# Bridging the Digital Divide:
## Tackling Digital Access, Equity, and Resilience Through Broadband Connectivity

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Kisatchie-Delta Regional Planning & Development District

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# ECONOMIC RECOVERY CORPS

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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U.S. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

## ERC Partner Coalition

NADO Research Foundation

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES NACo

© NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC.

RAIN catalysts

CORI Center on Rural Innovation

NLC NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

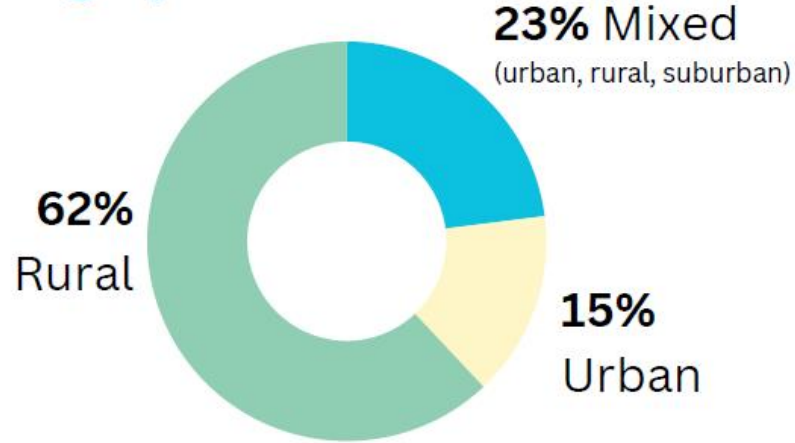
CITIES STRONG TOGETHER

ICMA

# 65 Fellows, 65 Catalytic Projects, 42 States, 2 Territories

ERC Fellows are working alongside Host Organizations in communities large and small, including nine Tribal Nations, two U.S. territories, and 5 multi-state collaboratives.

## Geographic Mix



## Fellows

**65%** 10+ years of experience

**69%** Women

**54%** Identify as a person of color

**40%** Come from host community or region

## Projects

Broadband

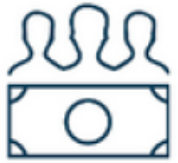
Housing

Childcare

Downtown Revitalization

Technology & Innovation

Workforce Development



Tourism & Recreation

Sustainability & Climate Resilience

Small business, Entrepreneurship, Access to Capital

Transportation & Infrastructure

## Host Organizations

- City and county governments
- Regional coalitions and partnerships
- Tribal Nations
- Economic development organizations (EDOs)
- Economic Development Districts (EDDs)
- Entrepreneurial support organizations
- Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)
- Nonprofits and technical assistance providers

Serving Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, Grant, LaSalle, Rapides, Vernon and Winn Parishes

ERC project: Support the development of a center of resilience in the central Louisiana region

Largest community:

1. Alexandria, LA 44,000
2. Pineville, LA 14,100
3. Leesville, LA 5,500

2016-2023: 14 federally-declared disasters

Additionally, central Louisiana serves as evacuation route for coastal events and ingress route for disaster response efforts

# Bridging the Digital Divide

Tackling Digital Access, Equity, and Resilience Through Broadband Connectivity

# Broadband Definitions

Digital Access, Equity, Communication… what does it mean?

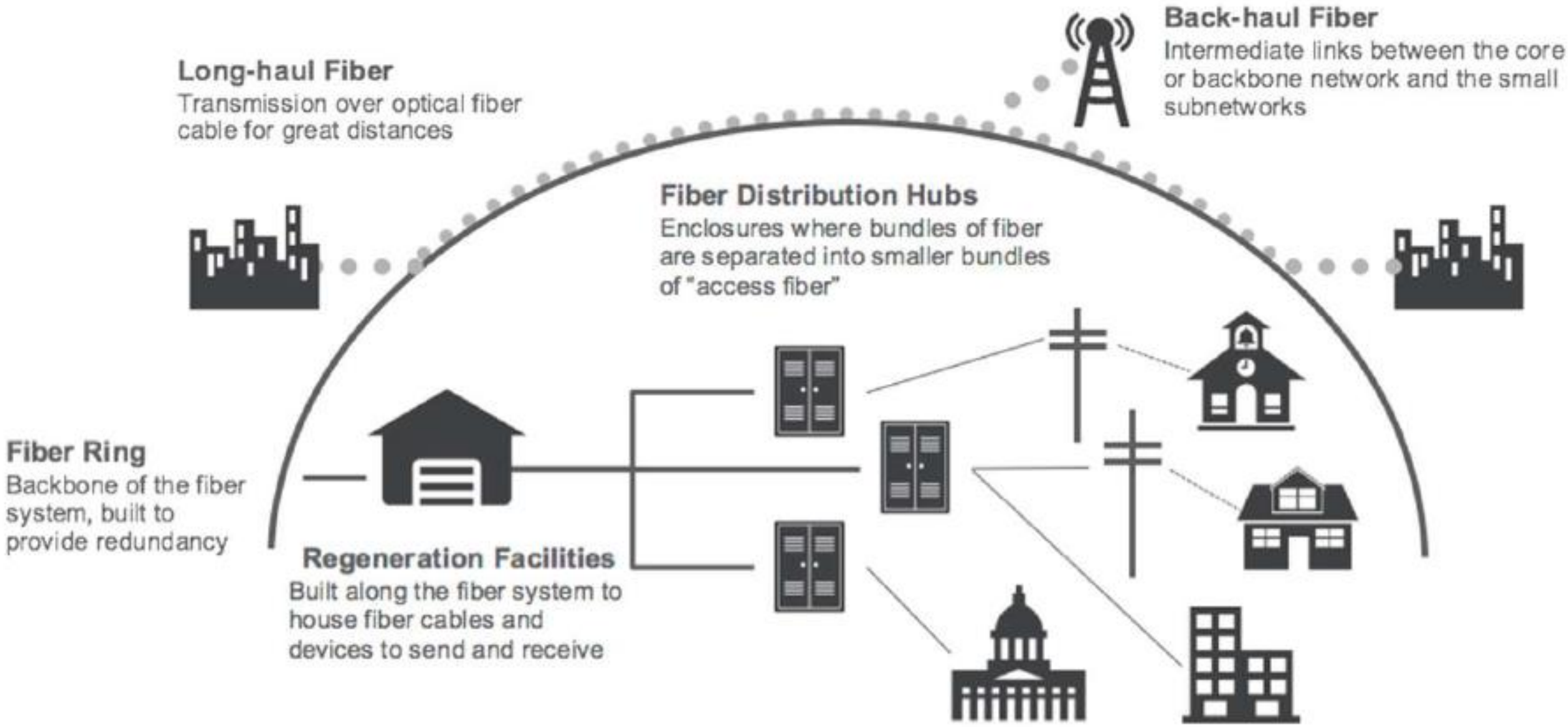
# Broadband (short for “broad bandwidth”)

