Best Practices for Rural Broadband Adoption

Broadband access and the skills to use it are necessary to fully engage in today's connected world. This is particularly true in rural communities, where access to telemedicine, distance learning and e-commerce keep residents and local economies healthy, competitive and engaged. According to NTIA's latest computer and Internet use report, rural Internet adoption rates are five to seven percentage points lower than those in urban communities. As more daily activities move online, it is increasingly important for all Americans to access and use the Internet in a meaningful way regardless of where they live. While no one-size-fits-all solution exists for increasing broadband adoption, all communities should consider the following strategies:

1. **Evaluate the various needs for broadband adoption and digital skills.** Each community has its own characteristics, opportunities and challenges. Encourage input from local businesses and residents to meet broadband needs and develop solutions. For example, Crook County, OR worked with the regional economic development council, community college and state university to build a state-of-the-art computer training center and computer skills curriculum for residents when several high tech companies moved their data centers to the county.

2. **Integrate digital inclusion into the economic development strategy.** Although much of the attention in rural areas is focused on broadband access, broadband adoption and digital skills are also important. Research by Oklahoma State University shows that rural counties with high adoption rates display improved economic indicators and that adoption of broadband, not just availability, matters for rural economies.

3. **Build local, regional and statewide partnerships.** Organizations with ties to the community, such as libraries, community health centers and county and town governments, should look to regional and state partnerships. Institutions such as regional economic development agencies and state university extension programs can play a critical role in providing resources and sharing best practices across various communities.

4. **Use digital tools to convene people and disseminate information.** Leverage online conferencing and webinars to bring people together across geographic distances for planning meetings, technical assistance and train-the-trainer programs. The University of Tennessee Knoxville offered webinars to rural librarians throughout Appalachia to assist them with their technology planning and programs. The Nebraska Extension Rural Community Vitality Initiative posted a series of videos on technology skills for small businesses.

5. **Meet people where they are.** Rural libraries, schools and other trusted community institutions play a pivotal role in promoting broadband adoption. The Coffeenville Public Library in Kansas lends mobile hotspots, allowing residents to take the Internet anywhere they need it. Additionally, on the ground outreach is often needed to convince people of the importance of the Internet and to teach them the skills to use it effectively. The rural telecommunications company ToledoTel set up information booths at tribal pow wows to inform residents about their Internet services.
6. **Connect residents to training.** Even when residents own computers or have access to the Internet, they may not be comfortable, confident users. Residents need skills beyond basic digital literacy to fully benefit from opportunities in distance learning, telework, telehealth, e-commerce and online government services. A number of rural training programs use "mobile labs," vehicles outfitted with computers, to bring training onsite to different locations.

Interested in learning more about strategies to promote broadband adoption and digital inclusion in your community? Attend our BroadbandUSA Practical Broadband Conversations: Strategies for Broadband Adoption and Digital Inclusion in Rural Communities webinar on April 19 from 2:00-3:00 p.m. or contact us at broadbandusa@ntia.doc.gov and 202-482-2048 to connect with BroadbandUSA technical assistance staff.

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**Broadband News**

On March 30th, the Department of Commerce and First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) announced the selection of AT&T to build the first nationwide public safety broadband network. Watch Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross deliver the decision [here](#). Read more [here](#).

- Route Fifty soliciting nominations for Navigator Awards
- NITRD releases Federal Smart Cities and Communities Programs Resource Guide
- Attend the Partnership for Progress on the Digital Divide 2017 International Conference
- Mozilla, National Science Foundation (NSF) announce Wireless Innovation for a Networked Society (WINS) Challenges
- FCC announces FY2017 E-rate funding cap
- Attend the Public WiFi SuperCluster (PWSC) April webinar
- May Public WiFi SuperCluster (PWSC) conference in San Jose
- Arctic Broadband Forum set for May
- Rural Health Care Program initial filing window period open for FY2017
- Community Technology Network holding second annual Digital Leaders Awards
- Register for the Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition Seventh Annual Conference: United States of Anchors

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**New Broadband Resources**

Next Century Cities released a guide to help local communities investigate pole attachment requirements in their states. In addition to offering the basics organized by state, the guide provides information on One Touch Make Ready (OTMR) and Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations. Access the guide [here](#).

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**BroadbandUSA Spotlight**

Do you need help developing your broadband program? Join BroadbandUSA for a planning and funding workshop in Arizona on April 19th. Our technical assistance team will be leading a half-day session that will focus on best practices and lessons learned from the field, and feature open discussion and practice-sharing among participants.

- **Who:** BroadbandUSA's technical assistance team will lead the workshop.
- **When:** Wednesday, April 19, 2017; from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. MST. The workshop will be held the day after the Next Century Cities "Digital Southwest" broadband summit.
- **Where:** Mesa Arts Center, 1 E Main Street, Mesa, AZ 85201

The technical assistance workshop is free to attend. Click [here](#) to register for the half-day workshop.

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**Contact Us**

If you're interested in receiving technical assistance, email us at broadbandusa@ntia.doc.gov or call us at 202-482-2048. For more information, visit our website at [www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandusa](http://www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandusa). Follow on online:

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**Webinars**

**BroadbandUSA Webinar Series**

**Topic:** BroadbandUSA Practical Broadband Conversations: Strategies for Broadband Adoption and Digital Inclusion in Rural Communities

**Date:** Wednesday, April 19 from 2:00-3:00 p.m. EDT

**Overview:** This webinar will focus on strategies to promote broadband adoption and digital inclusion in rural communities, highlighting the role of libraries and university extension programs. The speakers will discuss research findings on the effect of broadband adoption in rural economic development, as well as program strategies to facilitate digital inclusion, such as mobile-hotspot lending programs, community outreach and digital skills training. Click [here](#) to register.

**Speakers:** Dr. Brian Whitacre, Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics, Oklahoma State University; Dr. Bharat Mehra, Associate Professor, School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee Knoxville; and Katie Hill, Director, Coffeyville (Kan.) Public Library. Emy Tseng, Senior Broadband Program Specialist, BroadbandUSA will facilitate the discussion.

*Please pre-register for the webinar. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.*

Release 1 of the BroadbandUSA Connectivity Assessment Tool will be available in May 2017 to nearly 20 county planning teams who will have the opportunity to use the tool to support planning efforts, leverage national data and produce planning and resource recommendations. After initial feedback from Release 1 users, we anticipate adding additional users.