the daily lives of Chicagoans. The City encourages all respondents to review the Statement [here](#). The City of Chicago defines equity as both an outcome and a process, which is why the City’s approach to closing the digital divide is being designed with the following components in mind: (1) prioritizing access and opportunities for groups who have the greatest need; (2) methodically evaluating benefits and burdens produced by seemingly neutral systems and practices; and (3) engaging those most impacted by the problems we seek to address as experts in their own experiences, strategists in co-creating solutions, and evaluators of success.

Most citywide initiatives focus on the Community Area – a geographic division that loosely aligns with neighborhoods. The City of Chicago is made up of 77 Community Areas. Information about the Community Areas, including spatial boundaries, can be found [here](#).

3.2.1 Chicago Connected

Chicago Connected, launched in June 2020, provides no-cost broadband access to pre-K-12 students and digital learning support to families. Across the program’s first two years, it successfully connected 60,000+ unique households, totaling an estimated 100,000+ students connected to broadband. The program has served high need residents, with 70% of participants’ incomes less than $35K and 93% economically disadvantaged. Chicago Connected meaningfully reduced the digital divide, with 40% of respondents never having internet access prior to the program. Given the success of the program, Chicago Connected will expand to connect up to 3,000 students enrolled at City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) over the next three years.

3.2.2 INVEST South/West

[INVEST South/West](#) is Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s signature community development initiative to reverse decades of disinvestment on Chicago’s South and West Sides. The ten target community areas are Auburn Gresham, Austin, Bronzeville, Greater Englewood, New City, North Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Greater Roseland, South Chicago, and South Shore. Since its kickoff in 2019, the City has aligned more than $1.4 billion in public and private investment in these community areas. The initiative is providing support for small businesses, creating public realm improvements, restoring historic buildings, and fostering equity and resilience where it’s needed most.
3.2.3 Chicago Recovery Plan’s Sustainable Infrastructure Initiatives

Through the Chicago Recovery Plan, the City plans to invest a total of $188 million in climate and environmental justice initiatives. As a part of this initiative, the City is investing in the following building retrofit programs:

- **Decarbonizing Affordable Multifamily Buildings**: Retrofit and decarbonize affordable multifamily building(s) to reduce emissions, improve utility affordability, and preserve valuable affordable housing stock. Project scope includes electrifying heating, hot water, and cooking as well as performing weatherization and HVAC upgrades.

- **Retrofitting Low- and Moderate-Income Housing**: Type of Buildings: Electrify and decarbonize 1–4-unit homes owned by low to moderate income families (<$80% of AMI). Project would include both energy efficiency, weatherization, electrification, and/or rooftop solar installation.

- **Retrofitting Community Anchor Institutions**: Building from an existing pilot project, this program will target community anchor buildings to provide funding for HVAC, ventilation system, and water efficiency upgrades as well as solar installations, battery storage and other weatherization, and energy efficiency work as deemed necessary.

Other green infrastructure programs include installing new site-specific flood mitigation approaches and building 20 Space to Grow projects on Chicago Public Schools properties.

3.2.4 Community Safety Coordination Committee (CSCC)

The Community Safety Coordination Committee is Mayor Lightfoot’s initiative to address community violence. The CSCC was created to take the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and apply them to the City's most pressing epidemic: gun violence. This means coordinating a holistic government approach that is data-informed, evidence-based, and community-driven. The 15 priority Community Areas are: Auburn Gresham, Austin, Chicago Lawn, East Garfield Park, Englewood, Greater Grand Crossing, Humboldt Park, New City, North Lawndale, Roseland, South Lawndale, South Shore, West Englewood, West Garfield Park, and West Pullman.
3.3 City of Chicago Permitting Processes

Depending on the nature of the work, organizations may need approvals or information from the following City of Chicago Departments:

1. Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) - Issues permits for work and access related to the public right-of-way, inclusive of underground trenching work, along with providing existing utility information. Per Municipal Code of Chicago (MCC) § 10-21, all excavation activity will also require a “dig ticket” issued by CDOT.
2. Department of Assets, Information and Services (AIS) - Exercises jurisdiction over City property and approves attachments of wireless equipment to City buildings.
3. Department of Buildings (DOB) - Issues permits and inspects work done within buildings to ensure compliance with the City’s building and zoning codes.