Bandwidth: the capacity of a network connection to transmit data

Broadband: high-speed internet connection that offers increased data transfer rates

# Broadband Infrastructure

Backbone, middle mile, and last mile systems


Back-haul Fiber
Intermediate links between the core or backbone network and the small subnetworks
Long-haul Fiber
Transmission over optical fiber cable for great distances
Fiber Distribution Hubs
Enclosures where bundles of fiber are separated into smaller bundles of "access fiber"
Fiber Ring
Backbone of the fiber system, built to provide redundancy
Regeneration Facilities
Built along the fiber system to house fiber cables and devices to send and receive
Backbone
Large-capacity fiber
Middle Mile
Segment of fiber system linking core network to the local fiber
Last Mile
Fiber network connects to end-users

# Digital Access

Do you have what you need to participate in a digital society?

# Digital Access

Having what you need to participate in a digital society, including connectivity, devices, skills, knowledge, and support

# Digital Equity

(NTIA) Measurable objectives to promote:

1. the availability and affordability of access to broadband technology;

2. online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and services;

3. digital literacy;

4. awareness of online privacy and cybersecurity; and

5. the availability and affordability of consumer devices and technical support for those devices.

# Digital Literacy

Celise Reech-Harper, MSIS: Competency in technology, access and communications that allows the individual or group to complete all tasks necessary for an unencumbered life

(ALA) The ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.

# Inclusion

Who is in the room and who isn’t?

# Digital Inclusion

(NTIA) Individual- and community-level access to robust broadband connections; Internet-enabled devices that meet their needs; and the skills to explore, create and collaborate in the digital world.

# Digital Resilience

Heather Smoak-Urena, CEcD: Ability to create incremental changes that serve the dynamic needs of a local and regional community.

# Digital Communication

How do we approach tech and broadband conversations. Are they approachable? Are they technical? Are the understandable? Are they welcoming?

# Example: What is bandwidth?

1. A measurement indicating the maximum capacity of a wired or wireless communications link to transmit data over a network connection in a given amount of time (TechTarget)
2. The data transfer capacity of a network in bits per second (Investopedia)
3. The maximum amount of data transmitted over an internet connection in a given amount of time. Bandwidth is often mistaken for internet speed when it's actually the volume of information that can be sent over a connection in a measured amount of time (Verizon)
4. The amount of data that can be sent from one point to another in a certain period of time (Kiddle Search Engine)

# Broadband in Louisiana

A very abridged history of twenty years of broadband development in central Louisiana

# 1990’s Broadband Efforts

- Barriers:
- 1996
  - Several communities were unable to get universal telephone service
  - Municipality offices has telephone service but could not have a second phone line for a fax machine
  - Agency office struggled with dial up connectivity that was very limited
- Successes:
  - Agency was able to make emails for each staff instead of sharing two for the office
  - 1999: Last community gained universal telephone service

# 2000’s Broadband Efforts

- 2007
- Projects
  - Delta Regional Authority’s Delta Leadership Institute
  - Goal: build a toolkit to educate communities about emerging technologies and to assess their needs and engage service providers effectively

# 2010’s Broadband Efforts

- 2016
- Projects:
  - Collaboration between Kisatchie-Delta Regional Planning & Development District and North Delta Planning & Development
  - Goal: promote broadband awareness and adoption in metro-adjacent rural areas

