CIVIC NATION ACP PILOT REPORT

Lessons for Community-Based Affordable Connectivity Program Outreach

CIVIC NATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SUMMARY

From December 2022 to February 2023, Civic Nation provided pilot grants to five community partners to start new on the ground Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) outreach and enrollment programs.

Over a 12-week period, our pilot grantees:

Educated	Had	Helped	Helped	Saved their communities
39,335	**2,708**	**417**	**210**	**OVER $75,000**
people about the ACP	one-on-one conversations about ACP with community members	people start their ACP applications	people get fully enrolled in ACP	per year

This report provides background on the ACP and current barriers to enrollment, an overview of Civic Nation's pilot program design, and shares quantitative data and results from the pilot period. It also outlines lessons learned for fellow practitioners (illustrated by case studies and specific best practices), and ends with a set of recommendations for policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders.

KEY TAKEAWAYS *for community organizations and institutions, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) grantees, and others doing on the ground ACP outreach and enrollment work.*

- **Trusted community messengers are the key to driving higher ACP enrollment**, and navigators doing outreach and offering application assistance in languages other than English are particularly impactful in helping people who otherwise would not get enrolled.

- **Practitioners should prioritize creating an intentional enrollment pipeline.** A major lesson from this pilot is the importance of creating a strong program structure and clear systems for moving community members from initial interest to fully enrolled in the ACP.

- **The most effective outreach is just meeting people where they are.** Grantees were most successful when they layered ACP work into their existing programming and worked with partners to speak to community members in places they already go regularly, rather than trying to drive people to a standalone ACP enrollment event.

> **"People don't always have the capacity to show up, so you have to show up for them."**
>
> — Memphis APRI

RECOMMENDATIONS *for industry, philanthropy, federal program administrators, and policymakers to strengthen outreach and enrollment work and ensure the continued success of this program.*

- Invest in and partner with hyper-local community-based organizations doing on the ground work, and ensure they have the training, tools, and resources to do it well.

- Continue efforts to improve the application process and remove barriers to enrollment.

- The Affordable Connectivity Program is working – it's helping millions of Americans afford internet service and needs continued funding.

Civic Nation will be incorporating the learnings from this pilot into all of our grant-making and future programming. We look forward to continuing this work with our grantees and to working with partners to ensure that all organizations doing enrollment work have the training, tools, and resources to be effective in their communities.

ABOUT CIVIC NATION

Civic Nation is a nonprofit ecosystem for high-impact organizing and education initiatives working to build a more inclusive, equitable America. We work to change culture, behavior, systems, and policy by organizing everyday citizens, grassroots organizers, industry, philanthropic and government leaders, and influential voices to tackle some of our country's most pressing problems.

Civic Nation is proud to be partnering with the U.S. Department of Education to launch **Online For All**, an initiative working to close the digital divide by focusing on internet access, affordability, and equity for students, families, and all Americans. With a community of supporting organizations and trusted messengers, we will ensure those who are eligible enroll in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

ABOUT THE AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM

In 2021, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act, which created the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) to help low and middle-income households afford reliable internet. The ACP provides a subsidy of up to $30 per month for eligible households (and up to $75 per month for households on tribal lands) on any internet plan offered by a participating provider. Enrolled households can also get a one-time $100 subsidy for a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer, depending on their internet provider.

Households are eligible for this program if their income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, if a household member is enrolled in another federal program such as Medicaid, SNAP, WIC, SSI, or federal housing assistance, or if anyone in the household receives a VA pension, Pell Grant, or free and reduced-price lunch at school. The full eligibility criteria can be found **here**.

As of June 2023, over 18 million American households are now enrolled in the ACP and saving hundreds of dollars every year on internet service.

ACP AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The digital divide is the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not (as defined by the **National Digital Inclusion Alliance**). **The ACP represents a historic investment in closing the digital divide by making internet service more affordable and accessible to the millions of Americans who have found themselves on the wrong side of this divide and unable to participate fully in an online society.**

"We do everything online: banking, filling out a job application, registering, renewing a license. So if we don't have access, we're left out there in the cold."

— Sherry, 63 (Memphis, TN)

Reliable high-speed internet is critical for Americans to access work, school, health care, and more. Yet approximately **28 million households** (23%) in the United States do not have high-speed broadband at home, and two-thirds of these households are offline because they cannot afford it, despite having access to broadband infrastructure in their community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when many essential services moved online, **nearly 1 in 5 households** with annual incomes under $50,000 lost their internet connection due to difficulty paying for it.

These inequities disproportionately impact communities of color, rural communities, and older Americans. A 2021 **Pew survey** found that 80% of white people reported having broadband service at home as compared to 71% of Black and 65% of Hispanic respondents.

"Growing up, internet was a luxury for me and my family. Living paycheck to paycheck, we had to make sure our essentials were covered, and there was never enough for internet. Applying for the ACP and seeing how much money I've saved has been a real game-changer. That money I'm saving has been going to groceries. I am so glad that the ACP exists and that so many families like mine can benefit from this program."

— Misael, 22 (Dallas, TX)

BARRIERS TO ACP ENROLLMENT

An estimated 42% of all American households are eligible for discounted internet service through the ACP. As of June 2023, over 18 million households are already enrolled, leaving at least 30 million eligible households still to reach.

Barriers to ACP enrollment include lack of awareness, mistrust and skepticism, and challenges completing the application, particularly among those with lower digital skills, language barriers, and little time to devote to signing up. The good news is that we know how to overcome these barriers: with **trusted, community-based messengers spreading awareness and offering one-on-one application assistance.**

AWARENESS: A recent survey conducted by the Benton Institute found that over half of eligible households have never heard of the ACP – but over two thirds (68%) of that group said they would be likely to apply if they had more information or knew they qualified.

TRUST: Many Americans, especially in communities of color, are initially skeptical of offers for free or discounted internet from the government or an internet provider – but 77% of eligible households say they would trust information on this type of program if it came from a local community organization.

APPLICATION CHALLENGES:
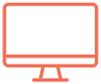
Digital skills: The quickest way to enroll in the ACP is to submit an online application, which requires digital skills that some applicants may not have, such as needing to scan and upload documents or establishing an email account. The same **Benton Institute survey** found that those with high levels of digital skills were almost twice as likely to report that they had successfully enrolled in ACP than those with low levels of digital skills.

Language barriers: While instructions are available in multiple languages, the ACP application is only available in English and Spanish, which leaves many eligible households in need of assistance from someone who speaks their language to help them complete their application.

Time: Civic Nation's pilot program found that **it takes an average of 56.6 minutes for a household to get fully enrolled in the ACP**, including checking their eligibility, submitting an application, and applying their benefit with their internet provider. Many low-income Americans are busy juggling work and family obligations and may find it difficult to make time to complete their enrollment.

Documentation: There are two ways that ACP applications are approved: automatically, by data-matching an applicant's information with a qualifying federal program like Medicaid; or through a manual review of an applicant's documents, which is necessary for applicants using eligibility pathways that require additional documentation (like Pell Grant status or proof of WIC participation). These two paths create two very different experiences for applicants, and applicants often do not return to complete their application if their documents are not approved on the first try or if they are asked to submit information multiple times.

Note: This pilot program was conducted before recent changes were made to the ACP application site in April 2023 aimed at reducing the amount of time the application takes.

PILOT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

October	November	December	January	February
Grantee Selection	Grantee Notification & Program Planning	Onboarding + Program Start	Midway reports + program shifts	Final Reports due February 24

From December 2022 to February 2023, Civic Nation provided small pilot grants to five community partners to start new, on the ground, ACP outreach and enrollment programs.

