

# Broadband in the Mississippi Delta: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Racial Justice Issue



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The Center for Social Inclusion

65 Broadway, Suite 1800, New York NY 10006 | (212) 248-2785

[www.centerforsocialinclusion.org](http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org)

Mississippi State Conference NAACP

1072 West J.R. Lynch Street, Jackson, MS 39203 | (601) 353-6906

<http://www.naacpms.org/>

## Executive Summary

Communities of color in the Mississippi Delta are disconnected from the twenty-first century information economy and the social benefits it brings with it. *Broadband in the Mississippi Delta*, shows the link between economic opportunity and broadband access in one of the poorest regions of the country. Mississippi's rural areas need investment in broadband to grow and thrive. As new federal resources under the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program become available this year CSI's report, *Broadband in the Mississippi In the Delta*, demonstrates the strategic and social importance of the federal government directing those funds to poorly connected communities in Mississippi, which are often communities of color.

### Findings:

- **People of color are the majority in zip codes with zero access to high speed Internet.**
- **Mississippi's Second Congressional Districts has the largest population of people of color and the lowest levels of broadband access.**
- **Broadband builds the economy. Therefore, poor communities of color are less able to build their economies or the state and national economy:**
  - **Zip codes with 8 or more Internet providers average 811 businesses. Those without high-speed internet access have a mere 7 businesses on average. Zip codes with 8 or more Internet providers average 13,212 jobs. Job opportunities in places with one, two, or even three Internet providers are a mere fraction of that, with an average of 646 jobs.**
- **Of the 124 applications for expanding broadband access in Mississippi, 87 were rejected and 37 are still awaiting a decision.**

Thankfully, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act ("Recovery Act") allocates \$4.7 billion in grants is going to better America's access to broadband. The National Technology and Information Administration ("NTIA") will be accepting new applications for the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program ("BTOP") between Feb. 16, 2010 and March 15th, 2010. At the same time, the Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") is in the process of developing a national broadband plan. Under the Recovery Act, this plan must guarantee all Americans access to broadband capability.

### Recommendations:

To get the most value from our tax dollars:

- **Recovery Act funds must be directed toward revitalizing the communities hardest hit by the recession and pay particular attention to rural and urban communities of color.**
- **The FCC's national broadband plan must plan to target rural communities and rural and urban communities of color.**
- **Improve transparency regarding broadband availability and ARRA grant decisions.**
- **Ensure that high-speed Internet is affordable for residents of poor communities of color and rural communities of all races.**

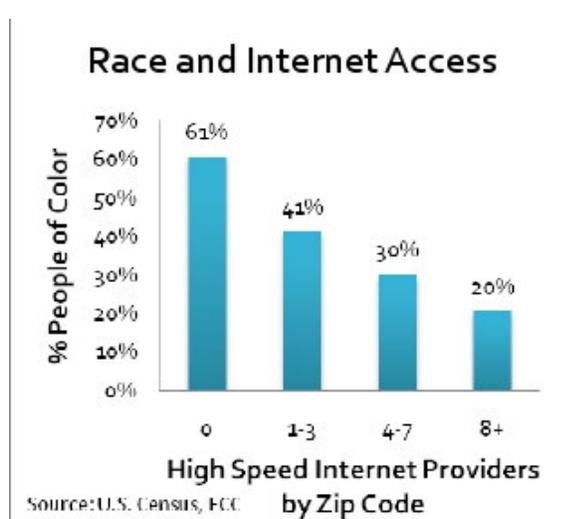
## Broadband in the Delta

Businesses cannot compete and create new jobs, health care cannot be expanded and educational quality cannot improve without high speed internet access. It is a 21<sup>st</sup> century gateway to the information and the relationships we need to meet the basic needs of today. Businesses stock their shelves, keep their books, market their products, and post new jobs via the Internet. Students conduct research, participate in classes, and download materials from the Internet. More importantly, they learn how to connect to the information economy so necessary for global economic competition and citizenship. Patients make appointments and consult with their doctors on the Internet. For poor communities, high speed internet access can mean the difference between whether or not a family in areas underserved by doctors can get primary health care through a nurse practitioner who can communicate with a doctor hours away. Farmers learn new techniques, order seeds, check on prices, and research their markets by way of the Internet.