# 2020’s Broadband Efforts

- 2020
- Barriers:
  - State law prohibiting municipalities involvement in developing broadband infrastructure
- Opportunities:
  - Leslie Durham, Louisiana Governor's Designee for the Delta Regional Authority, recognizing need to prioritize broadband
  - Planning districts’ white paper defining strategies for a better Broadband Map
  - Granting Underserved Municipalities Broadband Opportunities (GUMBO)

# Three pillars to broadband outreach

Awareness, acceptance, and adoption

# Broadband in Vidalia, LA

The Story of a Community Champion

# A Champion to Drive the Project Forward

- An employee of the city of Vidalia, LA (pop 3,897) who was a former cable company employee
- Role:
  - Build capacity of the town's broadband through knowledge
  - Investment in fiber
  - Prioritizing redundancy in infrastructure
  - Supporting public agency's bandwidth
  - Collaborating with the EDD
  - Willing to support any local community understand their broadband needs and opportunities

# Inclusion and Equity

My role in this story

# CENLA Broadband Regional Priorities

1. Access to connectivity
2. Adaptability and sustainability
3. Affordability
4. Digital Literacy, Education, and Security

# Join us!

The Louisiana Office of Broadband Development & Connectivity and the National Telecommunications & Information Administration cordially invite you to the inaugural Broadband Solutions Summit.

*August 31, 2022*

*The Hotel Bentley*
*Alexandria, Louisiana 71301*

Click here to register!

ConnectLA
Louisiana Office of Broadband Development & Connectivity

NTIA

INTERNET FOR ALL

COME SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

# LET'S TALK ABOUT BROADBAND

HELP US CREATE AN EFFECTIVE STATE-WIDE CONVERSATION ABOUT CONNECTIVITY

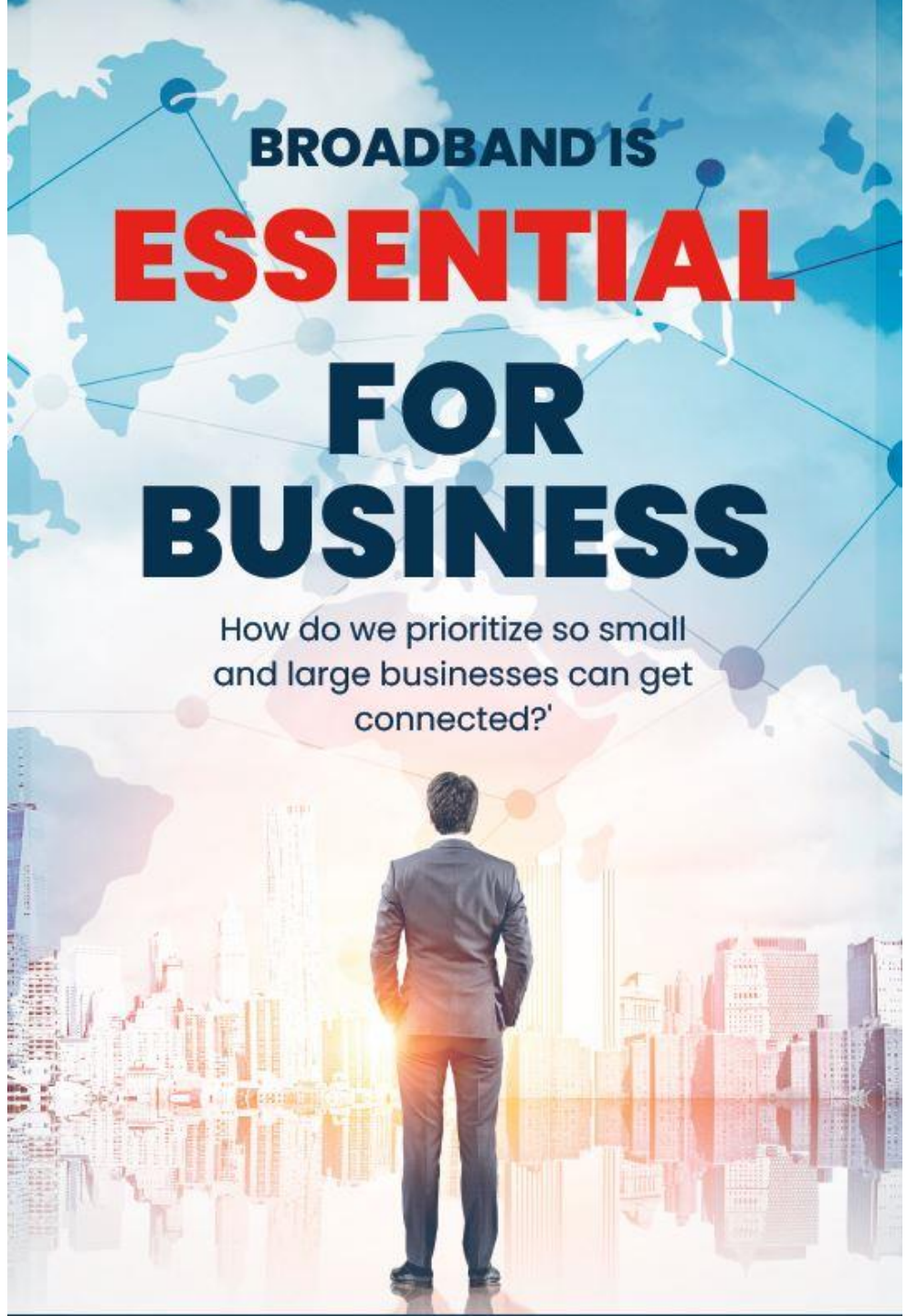
PART OF BROADBAND MEANS EVERYONE CAN CONNECT TO THE INTERNET.