PILOT GOALS: Our primary goal was to learn more about what makes a successful ACP outreach and enrollment program, so we set out to answer some key questions:

- What are the biggest barriers to ACP enrollment, and how can community-based organizations (CBOs) best navigate these barriers?

- What is a realistic number of sign-ups a CBO can achieve with limited funding and time?

- How many interactions and how long does it take to get a household fully enrolled?

- Which outreach strategies are the most and least effective?

- What kind of training, resources, and support do CBOs need to be successful?

- What types of CBOs are most successful and what communities need the most support?

PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS

To answer these questions, we provided grants to a small group of community-based organizations that had previously participated in Made to Save, Civic Nation's vaccine outreach campaign. We set a budget of $26,000 per organization for a 3-month pilot program, and asked grantees to carefully track their work and submit regular reports.

Grantees received:

- **$25,000 in unrestricted funding**
- $1,000 specifically to support tech needs like hotspots or tablets
- A 3-day virtual onboarding training to learn the ins and outs of the ACP and digital inclusion work
- Additional training opportunities and monthly check-ins with fellow grantees throughout the program

Grantees committed to:

- **Designate 1 staff member** to lead their organization's ACP work
- **Dedicate 20+ hours a week** of staff time to ACP outreach and enrollment efforts
- Track key program metrics and submit short weekly reports
- Attend regular trainings and check-ins with Civic Nation and fellow pilot grantees
- Submit narrative midway and final reports to summarize key learnings

PILOT GRANTEE SELECTION

In October 2022, we reached out to former Made to Save grantees and invited them to an information session about this new pilot opportunity. Because we intended to move quickly with this pilot program, we chose to only consider former Civic Nation grantees that we knew had built a high level of trust in their communities and had the outreach expertise that would help them stand up successful ACP outreach programs. In addition to the vaccine outreach they did with Made to Save, many of these groups did 2020 Census outreach and typically do a mix of civic engagement and direct service work in their communities.

We conducted three information sessions, then asked interested CBOs to submit a short interest form and sign up for an individual conversation with a member of our team to talk more about how they would approach ACP outreach work in their community. We had overwhelming interest from community partners: 26 organizations attended an info session, and 23 of those organizations submitted an interest form and signed up for a follow-up conversation.

From that group, we selected five organizations to participate in the pilot program, based on a number of criteria, including: the strength of their proposed program approach, current ACP enrollment rates, if there were multiple ISP options in their service area, and the geography and demographics of the communities they serve. This criteria helped ensure our pilot cohort would cover a wide range of communities.

Our five pilot grantees were:

★ **Detroit Change Initiative:** Working in Black communities in Detroit

★ **Vietlead:** Working in Southeast Asian communities in Philadelphia and Camden, with subgrantees **KITHS** and **Gapura**

★ **Somos Tejas:** Working in Latino communities in Dallas

★ **Civic TN:** Working in Memphis and in rural communities outside of Memphis (Fayette, Hardeman, and Tipton counties) with subgrantee **Memphis APRI**

★ **South Dakota Voices for Peace:** Working with refugee, immigrant, and Muslim communities in and around Sioux Falls
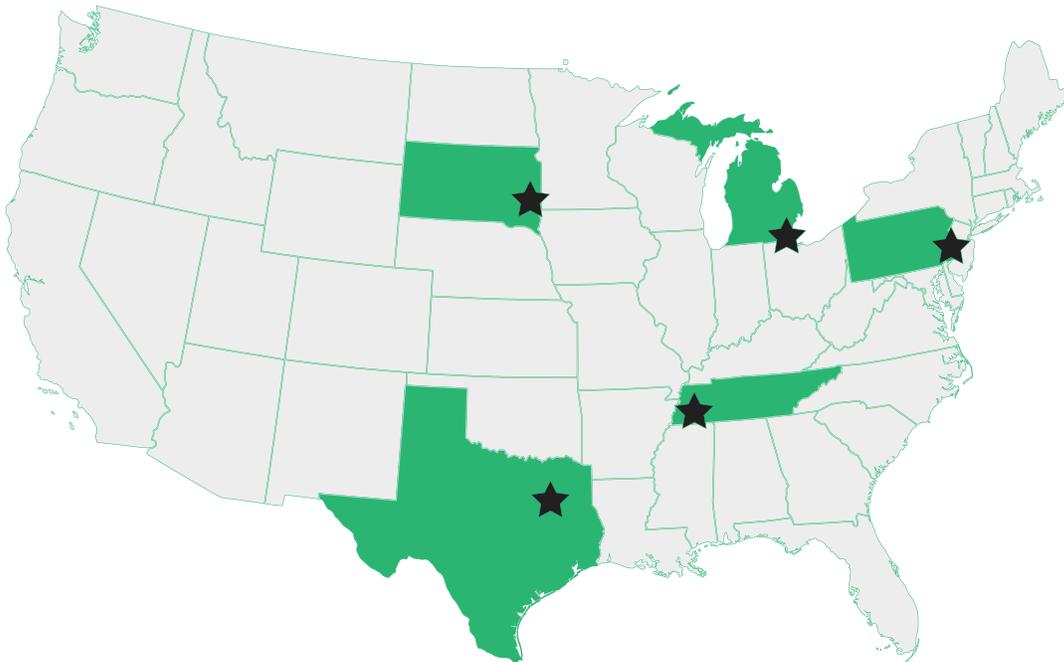
PROGRAM PLANNING & ONBOARDING

Grantees were notified of their selection on November 1 and were asked to submit full program plans using a provided template by November 21, just before Thanksgiving. We asked grantees to map out their own goals for the pilot (including number of projected enrollments), their target audiences, outreach strategies and tactics, possible partnerships, data tracking plan, detailed budget, and a calendar with benchmarks and key dates for the 12-week pilot period.

Civic Nation staff collaborated with key partners EducationSuperhighway and the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) to create a comprehensive 3-day virtual onboarding from November 29th to December 1st, with three hours of programming each afternoon.

Day 1: **Foundations**	Day 2: **ACP Outreach In Practice**	Day 3: **Program Prep & Planning**
• Intros + Icebreaker • Intro to Digital Equity & Inclusion with *NDIA* • ACP Enrollment 101 with *EducationSuperhighway*	• ACP Outreach Strategies • Partnerships & Asset Mapping • Digital Navigator Roundtable *with NDIA*	• Pilot Program Logistics • Reporting Deep Dive • Program Plan Workshop • Wrap-up

> **"I really appreciated the time for brainstorming, outreach planning, and feedback!"**
>
> — Vietlead

The final session of the onboarding was a workshop that gave pilot grantees space to apply what they had learned during the onboarding to their draft plans – especially mapping out the pipeline they would create to help community members through the entire ACP enrollment process, now that they had a fuller understanding of the way the application process worked.

ONGOING SUPPORT

After the initial onboarding, Civic Nation staff stayed in frequent touch with pilot grantees through biweekly individual check-ins and monthly group calls with all participating organizations. These touch points offered ample opportunity for grantees to ask questions and troubleshoot programmatic challenges throughout the pilot.

EducationSuperhighway staff conducted a deep dive training on the ACP application during onboarding and also offered ongoing application troubleshooting and support, including sharing a preview of their **LearnACP tool**, which provides a self-paced version of their ACP training, with our grantees.

> **"The consistent communication during check-ins and monthly calls made it simple and comfortable to share and discuss unique successes and challenges that we were experiencing on a regular basis."**
>
> — Vietlead

REPORTING

In order to get the hard data we would need to answer our main pilot questions, we asked grantees to submit short weekly reports with key metrics and updates, as well as a midway report at the 6-week mark and a final report after the conclusion of the 12-week pilot.