Within CDOT’s Division of Infrastructure Management, the Office of Underground Coordination (OUC) reviews any project to install new utilities in or under the public right-of-way. OUC ensures projects are designed to avoid existing infrastructure by requesting its members (utility owners) review and comment on the proposed installation plan. OUC conducts two main types of reviews: Information Retrieval (IR) review—during which OUC members submit atlas pages to the project owner; and Existing Facility Protection (EFP) review—during which OUC members review the project design. If the planned installation encroaches upon a member’s facility, they can request design changes. EFP submissions may go through several cycles of review before all members approve the design. CDOT only releases a project for construction after all members approve the design. For further explanation of their standard processes, please see OUC’s website. After OUC approval is obtained, application for public way permits for any construction/installation activities is required.

CDOT’s Division of Engineering, Electrical Engineering Section is responsible for reviewing plans and approving work on City light poles, traffic signal poles, viaducts, elevated structures, and bridges. CDOT will likely require a Structural Analysis Letter stamped by an Illinois-licensed Structural Engineer confirming the additional loading from the new equipment will not compromise the structural integrity of City assets located within the public way. Providers will also have to account for their own power needs as it relates to equipment on any city poles.

The City has an existing streamlined process for wireless communication and installation permits, detailed online. Access to City-owned rooftops will need specific approval from AIS, for which AIS has a standard template used with existing providers.

*Sister agency public assets could require additional approvals or processes as required by those agencies.*
4. SUBMISSION CONDITIONS
This is an RFI only and not a solicitation or offer to contract with any respondent. Submission of
a response does not bind the City to any agreement for services or any other work. This does not
constitute a Request for Proposals (RFP), Request for Statement of Qualifications (RFSQ),
Invitation for Bids (IFB), Purchase Order (PO), or a promise to issue a solicitation now or in the
future. The information obtained as a result of this RFI may be used by the City to prepare and
release a future solicitation to solicit proposals to perform the services described in this RFI. The
City may also elect to take no further action. The City does not guarantee that the RFI will lead to
any further action related to a broadband or telecommunications franchise or that subsequent
actions, if any, will follow the approach described herein.

At any time, at its sole discretion, the City may, by written addenda to this RFI, modify, amend,
cancel and/or reissue this RFI. If your organization wishes to be notified of any RFI changes or
future addendum please send primary point of contact’s: name, email address, and phone
number to: BroadbandEquityRFI@cityofchicago.org. You may also complete the form available
at this link.

4.1 Confidential and Proprietary Information
The City of Chicago will endeavor to protect from disclosure any confidential and/or proprietary
information the Respondent submits to the City pursuant to this RFI in accordance with
applicable law, provided that the Respondent shall specifically identify those portions of the
response to the RFI that are deemed to be confidential, proprietary information or trade secrets.

Such information deemed by the respondent to be confidential and/or proprietary shall be easily
separable from the non-confidential/non-proprietary sections of the response to the RFI. Marking the entire response to the RFI as confidential or proprietary will result in the submission
being deemed not confidential and/or proprietary and thus not protected from disclosure.

Respondents should be aware that the City may be required, pursuant to the Illinois Freedom of
Information Act (“FOIA”), 5 ILCS 140/1 et seq., to disclose to the public information submitted to
the City in response to this RFI or otherwise.

4.2 Information Preparation Costs
The City shall not be liable or responsible for any costs incurred by a respondent in the
preparation, submission, presentation, or revision of its information, or in any other aspect of
the Respondent’s pre-information submission activity. No Respondent is entitled to any
compensation except under an agreement for performance of services signed by a City-
authorized official and the respondent.

4.3 Questions Regarding this Request for Information
Potential Respondents may submit questions and/or request clarifications from the City of
Chicago by Tuesday, October 11, 2022 at 11:59 p.m. Central Time. Questions and clarification
requests should be emailed to BroadbandEquityRFI@cityofchicago.org. The City will issue written
responses to all questions received by October 11, 2022 to all those on the email list prior to the
RFI response deadline of November 7, 2022. The City may also choose in its discretion to conduct follow-up interviews with some or all respondents.

Please complete the form available at [this link](#) to receive updates on this RFI, including responses to questions and informational webinar details.