Importantly, the federal government has made broadband access a priority by making \$ 4.7 billion available through competitive grants under the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Stimulus). There can be no long-term recovery without it. But the communities hardest hit by the current economic crisis are often those that lacked affordable and reliable access before the crisis.

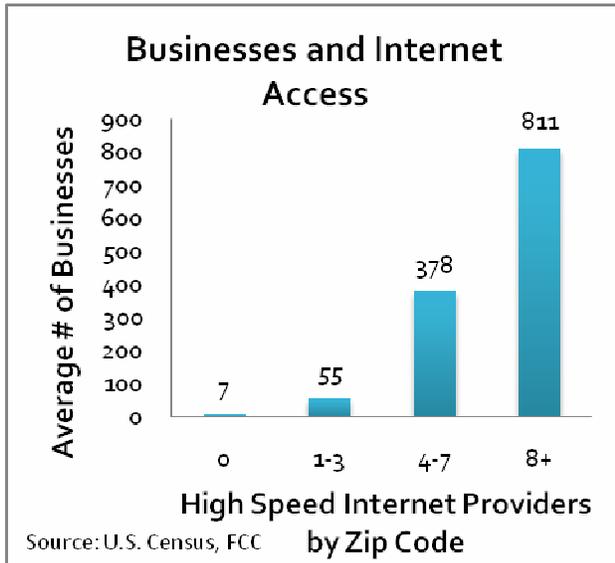
Therefore, federal planning and broadband investments should be directed to communities with the least access to broadband and social goods (e.g., quality public education and healthcare) and the most in need of economic growth. This would pave the way for long-term economic growth and development in our most vulnerable communities, making the nation stronger. Both the NTIA and the FCC must develop tools to measure the affordability of service, and promote broadband access that is affordable in each community.

In Mississippi, disconnected communities tend to be economically depressed communities of color.



### Communities with no high speed Internet access are majority people of color

In areas of Mississippi with no Internet access, people of color represent the majority of the residents. As the number of Internet providers goes up, the percentage of people of color in the area goes down. In MS zip codes with 8 or more Internet providers, people of color represent only 20% of the population.



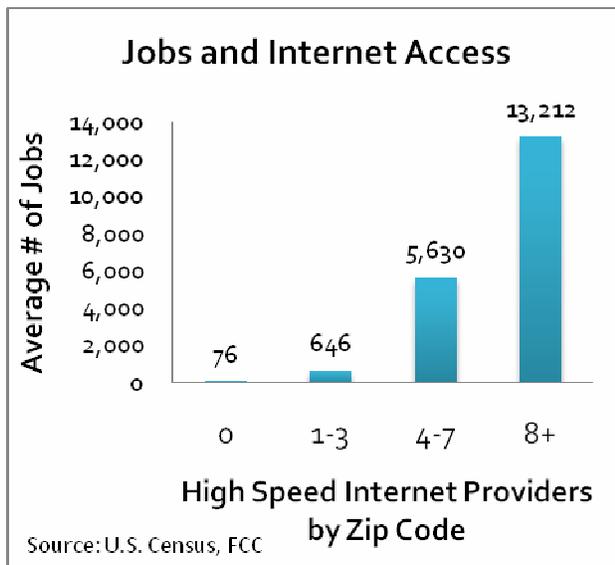
## Businesses need broadband and Mississippi needs businesses

Mississippi zip codes with 8 or more Internet providers average more than 800 businesses. This figure drops dramatically where there are fewer Internet providers. Zip codes with one, two, or three Internet providers average 55 businesses. Zip codes without Internet providers average 7 businesses.

The number of jobs in an area similarly shoots up in places that are well connected.