Our key metrics were:

- **ACP outreach attempts**: # of people you shared info about the ACP with

- **Conversations about ACP:** # of people you spoke with directly about the ACP

- **Enrollments started:** # of people who started an ACP application with your support

- **Enrollments completed:** # of people who enrolled & applied their benefit with an ISP

In their midway and final reports, we also asked pilot grantees to report some additional information for completed enrollments:

- **Average number of interactions per enrollment:** # times you helped the same person

- **Average amount of time spent per enrollment:** # minutes you spent with one person

- **Breakdown of devices used:** # of applications done on a computer, tablet, phone, paper

- **How many enrollees already had an internet plan / did not have an active internet plan?**

- **How many enrollees used their benefit for a home internet plan / mobile internet plan?**

- **How many completed enrollments resulted from which of your outreach tactics?**

We provided pilot grantees with a **data tracking template** to help them keep track of community members they were working with and the metrics we asked them to report. Grantees made copies and adapted this template to suit the specifics of their programs, and some set up systems to regularly move client data into their own CRM systems. Using this common template ensured that all grantees tracked these metrics consistently and reduced the burden on grantees to create new systems for tracking all the metrics we requested.

PILOT DATA & RESULTS

Our main goal at the outset of this pilot program was to learn more about what makes a successful ACP outreach program, including how much time and resources are needed to enroll how many people. We had heard varying reports that it could typically take 80-100 minutes to enroll one person, so we sought to create a pilot that would provide enough hard data to help us create more data-informed program metrics for our ACP outreach work.

This section outlines the quantitative results from this pilot program. We are excited to be able to make these data available to FCC grantees and other practitioners who may find this information useful for their own ACP programming.

Over a 12-week period, our pilot grantees:

Educated	Had	Helped	Helped	Saved their communities
39,335	**2,708**	**417**	**210**	**OVER $75,000**
people about the ACP	one-on-one conversations about ACP with community members	people start their ACP applications	people get fully enrolled in ACP	per year

Enrollments Completed
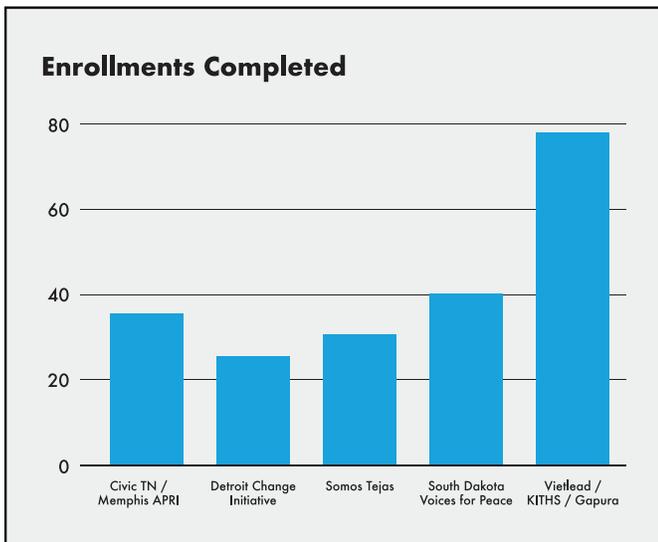
STARTED AND COMPLETED ENROLLMENTS

Total enrollments completed by grantee

At the start of the pilot, we set a target of 100 enrollments per grantee, but we soon realized that was an unrealistic goal within the given timeframe. A few grantees revised their goal to 50 enrollments at the midway point.

Four of our five grantees clustered around 30-40 enrollments over a 12 week period, while Vietlead, which worked with two subgrantees, was able to double that number with their combined efforts.
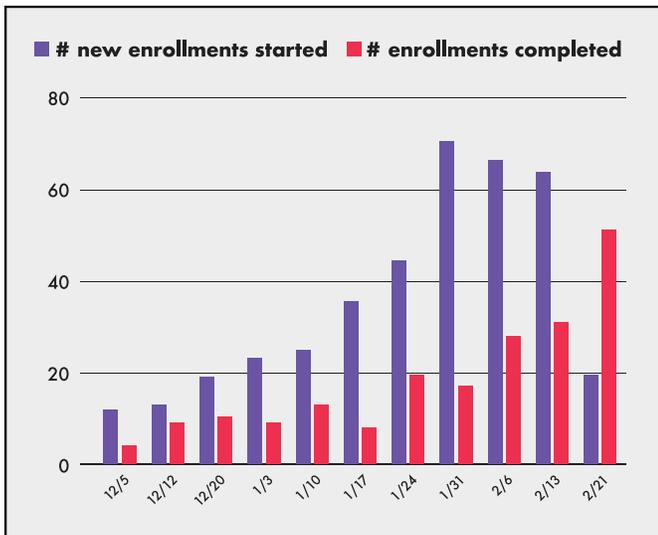
PACE OF ENROLLMENTS

Over the course of the 12-week pilot, grantees' enrollments steadily increased as they reached more community members and became more skilled in helping applicants navigate the application and enrollment process.

Completed enrollments lagged a few weeks behind started enrollments, which reflects the multi-step process grantees typically used to help community members get fully enrolled over the course of a few weeks.

In the final week of the pilot, these metrics flipped, as grantees focused more on follow-up to applicants who hadn't yet applied their benefit with an internet provider.

After a few weeks of learning the ins and outs of the ACP application (and after getting past the holiday season), grantees reported feeling like they really hit their stride around the halfway point of the pilot period. Grantees continued operating at full capacity during the second half of the program before hustling in the final week to focus on follow-up and helping people complete the enrollment process.

Based on the data from mid-January to mid-February, we found that **after an initial learning curve period, a community organization spending 20-30 hours/week on ACP outreach and enrollment work was able to enroll about 4-6 households per week, or 15-25 households per month.**

CONVERSION RATES

- **15% of people that grantees had conversations with about ACP ended up starting an application** (417 applications started out of 2,708 conversations).

- **50% of applicants who started an application with a grantee's support were able to get fully enrolled with an internet provider by the end of the pilot** (210 out of 417).

This conversion rate varied greatly between grantees, depending on the type of outreach they did. For instance: Somos Tejas and Vietlead had a similar number of conversations with community members about ACP, but very different rates of applications started among people they spoke with (8% and 14%). This difference is likely because Somos Tejas conducted a lot of their outreach by tabling at community events, while Vietlead primarily worked with community members they had already helped get enrolled in other benefits.

2,708 conversations

417 applications

210 enrolled
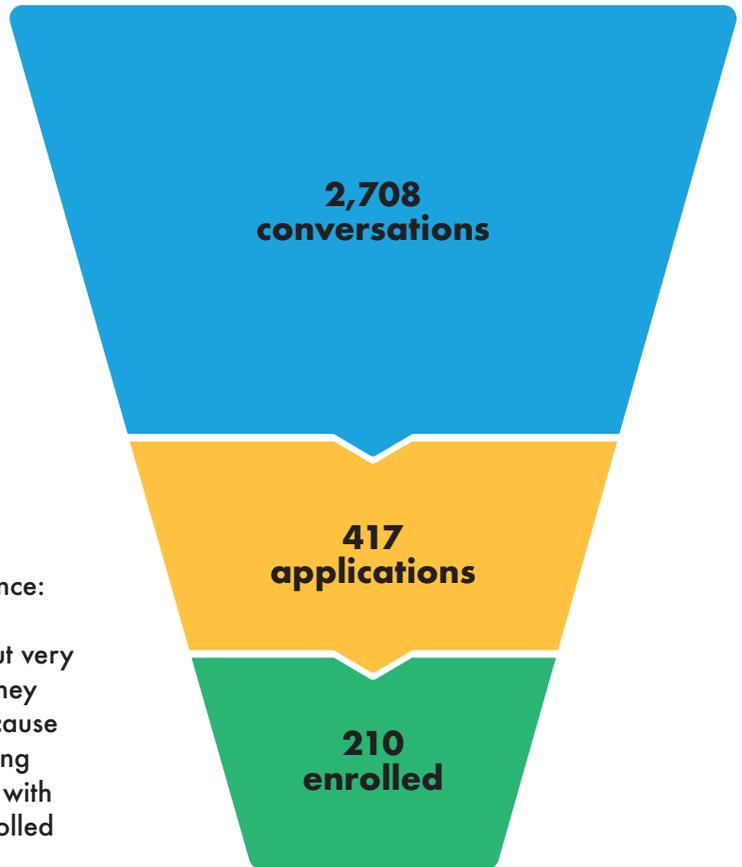
TIME AND EFFORT PER ENROLLMENT

