

CASE STUDY

How the Acadiana Planning Commission Won \$30M in Broadband Funding by Using Speedtest® Data to Challenge FCC Maps

The Acadiana region of Louisiana — made up of the Parish governments of Acadia Parish, Evangeline Parish, and St. Landry Parish — has historically lacked equitable access to high-speed internet connectivity. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 50% of households in the parishes lack access to the internet. The Acadiana Planning Commission (APC), responsible for the region's economic and community development, wanted to provide better educational and economic opportunities by improving broadband access.

The APC applied for funding through the NTIA Broadband Infrastructure Program, which has made \$288 million in funding available to help close the digital divide in the United States. There were over 230 applicants, and only 13 grants were awarded.

Vice President Kamala Harris and Deputy Secretary of Commerce Don Graves visited Louisiana in March of 2022 to announce that the APC had been awarded a \$30 million grant to fund high-speed internet in 11 rural Acadiana communities.

Q: Why was Acadiana's grant submission chosen?

A: "It's definitely the strategic vision that the team has put together in the application process, coordination, all the different organizations and institutions here, along with the private sector intersection — but it is also an acknowledgment of the need."
— Don Graves, United States Deputy Secretary of Commerce



Identified census blocks where FCC Broadband Maps were inaccurate



Successfully challenged data in 900 census blocks



Won \$30M in funding through the Broadband Infrastructure Program

The Situation

With \$288 million in federal funding on the table to help close the digital divide, the Acadiana Planning Commission knew that the residents of the region would benefit greatly from funding allocation to help improve broadband access.

Federal funding allocation decisions are based on FCC Form 477 broadband mapping data. FCC Form 477 requires broadband providers to self-report the census blocks where they offer internet speeds greater than

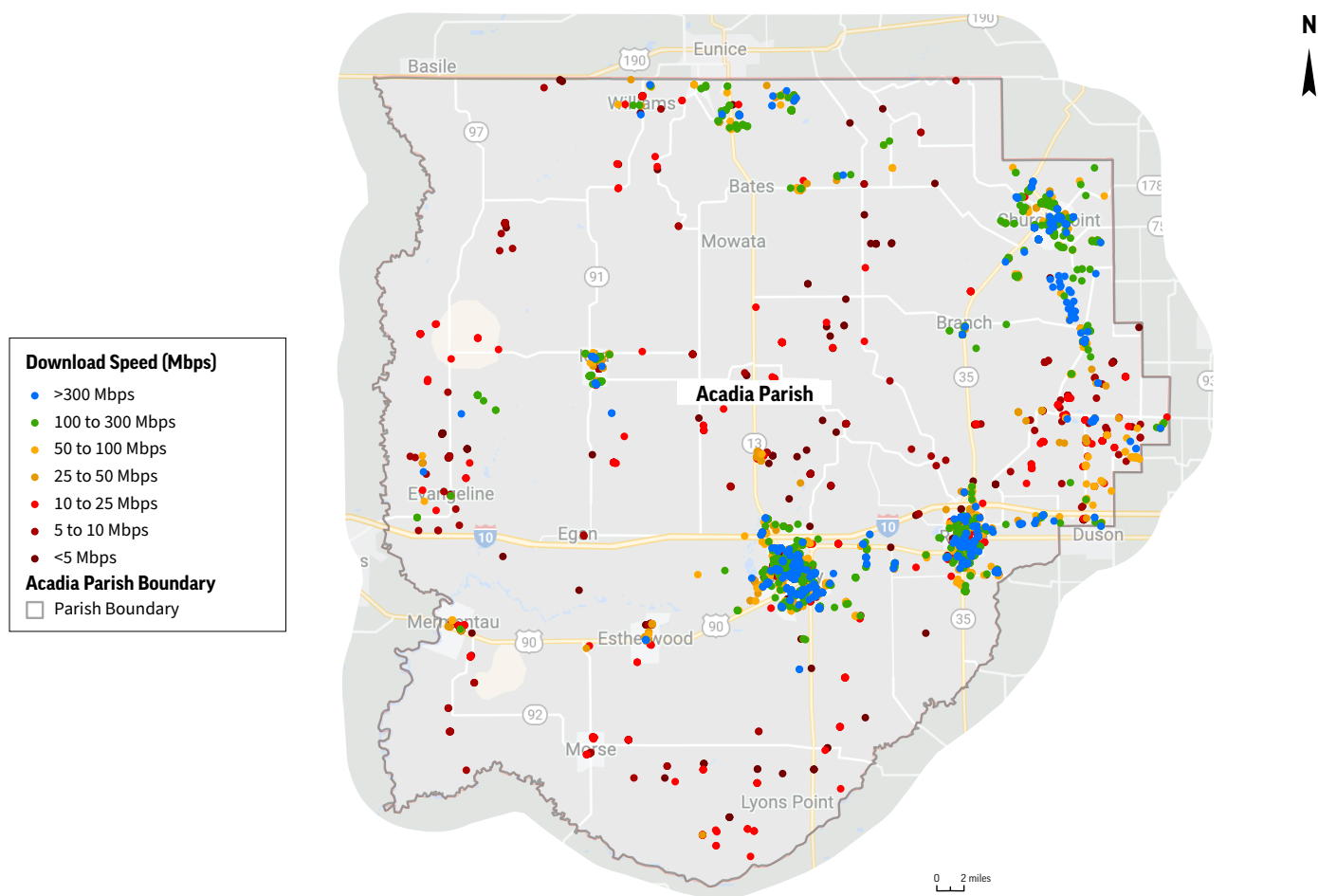
200 kbps download or upload to at least one location. The problem with this is that even if only one location receives service, the entire census block is considered “served”. This information can be misleading because the provider may not be able to offer those speeds or be able to offer them everywhere in the entire census block. The APC needed a way to determine which census blocks were unserved or underserved, in order to challenge FCC data and submit a winning grant application.

The Solution

The Acadiana Planning Commission overlaid Ookla® Speedtest data with FCC data to find out where the real-world network experience of residents was significantly worse than the broadband availability shown in FCC maps, which rely on data reported by internet service providers (ISPs) about their own network performance.

Using only the Acadia parish as an example below, FCC data showed that the entire parish was served with speeds between 25-50 Mbps, however Speedtest data revealed that many locations were actually underserved (represented by the red dots on the map).

Download Speed (Mbps) for all Fixed Providers in the Acadia Parish Speedtest Intelligence® | 2020



Based on these findings, the APC challenged approximately 1000 census blocks across six parishes that comprise the Acadiana region and was successful in 900 of those challenges. Speedtest data helped APC demonstrate that FCC data was inaccurate, and many residents in those 900 blocks did not have access to broadband.

The Outcome

The federal government acknowledged APC's efforts by awarding them a \$30 million grant to deploy last-mile fiber broadband in rural underserved areas of Louisiana.

The APC will work with DBA Allen Communications and LUSFiber to build off existing infrastructure and expand fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) service to households in unserved census blocks. The project aims to connect 22,196 unserved households, 3,723 unserved businesses, and 46 unserved community institutions with broadband. The project will cover 100% of unserved households in its service area of the Acadia, Evangeline, and St. Landry Parishes.

The success of this grant brings Louisiana one step closer to eliminating the digital divide. Ookla empowers local government agencies to understand real-world network conditions and equips them with the data they need to challenge FCC data and secure funding.

About the Acadiana Planning Commission

The Acadiana Planning Commission serves the public sector in the planning and implementation of Economic, Community & Transportation Development throughout the region known as Acadiana, including the Louisiana Parishes of Acadia, Evangeline, and St. Landry.