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DIGITALLY LITERATE?**

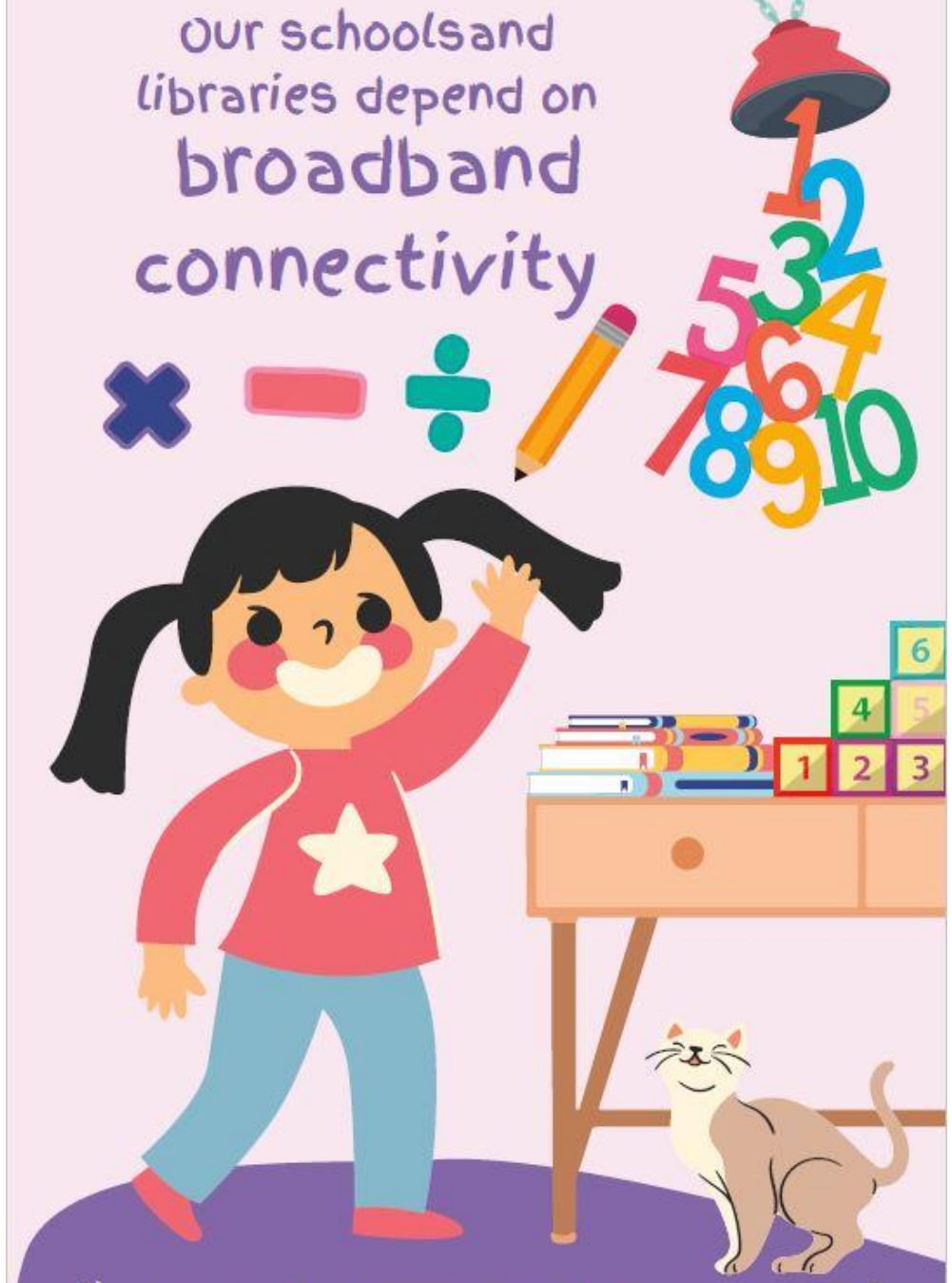
BROADBAND IS