Grantees reported spending an average of 56 minutes across 3 separate interactions on each completed enrollment they supported. However, these data points mask the reality that for some applicants, enrolling in ACP is a quick and easy 2-step process, while for others, it can take a lot of work both for the applicant and the navigator to get their application approved and their benefit applied with an internet provider.

> **Best Practice:**
> Check your state's list of automatic verification methods (state-by-state list <u>here</u>) to see which eligibility methods will be likely to result in automatic approvals.

South Dakota Voices for Peace noted that while they typically only needed 2 separate interactions to get folks enrolled, there were a number of outliers whom they spent hours working with over 6+ interactions to resolve documentation issues. Even for the simplest of cases, Civic TN noted that while the ACP application itself might only take 10-15 minutes, the phone call to help an enrollee apply their benefit with an internet provider often took 20-30 minutes.

There was also a clear difference on these metrics for grantees that primarily worked with community members in a language other than English. Somos Tejas and Vietlead reported that it took an average of 4 separate interactions and 60-90 minutes to help get folks across the finish line (often working in Spanish and Vietnamese, respectively), while our grantees in Memphis and Detroit, who primarily worked with English speakers, reported only needing 2 separate interactions and an average of 35-45 minutes to help folks get fully enrolled.

ADDITIONAL DATA OF INTEREST:

- **Boost in Internet Adoption:** 15% of the ACP subscribers our pilot grantees helped enroll did not have an active internet plan and enrolled in a new plan to use their benefit.

- **Home internet:** 90% of the ACP subscribers supported in this pilot applied their benefit to a home internet plan, while 10% used their benefit for a mobile plan.

- **Devices Used:** 58% of ACP applications completed during this pilot were completed on a computer, 34% on a tablet, and 8% on a smartphone.

- **Budget Breakdown:** Unsurprisingly, grantees spent the vast majority of their grants (an average of 74%) on staff time. The next highest budget categories were printing/mailing (7%), technology like hotspots and tablets (7%), and event/outreach supplies like snacks and water (5%).

> **Best Practice:**
> Get to know the Lifeline program, so you can help folks stack their benefits! Lifeline is an older federal program that offers $9.25 off the cost of phone or internet plans. Applicants must enroll in <u>Lifeline</u> first and then enroll in ACP in order to apply both benefits to the same internet plan, or they can use Lifeline for a phone plan and ACP for an internet plan.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

EFFECTIVE OUTREACH METHODS

The outreach methods used during the pilot program varied across each organization, depending on their staff capacity and skill sets. There are many forms of outreach that may be useful for spreading awareness about ACP, but because of the complexity of the application process, we focused on measuring success by enrollments, not awareness. The tactics we considered most effective were those that ultimately resulted in the highest number of completed enrollments, rather than the number of people engaged or applications started.

Based on this measure, one clear trend emerged from grantees' reports: **"warm" outreach was much more effective than "cold" outreach.** Tactics that leveraged existing relationships that grantees and their partners already had with community members were much more effective at getting people to actually enroll than more impersonal mass outreach tactics.

Completed Enrollments By Outreach Tactic

Outreach Tactic	Percentage
Community Events (Tabling)	26.6%
Office Hours / Walk-ins	18.3%
School/Parent Engagement	17.0%
Phone Calls	17.0%
Pop-Up Clinics	9.1%
Social Media	8.7%
Mailers	2.5%
Canvassing	0/8%
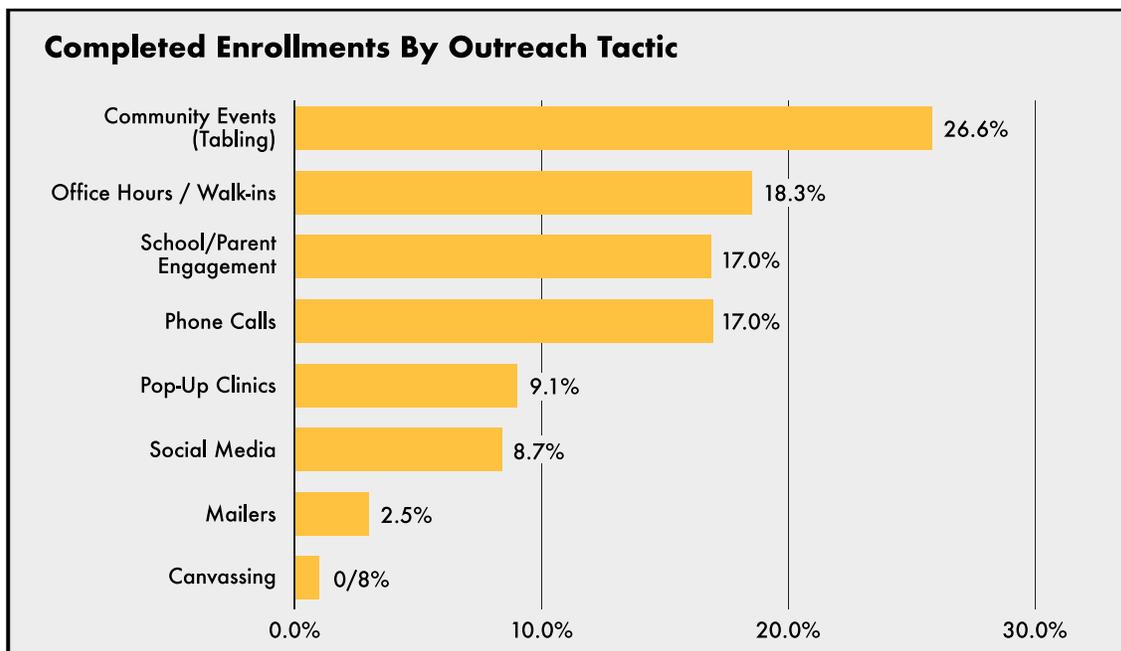
Note: This chart reflects the most effective outreach methods for this specific group of organizations. Community outreach work is most effective when organizations play to their strengths, so these data are based on the tactics our grantees typically use in their work and chose to use during this pilot program. Other organizations may find success in other ways!

The most successful tactic across all grantees was doing outreach at events already happening in their communities. This outreach typically involved setting up a table, walking around with clipboards/tablets, or being given a few minutes to speak to everyone in attendance. Grantees were able to share info about the ACP with community members who had already committed time to being at an event and either helped them sign up on the spot, or took down their contact information and set up an appointment for a later date.

> **"You've got to bring the program to the people, rather than expecting people come to you"**
>
> — Memphis APRI

Other effective tactics included:

- **Office walk-ins,** either during dedicated office hours (South Dakota Voice for Peace hosted weekly library office hours) or when community members come in for other services – Vietlead's office is conveniently located inside an Asian grocery and gets lots of walk-ins!