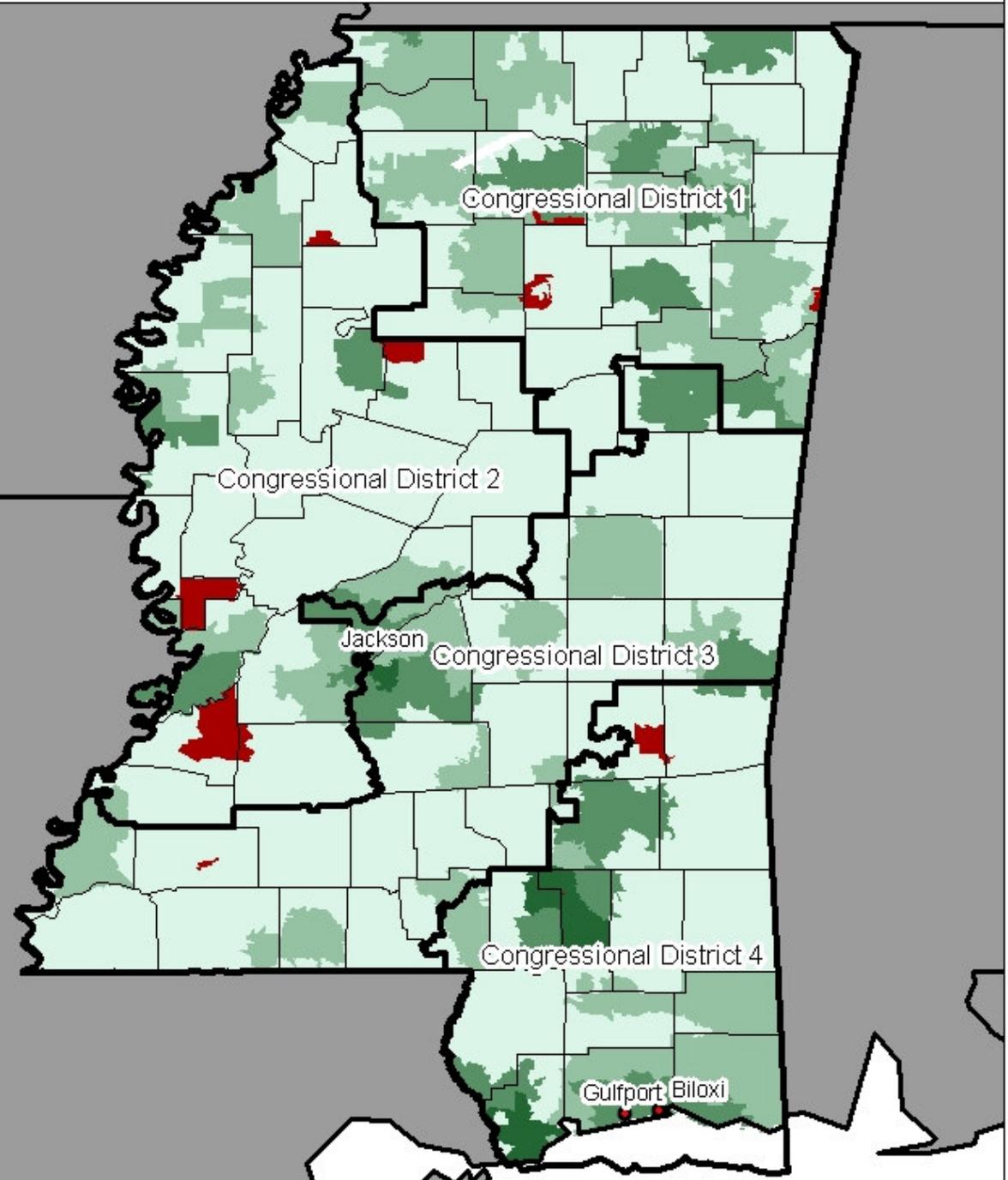
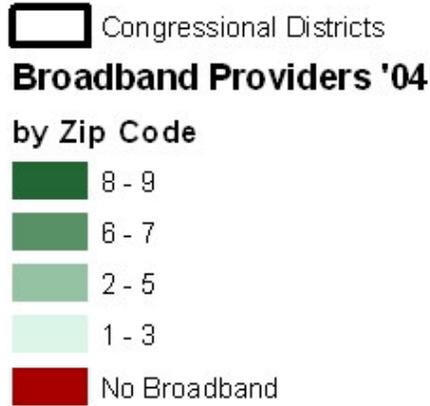
Places with eight or more Internet providers average 13,212 jobs. The average number of jobs drops to 646 in zip codes with one, two, or three Internet providers. An average 76 jobs per zip code are found in places with no Internet access.