# ESSENTIAL FOR BUSINESS

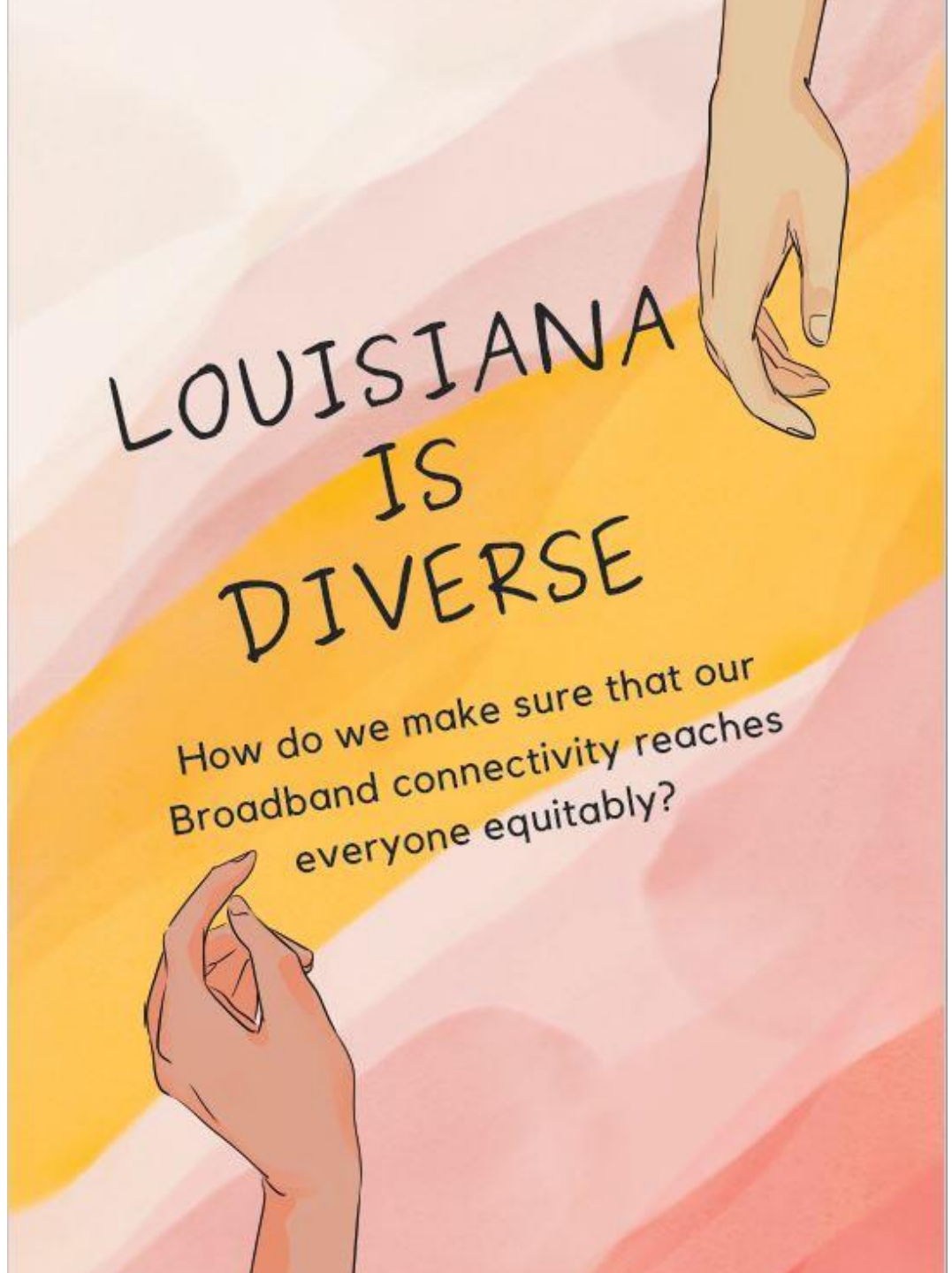
How do we prioritize so small and large businesses can get connected?'