> **Best Practice:**
> Have snacks and activities for kids (coloring, games) available during office hours and at events to keep kids occupied while their parents work on their application!

- **School and parent engagement:** Detroit Change Initiative and South Dakota Voices for Peace each enrolled 20+ households by working directly with school administrators and parent groups to enroll families during parent-teacher conferences and school events.

- **Targeted phone calls:** Grantees also found success by calling community members their organization had previously engaged and who were likely to be eligible for ACP. For instance: Vietlead was able to call through a list of elders they had previously helped sign up for Medicaid, all of whom were eligible for ACP as well.

- **Pop-Up Clinics:** Throughout the pilot program, grantees attempted to stand up pop-up enrollment clinics, with mixed success. Somos Tejas was able to form a strong partnership with a local family resource center and hosted a clinic where their team helped 20 mothers start ACP applications. This particular event was a success, but they later shared that this type of event was "the most time consuming and difficult to organize." Other grantees echoed these challenges, and shared stories of pop-ups they had spent significant time and resources organizing, only to have a few people show up, despite doing as much outreach as they could to spread the word about the event.

> **Best Practice:**
> Focus on meeting people where they already are! It's both easier and more effective to plug into existing community events and to partner with local organizations and institutions to offer ACP enrollment assistance through existing programs than it is to expend resources creating new events and programs.

- **Social media:** A couple grantees found success by posting information on social media, specifically with staff posting about ACP in popular local Facebook groups, inviting folks to reach out to them for more information and help applying. Paid ads were less successful, resulting in a fair amount of clicks but very little follow-through.

Less effective tactics included:

- **Canvassing:** Somos Tejas typically does a lot of door-to-door outreach in their work and were excited to canvass households in neighborhoods with high rates of unconnected households, but found that contact rates and interest in ACP were much lower than when they did outreach at community events.

- **Mailers:** A couple grantees sent mailers to likely eligible households in more rural areas and saw a handful of folks reach out after receiving them, but given the costs of printing and mailing these materials, other outreach methods proved to be more cost-effective. However, Civic TN shared that mailers were effective for reaching elderly community members and people with disabilities, when layered with follow-up phone calls.

- **Texting:** Civic TN has a robust peer-to-peer texting program that they typically use for civic engagement programming, and they sent thousands of text messages out with information about ACP. Unfortunately, they saw extremely low response rates and none of the folks they ultimately were able to help enroll came from the texting program. With both the mail and the text outreach, it's very possible that some recipients chose to enroll themselves online due to this outreach, but we were not able to measure that effect.

CREATING AN ENROLLMENT PIPELINE

A major lesson from this pilot is the importance of creating a strong program structure and clear process for moving community members from initial interest to fully enrolled in ACP - what we called an "enrollment pipeline."

Throughout the program, the following model of success emerged, though each grantee created systems that worked for them and divided work up among their staff in different ways. Here are the general steps that a navigator can expect to need to create a strong enrollment pipeline:

Note: For simple applications, all these steps can be completed in one interaction!

|	
Step 1: **Outreach**	Initial outreach or conversation with a community member about ACP
Step 2: **Intake**	Potential applicant expresses interest in applying and provides the navigator with their name and contact information (can be simultaneous or flipped with step 3).
Step 3: **Eligibility Check**	Navigator walks the applicant through eligibility methods and determines what (if any) documents they need for their application.
Step 3b: Follow-Up (If needed)	If the applicant does not have the documentation they need or does not have time to apply on the spot, the navigator schedules an appointment to do the application together at a later date. Before the appointment, the navigator follows up to ensure the applicant was able to find the documents they need, confirm the appointment time, and help resolve any documentation issues that need to be addressed before applying (names matching across documents, etc.)
Step 4: **Application**	Navigator works with the applicant to submit their application. (Note: A navigator cannot submit an application on someone's behalf. Applicants must submit their own application, but can have someone help them.)
Step 4b: Troubleshooting (If needed)	Navigator works with the applicant to resolve any application or documentation issues, if the application is not approved.
Step 5: **Apply Benefit**	Once approved, the applicant calls their internet provider to apply their benefit to their internet plan or sign up for a new plan, with the navigator's help (or with reminders from the navigator).
Step 5b: Follow-Up (If needed)	Navigator reaches out to the applicant to confirm that their internet was set up and/or that their benefit was successfully applied to their next bill.

Case Study: Somos Tejas

Somos Tejas kickstarted their ACP work by doing outreach at community events, like participating in local health/career fairs, speaking at partners organizations' events, setting up a table outside community theater performances, and passing out flyers at a parade. Over a 12-week period, they spoke with community members at 29 different events! The key to their success was creating a tight system for doing applicant intake, appointments, and follow-up.

Somos Tejas assigned two staff members to their ACP work and divided responsibilities between outreach work and enrollment support, ultimately averaging 30-35 hours/week towards the end of the program, when they had dozens of applicants in the various stages of their pipeline.

We're out here offering affordable internet at the DallasCred & Dallas County Health Fair!

Affordable Connectivity Program
You Could Qualify to Receive a $30 Discount Every Month on Your Internet Bill

Step 1: Confirm if you qualify

You may qualify if you participate in a federal assistance program such as SNAP, CHIP, Medicaid, WIC, the federal public housing assistance program, the federal Pell Grant for the current school year, or families with children who receive free or reduced lunch. Go to GetACP.org to see if you qualify.

Step 2: Contact Somos Tejas to request an enrollment appointment

Our team will help you with the application process.

Step 3: Contact your internet service provider

Contact your preferred carrier (AT&T, Spectrum, Verizon, etc.) to apply the subsidy directly to your bill.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
You can call or text: (417) 388-3725
Email ariana@somostejas.org if you have questions
Website: somostejas.org
Scan QR code to fill out ACP interest form.

Programa de descuentos para internet
Usted podría calificar para recibir $30 de descuento cada mes en su factura de internet

Paso 1: Confirme si califica

Si usted participa en uno de los programas de asistencia, como SNAP, CHIP, Medicaid o WIC, el programa de asistencia federal de vivienda pública etc. o si es una familia con niños que reciben almuerzo gratis o precio reducido en la escuela. Vaya a GetACP.org para ver si califica

Paso 2: Comuníquese con Somos Tejas para solicitar una cita de inscripción

Nuestro equipo le ayudara con el proceso de aplicación

Paso 3: Comuníquese con su proveedor de servicios de internet

Comuníquese con su proveedor preferido (AT&T, Spectrum, Verizon, etc.) para aplicar el descuento directamente a su factura.

PARA OBTENER MÁS INFORMACIÓN:
Puede llamar o mandar un mensaje a: (417) 388-3725
Si tiene preguntas envíe un correo electrónico: ariana@somostejas.org
Página de Internet: somostejas.org
Escanee este código QR para completar el formulario de interés

Somos Tejas table at a Dallas CRED Health Fair (1/20/23); ACP flyers in English and Spanish

Case Study: Somos Tejas

Step 1: Outreach	Passing out a flyer or having a conversation at a community event
Step 2: Intake	Somos Tejas used a Google form (in English and Spanish) to collect contact info from interested community members. They put this interest form on their website, put a QR code to it on their flyers, and had folks fill it out on a phone or tablet at in-person events. They also put a phone number on their flyers, so that community members who might not be comfortable using a QR code or filling out a form could just call or text.
Step 3: Eligibility Check	Ariana, their enrollment lead, called each person who filled out the interest form to discuss eligibility methods. After confirming that they would be eligible and what documents they would need, Ariana would schedule an in-person appointment at Somos Tejas' office.
Step 3b: Follow-Up (If needed)	After seeing some folks were missing their appointments or coming with documents that didn't meet the application requirements, Somos Tejas added an extra reminder call before appointments.
Step 4: Application	At the in-person appointment, Ariana or another trained staff member would guide the applicant through the application process.
Step 5: Apply Benefit	If the application was approved immediately, staff helped applicants call their internet provider during their appointment to apply their benefit.
Step 5b: Follow-Up (If needed)	If the application was not approved immediately, Somos Tejas would follow up with the applicant by phone to confirm that they got approved and remind them to call their internet provider. If they were not approved, Ariana would work with the applicant to call USAC, figure out what happened, and resolve any documentation issues.

