More than just Facebook: Internet access is essential infrastructure

From sharing a local news story on Facebook to working from home with a sick child, Internet access is changing our personal and professional lives. While one of the most common applications of Internet access is connecting with others over social media, it is also essential for more than entertainment: completing job applications, telecommuting for work, and engaging with local government. In areas across the United States, municipalities are recognizing the benefits of improving Internet access, investing in infrastructure to keep their communities vibrant.

450+
American communities have invested in public infrastructure to improve Internet access for businesses, residents, and other stakeholders

Source: MuniNetworks.org

84%
of recent job seekers have completed an online application

Source: Pew Research

1 in 3
households with school-aged children and an income of less than $50,000 do not have a broadband connection

Source: Pew Research

10%
of American adults access the Internet exclusively with a cell phone

Source: Pew Research

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance is a people-community-policy driven non-profit that works to keep local economies strong. Since 1974, ILSR has promoted policies and ideas that empower local communities.

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Internet access and local economies

Internet-based applications are essential for producing and packaging crops; creating video, 3-D renderings, and other media; and communicating with employees around the world. Businesses increasingly consider Internet access as they once did proximity to major thoroughfares and storefront size, and many cities tout high-speed Internet access as a major incentive for business development.

Internet access and job seekers

Home Internet service is important for job searching, as postings are almost exclusively listed online. This is especially true for higher-wage jobs, which often require candidates to send resumes and in-depth applications over email. Public libraries provide Internet services to job seekers without home access, but are not a long-term solution because of inconvenient hours or distance from home.

Internet access and the homework gap

As teachers assign online homework, students without access are unable to complete tasks at home. While libraries are an option, their location and unaccommodating hours can be problematic for students. A home connection provides unparalleled ease of access.

Mobile access is convenient, but not enough

Smart phone Internet access is much more expensive per megabit than wired home access due to carriers implementing data caps and overage fees. Cell phones have helped get low-income households online, but are not meeting current needs for access. While one in ten American adults access the Internet only with a cell phone, these numbers jump for low-income adults.
Need better connectivity in your community? You’re not alone. Local governments have been able to improve Internet access for residents and businesses in a variety of ways, often reducing costs and providing better service. Take a look at the multitude of resources at MuniNetworks.org and NextCenturyCities.org to find out how your community can improve Internet access.