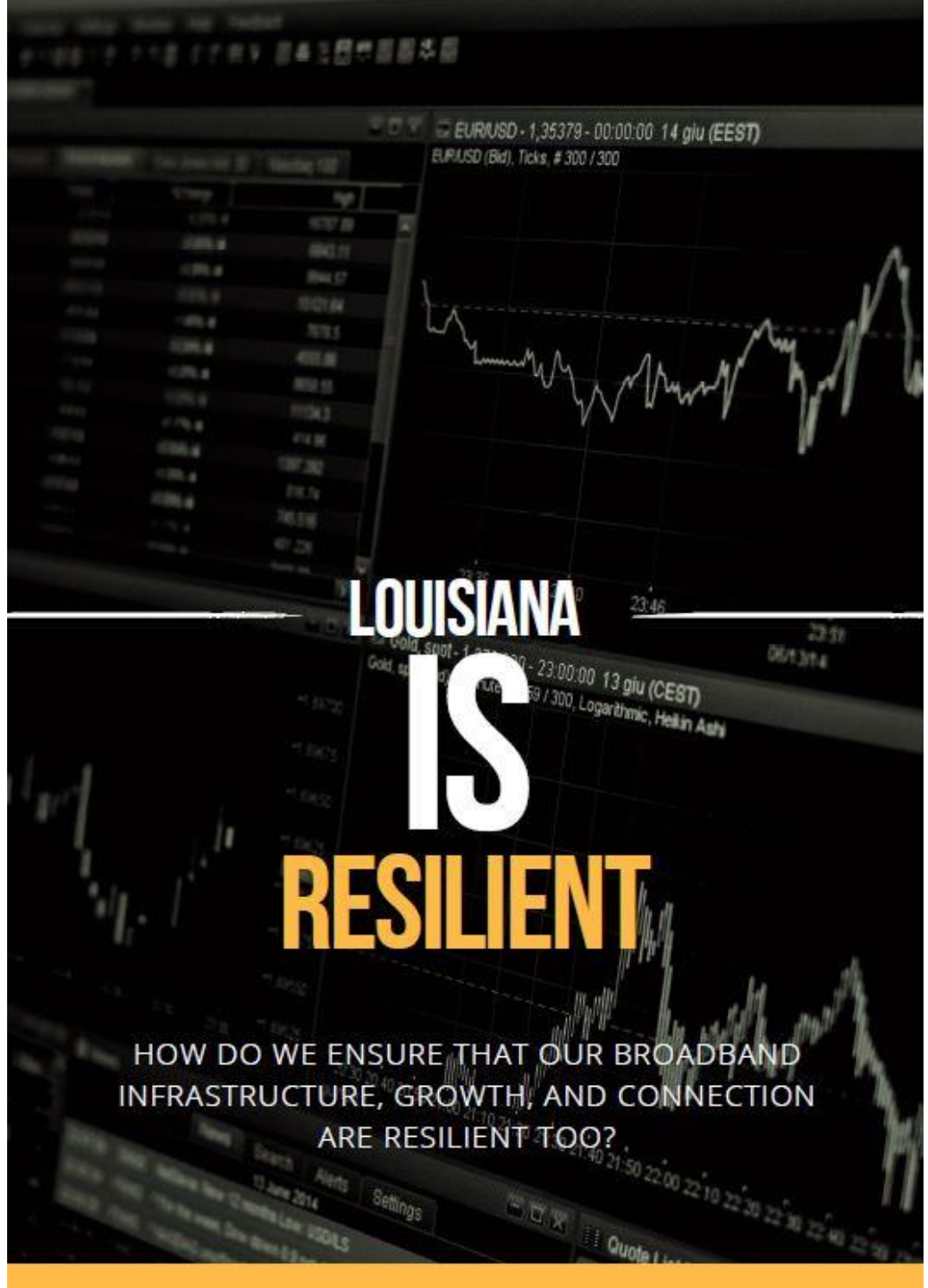


Our schools and libraries depend on broadband connectivity




How do we include them in our plans and priorities?


LOUISIANA
IS
DIVERSE
How do we make sure that our Broadband connectivity reaches everyone equitably?




# LOUISIANA IS RESILIENT

HOW DO WE ENSURE THAT OUR BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE, GROWTH, AND CONNECTION ARE RESILIENT TOO?

# CENLA Regional Stakeholder Meeting

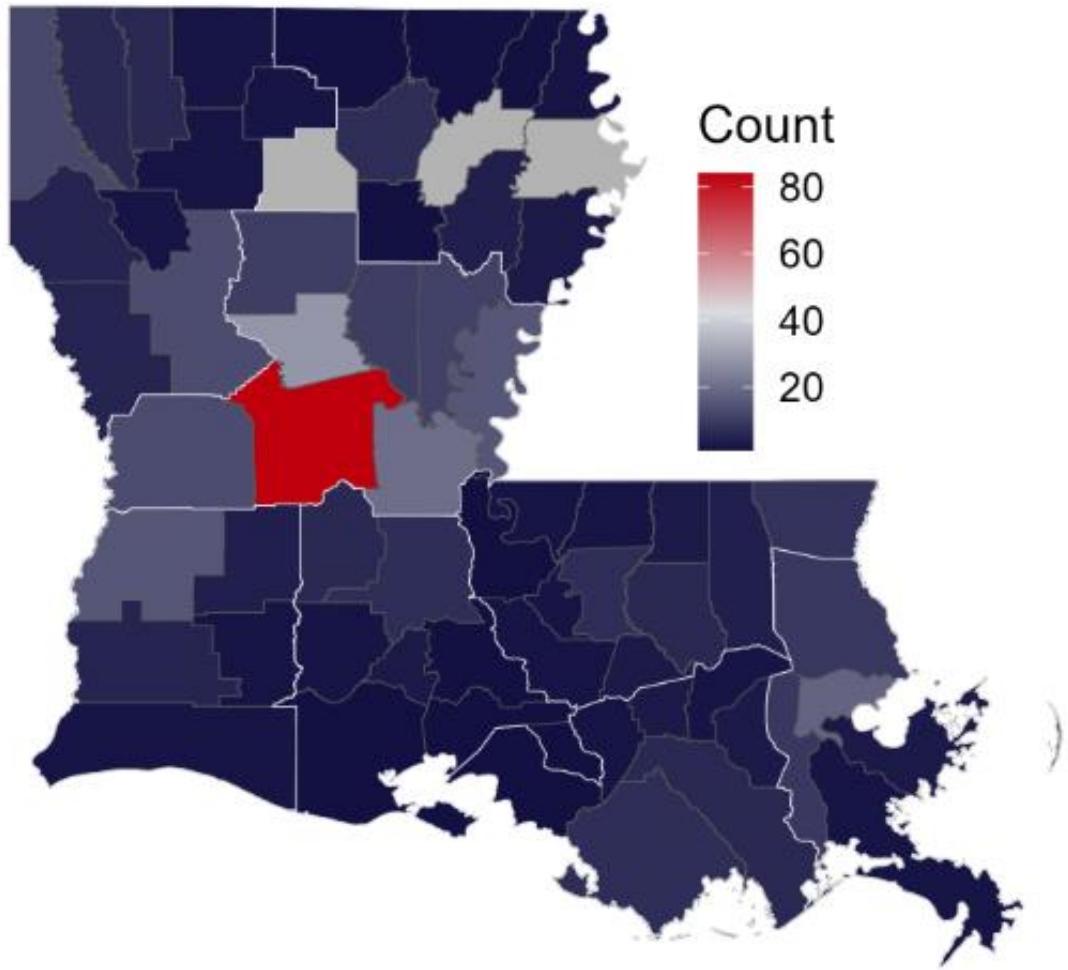
## October 26th, 2022
## 2 pm - 4pm
## 516 Murray St, Alexandria, LA 71303