Case Study: Vietlead

Vietlead, which primarily serves the Vietnamese community in Philadelphia and South Jersey, offers a successful model from this pilot program.

Vietlead focused on reaching out to elders they had previously helped enroll in other programs, like Medicaid. Many of these community members do not speak English and needed help both with the application (which is not available in Vietnamese) and with making phone calls to their internet provider. Vietlead engaged community members in their native language, making ACP enrollment accessible to those who would not otherwise be able to apply.

Story Spotlight: "Mr. Van has known Vietlead for many years through an elder program. His only income is SSI and about half of that goes toward his rent every month. He had never heard of this program before, but trusted us to do the application with him. This extra money has helped him be able to spend more money on food and other necessities every month."

Through trial and error, Vietlead ultimately created an enrollment pipeline with very clear divisions of responsibility among their team, in order to maximize the work that could be done by a remote teammate. They ended up having four key staff involved in their ACP work: a program lead, two staff who helped people with applications in-person, and a remote teammate who handled any phone-based outreach and support. Collectively, they spent about 25-30 hours/week on ACP outreach and enrollment support.

Vietlead made two key choices in their outreach model 1) they prioritized outreach to their existing network of eligible community members and 2) they created a system to leverage the strengths of their team and meet the unique needs of the community they serve.
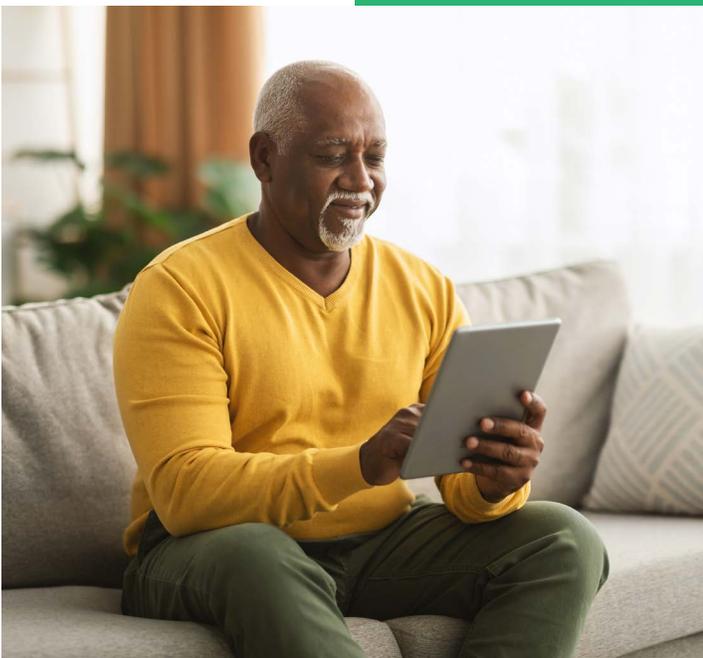
Case Study: Vietlead

Step 1: Outreach	Their remote staff member called eligible community members to share information about ACP, while local staff talked up ACP to folks who came into Vietlead's office for other services and at community events.
Step 2: Intake	Once a community member decided to apply, staff added their contact information to a shared spreadsheet tracking active clients.
Step 3: Eligibility Check	In the same conversation or a follow-up phone conversation, staff spoke with the applicant to figure out the easiest eligibility method for their household. Because they discovered that Vietnamese elders often have internet plans in their adult children's names, they also learned to ask applicants at this step whose name was on their bill.
Step 3b: Follow-Up (If needed)	If the applicant did not have the documents they needed, had a bill in someone else's name, or did not have time to apply on the spot, staff would schedule an appointment for the applicant to come to Vietlead's office to do the application together at a later date. Before the appointment, their remote teammate would work with the applicant by phone to help them find the documents they needed and change the name on their internet bill. They also called the day before the scheduled appointment with a reminder of what to bring.
Step 4: Application	Vietlead had two staff (one in Philly, one in Camden) trained to help applicants submit their applications during in-person appointments.
Step 4b: Troubleshooting (If needed)	If the application was not approved, the remote staff member would call USAC on the community member's behalf to see what was needed to resolve the problem, then call the community member to help them resolve the issue.
Step 5: Apply Benefit	Once approved, the remote staff member would schedule a time to do a three-way call with the applicant to call their internet provider and get their benefit applied.

TRUSTED MESSENGERS & PARTNERSHIPS

The guiding principle and core strategy behind this pilot program is that trusted community messengers are the key to driving higher ACP enrollment, and more broadly, to helping more Americans access benefits that can make a difference in their lives. Our pilot results confirmed this strategy works: in-person outreach that leveraged the strength of an organization's pre-existing relationships with community members proved to be more effective than more impersonal outreach like social media ads or mailers.

> **"Person to person action, that's what works"**
>
> — Detroit Change Initiative

A large part of what makes some of these pilot grantees so trusted in their communities is that they do outreach and offer services in their communities' native languages:

- 90% of the applicants Somos Tejas helped to enroll in ACP were Spanish speakers.

- South Dakota Voices for Peace works with many refugees and recent immigrants in Sioux Falls and made materials available in Spanish, Nepali, Swahili, and Amharic.

- Vietlead, KITHS, and Gapura prioritized outreach to elders and community members who do not speak English. The outreach they did in Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Malay allowed them to reach folks who would not have heard about ACP anywhere else.
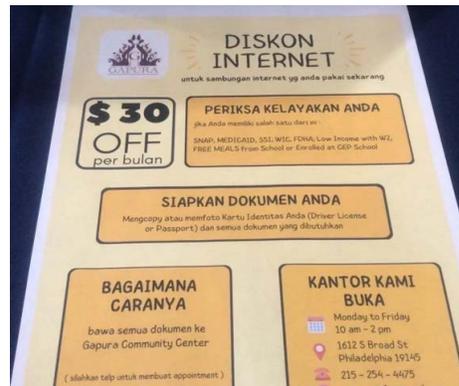
Gapura staff doing outreach with flyers in Malay at Bethany Miracle Center, a church for Philadelphia's Indonesian community.

But even organizations that have strong, trusted relationships with the community they serve can sometimes struggle to reach folks who are busy with work, school, child care, and other responsibilities that make it hard to answer the phone or come out to an event. Forming partnerships with schools, libraries, community centers, places of worship, and other local institutions that people go to regularly helped grantees tap into the networks of other trusted messengers and reach people in ways that they could not do alone.

Story Spotlight: "We met Ms. Linh at a local temple in Philadelphia doing outreach. She has a family of 5, including 3 children who are in school. Her eldest child is in college and frequently had to stay at school long hours or commute to school on the weekends to do homework because of the low internet speed in their home. After helping them get the ACP credit, this family was not only able to save money on their internet bill, but also increase their internet speed so that all 3 children could do schoolwork at home." - Vietlead

Case Study: South Dakota Voices For Peace

South Dakota Voices for Peace (SDVFP), based in Sioux Falls, helped enroll community members throughout the pilot by hosting regular office hours at the downtown library and with several partner organizations like community centers and after-school programs, but the most successful part of their ACP program was the partnership they built with Hawthorne Elementary.