New broadband infrastructure should be built, expanded, and improved where it's needed most.



# Mississippi Broadband Availability

Sources: U.S. Census, FCC, ESRI

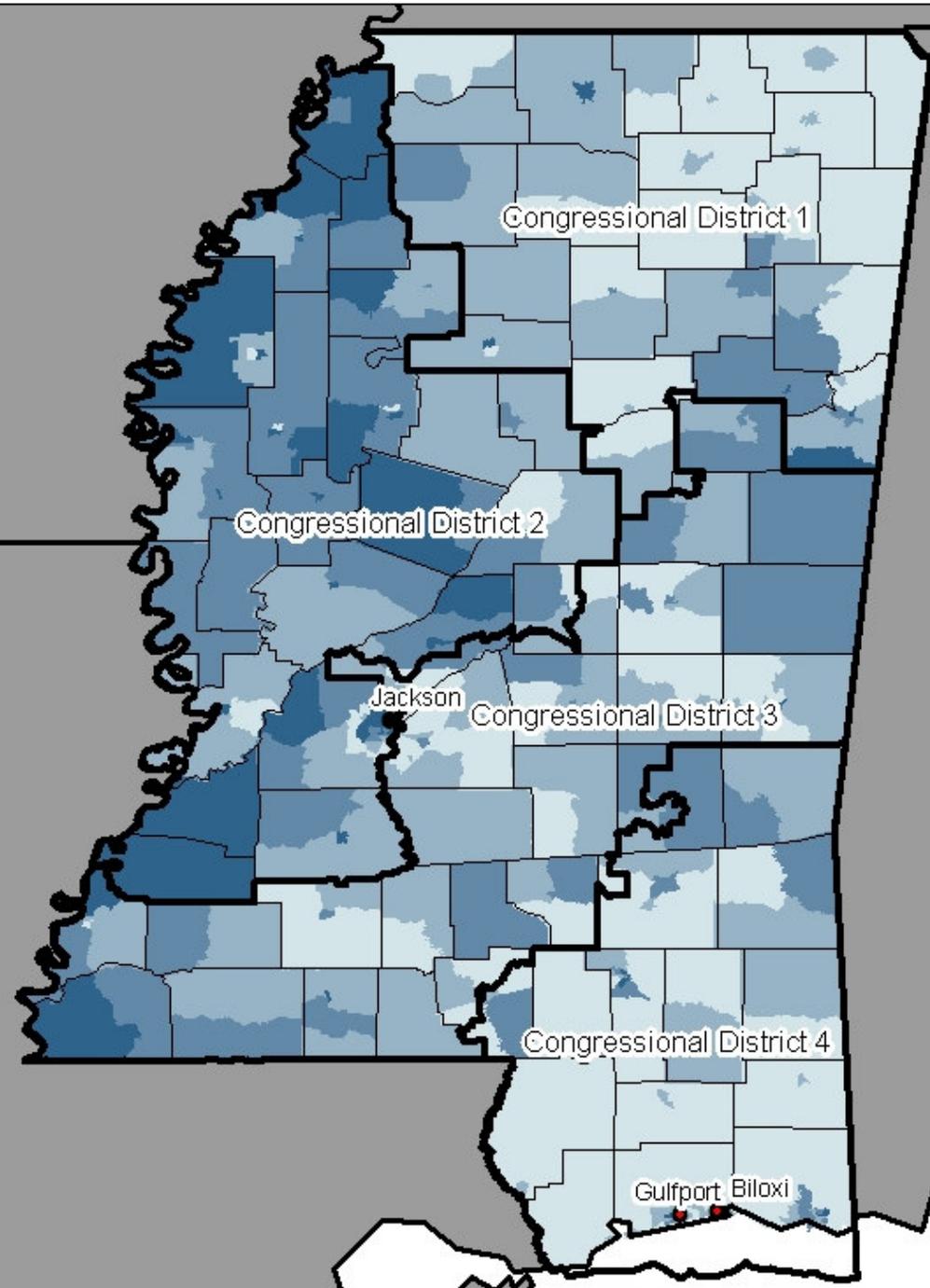
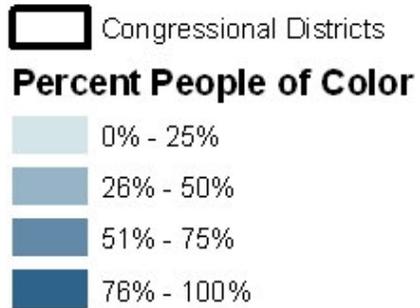