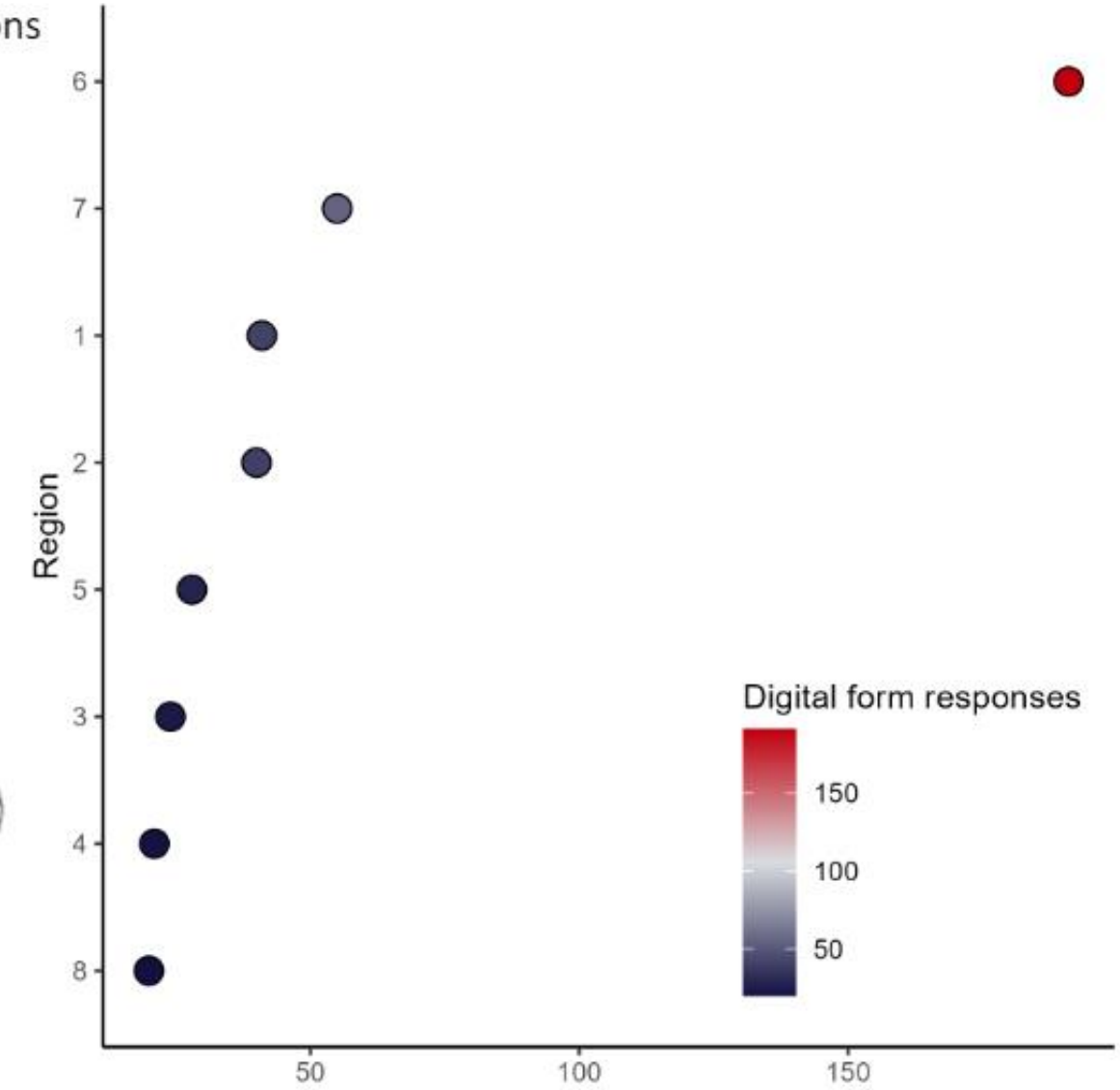
Join us in discussing digital equity in the Louisiana Broadband Initiative
as it applies to Central Louisiana and
Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, Grant, LaSalle, Rapides, Vernon and Winn Parishes.
Register at
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/cenla-digital-equity-outreach-and-engagement-tickets-432967265747

Hosted by:
Central Louisiana Technical Community College
Kisatchie-Delta Regional Planning & Development District
Kathleen Blanco Public Policy Center
Connect LA