SDVFP held office hours at the downtown public library twice a week!

SDVFP staff at parent-teacher conferences at Hawthorne Elementary (2/9/23).

Get $30 off your internet bill each month for eligible households!

Have Questions about this Federal Benefit? Need help with the application? Schedule an appointment by phone: (605) 610-9239.

Scan the QR Code or visit www.sdvfpeace.org/acp.html to schedule an appointment.

Office Hours:
Kid Link:
- Terry Redlin on Tuesday's 5 pm - 6 pm
- Laura B. Anderson on Tuesday's 5 pm - 6 pm
Downtown Public Library:
- Thursday's 4 pm - 8 pm
- Sunday's 1 pm - 5 pm
Caminando Juntos:
- Every Friday 12 pm - 4 pm

For more updates on office hours and locations, check our social media and website: Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @sdvfpeace

Story Spotlight: "I am so thankful for ACP because when schools have been canceled, my kids can still get online and do the homework that is assigned to them." - Meliha, 44 (Sioux Falls, SD)

Hawthorne Elementary is the only school in the Sioux Falls school district that participates in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which means that every family with a child at the school is eligible for ACP. SDVFP staff reached out to the school's principal early on in the pilot program, and after working with her to make sure they had a letter verifying students' enrollment and participation in CEP that met the requirements for the ACP application, they organized an outreach opportunity at parent-teacher conferences in February.

> **Best Practice:**
> Because eligibility methods like CEP require manual review of an applicant's documentation, it's typically easier to help folks enroll based on their participation in programs like Medicaid, which usually trigger automatic approvals, even if you're doing an event at a school where every family also qualifies for ACP based on the school's CEP status.

SDVFP worked with the principal to send flyers home with students ahead of time - the principal hoped that their presence at the conferences would help boost attendance. Several parents came to the conference prepared with their documents because they knew SDVFP would be there, and several parents called them for more information after seeing the flyers. These parents trusted SDVFP staff to help them, because they trusted their school and their principal.

> **Best Practice:**
> Create a Google Voice number specific to your ACP work that people can call or text to express interest! Some people will be more comfortable calling or texting for more info than filling out an online form. You can put this number on a flyer, share it on social media, and use it to track your outreach work separately from other programming.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

MESSAGING TO OVERCOME MISTRUST

Even in programs built upon the strength of using trusted messengers, the message they're delivering also matters! Many folks in low-income communities are wary of ads for "free internet" and have good reason to be a little skeptical of signing up for a program they've never heard of.

Anecdotally, pilot grantees reported that the most effective messaging they found was to avoid mentioning "free internet" and to lead with the amount of money people can save: **"There's a program that can save you $30/month on your internet bill"** worked well across the board.

After the pilot program concluded, Civic Nation conducted a randomized control trial (RCT) to test messages that also validated these anecdotal reports. You can read more about those results at the end of this report.

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach and messaging should be tailored to the needs and values of each community and person, here is general guidance based on our findings:

Do say:	Avoid:
✓ "Save $30 a month" to help people see the tangible impact on their monthly budget.	✗ Promises of "free internet" which can raise suspicion and skepticism
✓ That ACP is a "federal benefit program" (for most audiences), to make clear that ACP is a legitimate government program, not a scam.	✗ Using "federal benefit" language with audiences who express a negative view or mistrust of government programs. Instead, focus on the positive outcomes of more affordable internet: saving money, and access to remote work, virtual classes, telehealth, and connecting with friends and family online.
✓ "You can apply this discount to your current plan or switch to a new plan" to pre-empt concerns about being forced to switch ISPs or to a cheaper plan with slower speeds.	✗ Using the same message for all audiences. Different messaging may resonate differently with seniors on a fixed income, working parents, or college students.
✓ "See if you or your loved ones may qualify" to encourage people to think of family who may be eligible and spread the word further.	✗ Trying to list every single qualifying program. Encourage people to check to see if they qualify.

Some communities may also have more specific concerns that groups doing outreach may need to address. During the pilot, our grantees encountered folks who were worried about ACP putting other federal benefits they receive in jeopardy (it does not) or who are in the process of trying to change their immigration status were worried about triggering a 'public charge' rule (ACP is not a cash assistance program and should not impact a public charge determination).

Best Practice:
Get to know the consumer protections built into the ACP so that you can answer folks' questions and address concerns they may have. For instance, some may not know that they can enroll in ACP and apply their benefit to an internet plan regardless of their credit status, past due balances, or prior debt with an internet provider **(USAC)**.

Some messages will also resonate more with certain communities. Memphis APRI, who primarily worked to enroll lower-income Black community members, shared that the best way they found to overcome skepticism was to talk about how ACP is a new federal program "designed to help folks like us afford internet."

In communities that often feel left behind by the government, it can help to name the harms folks see day-to-day (like kids who don't have internet at home to do their homework), talk openly about the ways that's impacted the community, and then bring up the specific remedy at hand: $30 off your bill, so you can afford reliable internet.

BUILDING BROADER AWARENESS

This pilot program focused heavily on person-to-person outreach, but grantees also found that **engaging in broader media and awareness work also helped their programs by priming community members to be more receptive to their outreach.**

Tactics like mass texting, mailers, social media ads, and local earned media did not lead directly to an influx of newly interested applicants during the pilot, but they did help spread the message that the ACP exists and it is real, which may have helped lay the groundwork for the person-to-person conversations that grantees spent most of their time on.

Best Practice:
Local news coverage can help your organization get more visibility for your work and build credibility for the program, so that more folks in the community have already heard of the ACP and know that it's real (and not a scam!) when you tell them about it.

abc 24/ — News   Weather   Sports   VERIFY

Mid-South organization works to bridge the technology gap, help Memphians get Wi-Fi

The Affordable Connectivity Program provides lower-income families savings for home online access and a better quality of life.

After a local news station covered one of Memphis APRI's events and the anchors talked about how folks can save $30/month with the ACP, several community members reached out asking for information, and their staff started to encounter more people during their outreach who said they had seen them on the news.

Dakota NEWS Now

SD Voices for Peace awarded grant for Federal Affordable Connectivity Program

South Dakota Voices for Peace found that the local media coverage made it a little easier to form partnerships with schools and other community partners who had not heard of the ACP either.

STAFF CAPACITY & LEARNING CURVE

This pilot also revealed just how much staff capacity and time it takes for an organization to stand up and successfully execute ACP outreach and enrollment programming. Between figuring out the best ways to set up their enrollment pipelines, exploring partnerships with schools and other partners, planning for outreach events, and learning the ins and outs of the application, **it took most grantees 4-5 weeks to get their programs fully up and running.**

> **Best Practice:**
> Do a few test applications with staff or community members you have close relationships with to get to know the application process before starting to do a lot of outreach.

We asked grantees to designate one staff member to lead their ACP work and to commit to at least 20 hours of staff time per week on ACP outreach and enrollment. But by the end of the pilot, most grantees were spending closer to 30 hours/week on their ACP work, simply to meet the demand in their community for application support. **The most successful programs were those that divided responsibilities among several staff, rather than relying on one person** to manage program planning, creating materials, organizing outreach work, and providing the amount of dedicated one-on-one support that folks needed to get fully enrolled.

> **Best Practice:**
> Split your ACP work between staff doing initial outreach/intake and staff doing intensive enrollment support. Staff doing outreach will be able to reach more people if they're not also spending hours in appointments, while team members assigned to enrollment support will be able to quickly become experts in navigating the ACP application with folks.