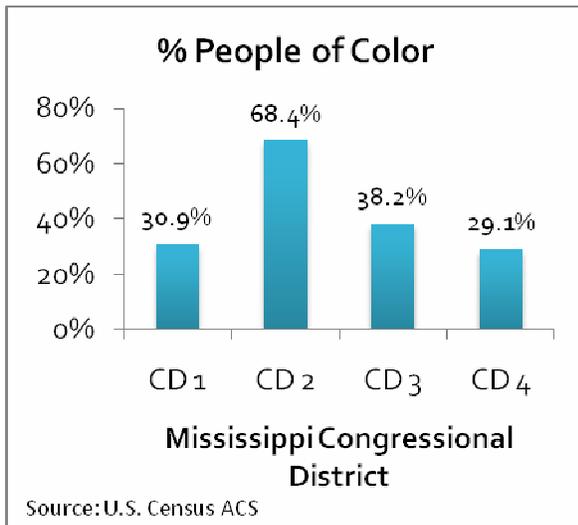
Absent or minimal Internet service blankets much of Mississippi, especially communities of color and the Second Congressional District.

# Mississippi

## Communities of Color

Sources: U.S. Census, FCC, ESRI

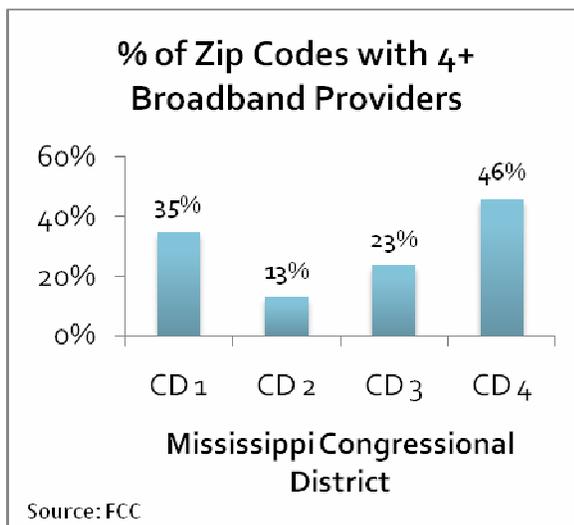
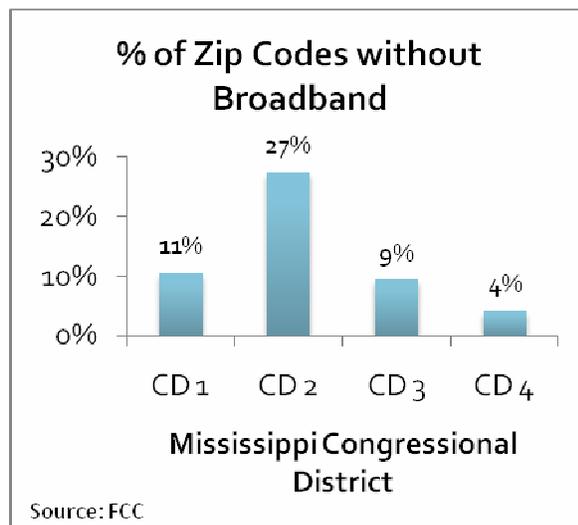
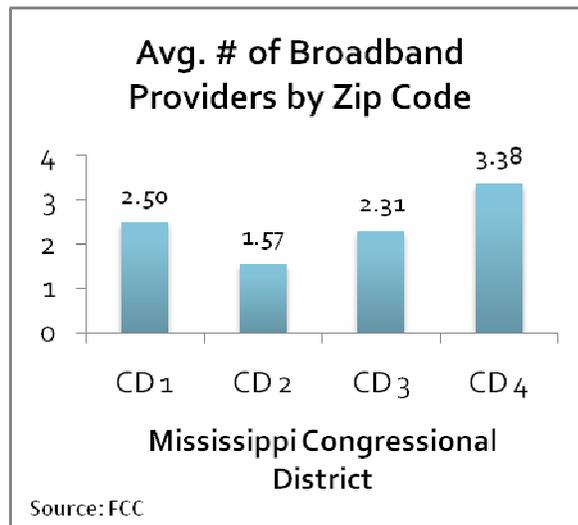