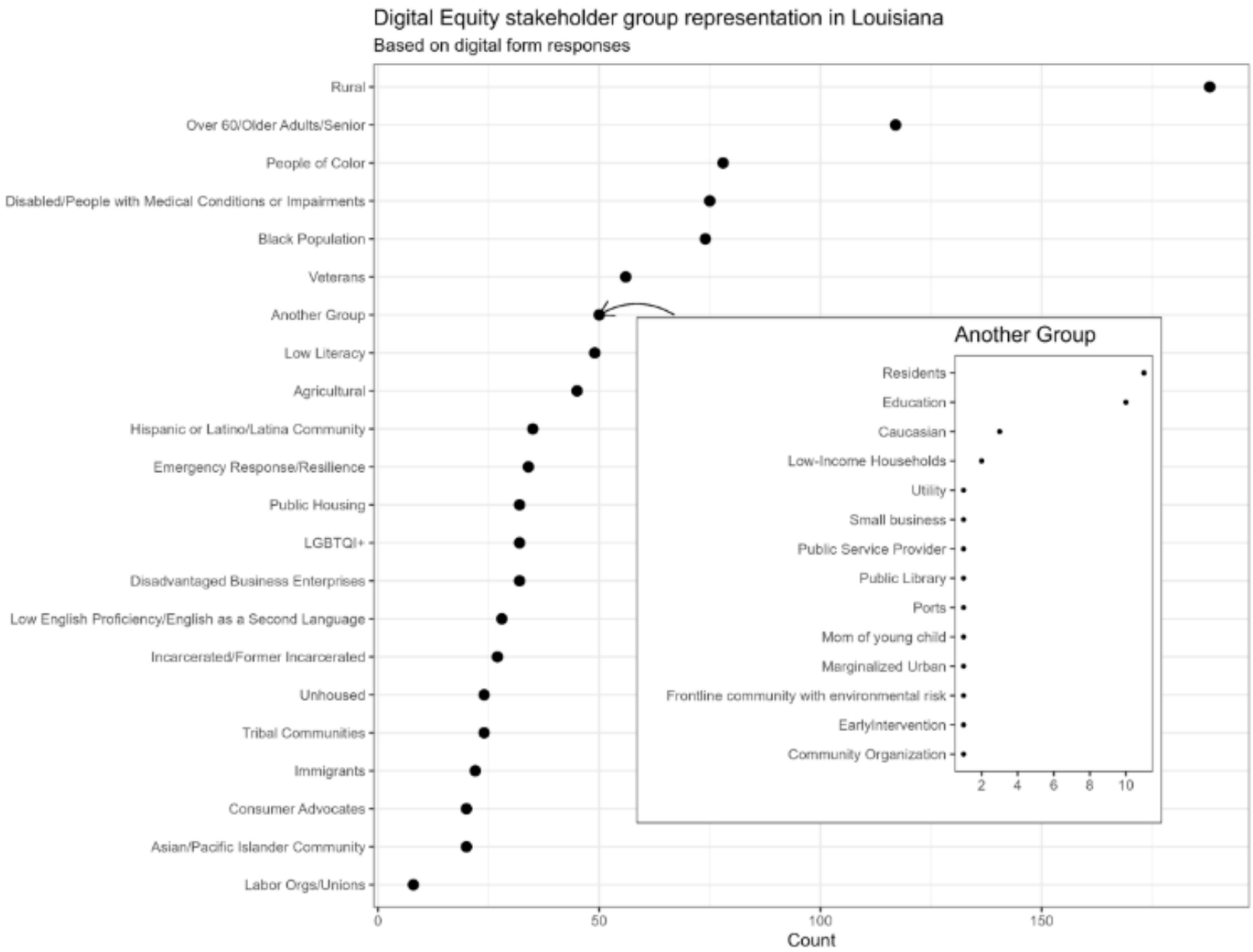
# Digital Form Responses

740 total responses, 319 answered 1+ of the 7 core questions



# Digital Form Responses



Digital Equity stakeholder group representation in Louisiana
Based on digital form responses
Rural

# Bridging the Digital Divide

How can planning districts take part in broadband initiatives?

# Bridging the Digital Divide

What would robust broadband look like in your community?

# Robust Broadband Infrastructure Enables Smart Community Initiatives

## SMART STREET

- Lighting
- Connected Devices
- Cameras
- Messaging
- Public WiFi
- Traffic Control
- Parking
- Kiosks
- Benches
- Digital Signage
- Waste Management

## SMART BUILDING

- Digital Antenna Systems (DAS)
- Access Control
- Automation
- Lighting
- Power
- Security
- Operations & Maintenance Efficiencies
- Remote Access

## SMART COMMUNITY

- Connected Citizens
- Connected Vehicles
- 4G and 5G Connectivity
- Mobility
- Equitable Access
- Public Safety
- Economic Development
- High Bandwidth/Low Latency
- Cloud Access

## SMART SYSTEMS

- Power
- Water
- Applications
- Video Streaming
- Analytics
- Interorganizational Connectivity
- Digital Twins
- Utility Management
- Cost Savings & Efficiencies

# Next steps

What support or information do you need to better work on broadband initiatives in your community?

# Francesca Parent, ERC Fellow

Serving Kisatchie-Delta Regional Planning & Development District

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