

How Broadband Connectivity Powers Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is a cornerstone of American democracy and one that is increasingly reliant on broadband connectivity to thrive. Internet access not only provides residents a means to participate in civic life; it also gives them a channel to communicate directly with their elected officials and receive essential government services. As the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic wages on, and residents, communities, and public officials across the country debate critical decisions about how they should respond to this crisis, it has never been more necessary to ensure broadband access for all Americans.

[According to a recent Pew Research Center survey](#), 82% of internet users (roughly 61% of all American adults) looked for information or completed a transaction on a local, state, or federal government website in the last 12 months. Nearly half of those either searched for information about a public policy issue, searched for what services a government agency offers, or downloaded government forms.

For the [estimated 42 million Americans lacking any broadband service](#) and many more with substandard connections, the digital divide leaves them shutout of the political process and, in many cases, unable to receive the critical government assistance they need during this crisis. Without a broadband connection, many people lack access or are unaware of these opportunities. To address these challenges, Congress must take every step to ensure that broadband is affordable, reliable, and universally accessible.

How Broadband Connectivity Supports Civic Life Every Day

- **Broadband connectivity powers effective governance.** It is not just a matter of Americans connecting and deliberating national issues of import; broadband supports local governments and municipalities' work, too. For example, [many city and town halls have moved official meetings online](#). Signing petitions, attending [public hearings](#), participating in comment periods, and other forms of civic engagement that matter for communities have also gone virtual.
- **Broadband connectivity powers the distribution of essential government services**, such as unemployment benefits and small business loans. It also offers an easy and safe way to renew a driver's license, apply for business permits, or pay parking tickets. [Applications for recently approved stimulus checks for low-income individuals are offered online](#), too.
- **Broadband connectivity powers an informed electorate.** Americans have long held the belief that being "politically informed" is a civic virtue. Even in the digital age, this belief reigns true. Many Americans [go online daily](#) to access government websites to understand policies and research relevant statistics, read the newspaper, track COVID-19 updates, follow politicians, watch debates, and engage in political discourse.
- **Broadband connectivity powers democracy.** The right to vote is a basic American principle and a fundamental human right. Internet access makes it easier for Americans to register to vote, find polling places, request absentee ballots, and vote early. Furthermore, to help contain the spread of COVID-19, Americans are even being encouraged to complete the 2020 Census -- which determines the distribution of political power and financial resources across the country -- online.