Grantees also experienced a fairly steep learning curve when it came to navigating the ins and outs of the ACP application and gaining the expertise they needed to help applicants with any questions or documentation issues that came up.

In the beginning of the pilot, grantees found EducationSuperhighway's **GetACP tool** very helpful, and used the site as a way to guide their conversations with community members to determine the easiest eligibility method and what documentation they would need. Once they got more conversant in the various eligibility methods and figured out the fastest and easiest eligibility methods in their state, they no longer needed tools like GetACP to help them, and found that they could help community members through the enrollment process at a quicker pace.

> **"The more confident we are about the application process and knowing the documents people need...the easier it is to talk to folks about it and get them to start an application."**
> — Vietlead

However, even after this initial learning curve period, grantees reported feeling limited in the amount of outreach they could do by the capacity they had to support folks with enrolling. For larger-scale programs, capacity may be less of an issue, but for small community organizations, it's important to find the right balance **between expanding outreach efforts and still being able to provide hands-on, individual enrollment support to community members who need it.**

OVERCOMING ENROLLMENT BARRIERS

The final major lesson learned from this pilot is just how hard it can be for some eligible community members to get enrolled in a program that was created specifically for them, and how critical it is to **have experienced, trusted navigators available to help people overcome those barriers and get enrolled.**

> **"People assume signing up is easy, and then people get frustrated when it's hard."**
>
> — Detroit Change Initiative

For applicants using a SSN to verify their identity and who are eligible through their participation in programs with data-matching agreements (like Medicaid or SNAP), which typically allow an applicant to be approved immediately, the enrollment process is fairly straightforward. But for applicants that are applying based on an eligibility method that requires additional documentation, the ACP application process can be daunting and opaque.

> **Best Practice:**
> Reach out to request example documentation (like benefit award letters) from the relevant state/local offices for each major eligibility method to make sure the documents meet the **USAC requirements** (like being on official letterhead) before trying to help someone enroll with them - every state and municipality does things differently!

People for whom the ACP could be life-changing need the most help to get enrolled, due to the difficulties obtaining documentation that meets the application requirements. And for community members with limited English proficiency, seniors, people with disabilities, and individuals with low digital skills, the ACP enrollment process can be difficult to navigate without help.

Story Spotlight: "Les doy gracias a ustedes por la ayuda. Ahora mi hijo puede seguir estudiando y aprendiendo para la escuela. Gracias a ustedes ya puedo tener internet en mi casa." - Doussandra, 24 (Sioux Falls, SD)

Even for people who don't have trouble filling out the application, it can be tough just to make the time to submit an application and call to apply the benefit with an internet provider. Some households may give up on enrolling if they don't get approved automatically, or they forget to take the last step and apply their benefit to their internet plan. But **having someone you trust, from your own community, to help guide you from start to finish can make all the difference.**

> **"We let clients know that there could be application issues, but we'll walk alongside you to handle any issues that come up."**
>
> — SDVFP

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has primarily shared key takeaways and best practices for organizations doing on the ground ACP outreach and enrollment work, but there are important lessons for other stakeholders, too. Industry, philanthropy, program administrators at USAC and the FCC, and policymakers in Congress and across the federal government have an important role to play to help strengthen outreach and enrollment work and ensure the continued success of the Affordable Connectivity Program.

1. **Invest in and partner with hyper-local community-based organizations doing on the ground work, and ensure they have the training, tools, and resources to do it well.** Trusted messengers with deep ties and established relationships with community members and partners are best positioned to drive ACP enrollment in their communities, and funding goes furthest when spent on increased staff capacity to create strong systems for supporting applicants from initial interest all the way through to applying their benefit. Many small CBOs are well-equipped to do this work and are excited to bring this benefit to their communities, but they need resources, training, and support to do so.

2. **Continue efforts to improve the application process and remove barriers to enrollment.** Recent application updates have made some promising changes, but the FCC and USAC need to continue working on improvements (like data-matching with more state-run qualifying programs and making the application available in more languages), with continuous feedback from community partners doing enrollment on the ground every day.

3. **Make sure policymakers know that the Affordable Connectivity Program is working and needs to continue to be funded.** The ACP is now helping over 18 million households save hundreds of millions of dollars every single month. From Mr. Van, a Vietnamese elder in Philly who lives on a fixed income and now has $30/month more to spend on groceries; to Jazzmine, a 26-year-old nail tech in Detroit who is now able to stay in better touch with her clients; to Yaar, a recent immigrant from South Sudan who settled in South Dakota and is now able to take classes online at a local technical college, the ACP is making a meaningful difference in the lives of so many American families. We owe it to them, and to our own families and neighbors, to ensure the ACP continues for years to come.

**Learn more about Civic Nation's ACP work
and how you can get involved.**

APPENDIX

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Civic Nation Resources

- **Pilot program Client Tracking template**
- ACP Message guidance (see page 31)

USAC resources

- **USAC Acceptable Documentation Guide**
- **USAC Automatic Eligibility Verification list**
- **ACP Protections & Rules**

EducationSuperhighway resources

- **GetACP** pre-enrollment tool
- **LearnACP** training course
- **EducationSuperhighway Resource Hub**
- **ESH CEP template letter**

Other Resources

- **State-by-state** lists of CEP schools
- **Consumer Protections and the ACP**
- **Online For All Resources**

APPENDIX

CIVIC NATION ACP MESSAGE GUIDANCE

Civic Nation conducted 3 national message testing experiments to understand what messages best persuade our intended audience to explore ACP enrollment. Our testing has revealed useful trends that can guide our grantees as they experiment with the best ways to communicate the benefits of the ACP with their local communities.

Insights:

- Explicitly stating dollar amounts (i.e. $30 per month) helps contextualize the benefit.
- Emphasizing the importance of home internet and the benefits it can bring helped prime respondents to show increased interest in the ACP.
- Explaining that the benefit can be applied to current internet plans helps to clear up a lot of common questions about changing internet providers, internet speed, etc.
- Using the phrase "you or your family" helps encourage readers to consider others in their life who may qualify. This is particularly important since we have observed community success when individuals help their family/friends explore ACP eligibility.
- When including information about the possible funding sunset of the ACP, we recommend encouraging community members to "act now to start saving money ASAP." While there is an overall decline in interest when discussing this limited sunset, "Act Now" language helps mitigate these declines. In fact, in certain groups, the "Act Now" language showed evidence of increasing interest.

"Better opportunities" language outlines the benefits of internet.

"Federal benefit" language helps build trust and differentiates the narrator from an ISP that is advertising a product.

These days, many families rely on the internet to access better jobs, education, and other opportunities. That's why there is a new federal benefit program called the Affordable Connectivity Program that could save you or your family $30/month on your internet bills. You can apply this discount to your current internet plan, or to any plan with any participating internet provider.

Using explicit dollar values helps contextualize the benefit within the consumer's monthly budget

"Keep your current plan" language is crucial to clearing up confusion and concerns about the quality of the internet plan and speeds that are available while participating in this program.

"You or your family" language reminds consumers that others in their household or in their community may be eligible, even if they are not.

Limitations of our work:

- Our work was conducted using an online survey tool which required respondents to have internet access. So, our study was largely comprised of individuals who reported having in-home internet, though a fraction of respondents reported not having home internet.
- After the first round of testing, we narrowed our audience to non-white individuals, so most of our findings are tailored towards communities of color.

Since there is no one-size-fits-all message, communication should be tailored to the values and needs of a given community. The diagram below is one example that we found to be successful among low-income, non-white respondents and the annotations highlight the relevant insights.

We also want to emphasize the limits of these insights and recognize that there is more work to be done in designing messages that will persuade certain groups to consider enrolling in the ACP.