## Mississippi's Mostly-Black Second Congressional District Lacks Broadband

In MS's Congressional district 2, where people of color represent 68% of the population, there is less than two Internet providers on average in each zip code area. (It should be noted that Internet access to a single address in a zip code qualifies the entire zip code as Internet connected).

CD 2 also has the most zip codes with no Internet access. 27 % of the zip codes in CD 2 have no broadband service. Only 13% of the zip codes in this part of Mississippi have four or more Internet service providers. Southern Mississippi has the richest Internet service, with 46% of the zip codes enjoying access to four or more Internet service providers.



## Recommendations

### Meet ARRA goals

One of the Recovery Act's primary goals is to assist those most impacted by the recession. Funds should be targeted to those communities where needs are the greatest, like Mississippi's Delta region.

### Promote affordability

Both NTIA and the FCC should develop tools to measure the affordability of service, and promote broadband access that is affordable in community, ensuring that low-income people can afford access.

### Fund broadband projects in poorly connected communities

CSI finds that of the 124 applications submitted so far for federal broadband funding, most (87) have been rejected. But another 37 are awaiting approval. NTIA should award funds in Mississippi to projects in poorly connected communities, with an emphasis on funding projects likely to create jobs, educational opportunities, and access to healthcare demonstrated by the design and partnerships included in the applications.

### Improve FCC Broadband Availability Data

Providing broadband availability by zip code in an easily-exportable format again (Microsoft Excel, Delimited Text Files, etc.). Up until December 31, 2004, the Federal Communications Commission published "Zip Codes by Number of High-Speed Service Providers" in Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet format (.xls), which made it easy for citizens to analyze broadband availability in their neighborhoods. Excel Spreadsheets are easy to disaggregate by geography and import into mapping software. Since 2004, the FCC has only published these data in Portable Document Format (.pdf). The .pdf format offers a single snapshot of one zip code, whereas excel, and similar formats, provide a look at a whole region. PDF makes detailed analysis of broadband availability impossible.<sup>1</sup>

### Prioritize the needs of underserved communities in the FCC's national broadband plan

The FCC plan must address the needs of low-income, rural communities of color such as those in the Mississippi Delta. The Commission must prescribe steps, such as the creation of incentives, which will encourage the extension of affordable broadband coverage to areas whose economic development is stifled without broadband access.

### Improve NTIA Grantee Reporting

NTIA must strengthen the quarterly reporting process for grantees. The agency must require recipients to provide data on service improvements that can be analyzed by specific location and demographics. Service improvements include greater access to broadband and better quality broadband.

NTIA must make these detailed quarterly reports publicly available. All information from quarterly reports should be available to the public on a searchable, online database in formats that are easy to analyze and interpret, such as shapefiles and standard spreadsheet formatting.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fcc.gov/wcb/iatd/comp.html>

# csi CENTER FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

The Center for Social Inclusion works to unite public policy research and grassroots advocacy to transform structural inequality and exclusion into structural fairness and inclusion. We work with community groups and national organizations to develop policy ideas, foster effective leadership, and develop communications tools for an opportunity-rich world in which we all will thrive.

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Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its adult and youth members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.

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