The County Role in Digital Inclusion Planning

Aug. 25, 2023

N.C. Department of Information Technology
Division of Broadband and Digital Equity

NCDIT NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF
INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY

DEFINITIONS: DIGITAL EQUITY & INCLUSION

Digital Equity

- All individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy

- Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services

Digital Inclusion

- Activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and communication technologies:
  - Access to affordable high-speed internet
  - Access to a device that meets the needs of the user
  - Access to digital literacy training
  - Quality technical support
  - Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration

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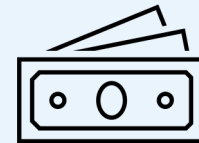# DIGITAL DEVICES, SKILLS & AFFORDABILITY

328,000

Estimated N.C. households without a home laptop or desktop computer

91%
of N.C. jobs require some digital skills

1/3
of U.S. workers don't have foundational digital skills

1.3M
N.C. households would have to pay more than 2% of their annual income to afford broadband cost of $60/month

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AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (ACP)

- The Affordable Connectivity Program provides:
    - Up to a $30 per month discount on internet services
    - Up to a $75 per month discount for households on tribal lands
    - $100 discount for a laptop, computer or tablet bought through a participating provider

- Goal for 1 million households to enroll by December 2023

- 825,444 households enrolled (Aug. 21)

- Encouraging internet service providers to participate and provide $30/month plan

STATE DIGITAL EQUITY GRANT PROGRAM

Digital Champion Grant Program (2023) - $14M

- Build capacity to develop or expand digital equity programs in communities

- For local governments and nonprofits, community-based organizations, and key stakeholder groups

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DIGITAL EQUITY STATE PLANNING

Year-long state planning process for Digital Equity program to set policy priorities for next five years

- Identify barriers to digital equity for general and covered populations

- Develop measurable objectives for overcoming barriers

- Asset Inventory and Needs Assessment

- Integrate local digital inclusion plans into the state plan

- Interagency coordination

- Workforce planning

- Mapping

TIMELINE

- November 2022: Awarded funds for planning

- January - August 2023: Local Coordination including listening sessions; needs assessment; asset inventory

- September 2023: Draft Digital Equity Plan posted for public comments

- October 2023: Digital Equity Plan due to NTIA

- 2024-2028: Digital Equity Plan implemented, and additional federal funding sought

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ASSET INVENTORY SURVEY: CLOSES AUG. 31

Do organizations in your community offer services to help people get online? Have them take the Asset Inventory Survey by Aug. 31

- We want to learn about organizations, businesses, and programs that support internet affordability, access to computers and digital devices, digitals skills and literacy, tech support, and free Wi-Fi, so we can publicly publish these assets and identify gaps that need to be addressed in the state's comprehensive digital equity plan

- Take the survey now at: **https://go.ncsu.edu/nc_assets**

- Additional planning resources: www.ncbroadband.gov/digitalequity

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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BAND-NC:
Building a New Digital Economy in North Carolina

August 25, 2023

What is BAND-NC?

Goal: Equip counties to meet needs and build more digitally equitable communities. Make North Carolina the first state in the nation where every county has a digital inclusion plan.
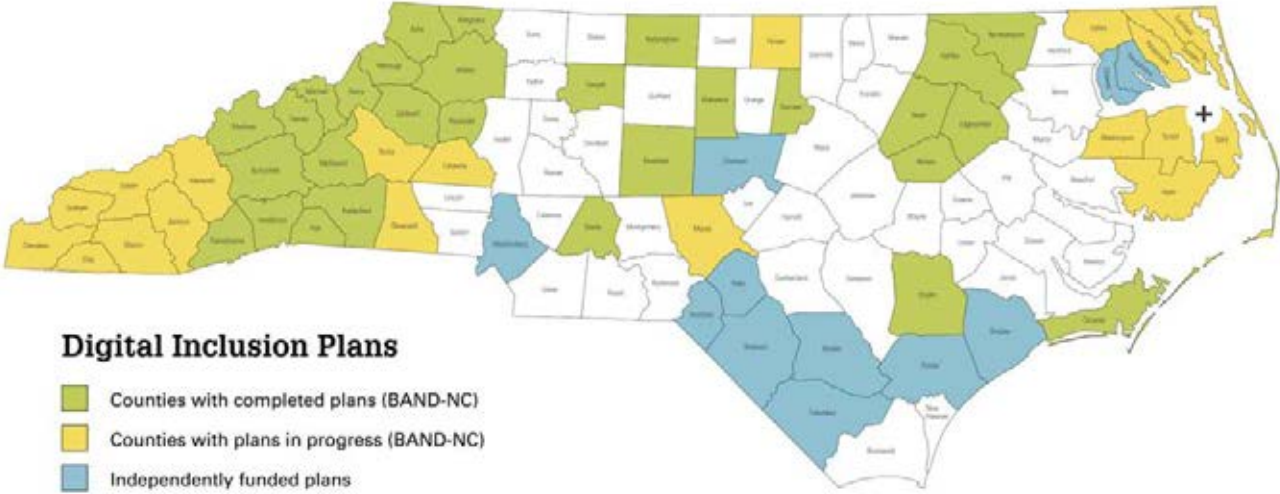
Digital Inclusion plans are community strategic plans that address the components of digital inclusion and work to close the digital divide.

NC Regional Digital Inclusion Plans

- Develop digital inclusion plans for every county in the region and the Qualla Boundary

- Make significant and sustainable progress in implementing digital inclusion strategies

- Build capacity and stronger regional commitment to digital inclusion

Digital Inclusion Plans as of August 25, 2023

Digital Inclusion Plans

- Counties with completed plans (BAND-NC)
- Counties with plans in progress (BAND-NC)
- Independently funded plans

DIGITAL INCLUSION PLAN: A community strategic plan that addresses the components of digital inclusion and work to close the digital divide

- Ensure stakeholder engagement
  - Surveys
  - Focus groups
- Community advocates
- Up-to-date data:
  - NCBIO survey
  - Local surveys

BAND-NC
Building a New Digital Economy in NC

Who should be involved?

- Community colleges and universities
- Local Chambers of Commerce
- Public libraries
- Churches/other faith institutions
- Local businesses
- County Cooperative Extension Offices
- Nonprofits
- Local government

Example Recommendations

- Expanding data collection efforts to include larger percentages of underserved populations - Durham County, Forsyth County
- Digital Literacy Extension Agent - Randolph County
- Enabling Smart, Accessible, User-Friendly Community Centers with internet access and resource - Forsyth County
- Create and support a device refurbishment program to provide free or low-cost devices - Land of Sky Regional Council
- Prioritizing inclusion efforts with underserved communities - Carteret County

Resources

- BAND-NC Digital Inclusion Planning Guide
  go.ncsu.edu/digital-inclusion-planning-guide

- BAND-NC completed plans and workshops
  https://iei.ncsu.edu/band-nc/resources/

- Affordable Connectivity Program
  https://www.affordableconnectivity.gov/

- NC BIO Survey
  https://www.ncbroadband.gov/north-carolina-broadband-survey

Questions?

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Chatham County Digital Inclusion Planning
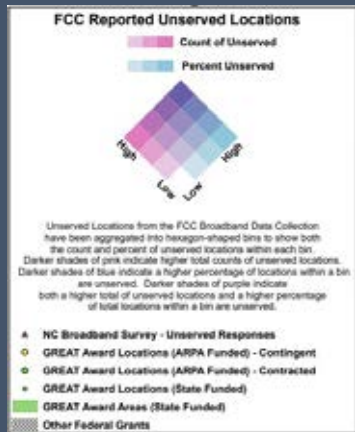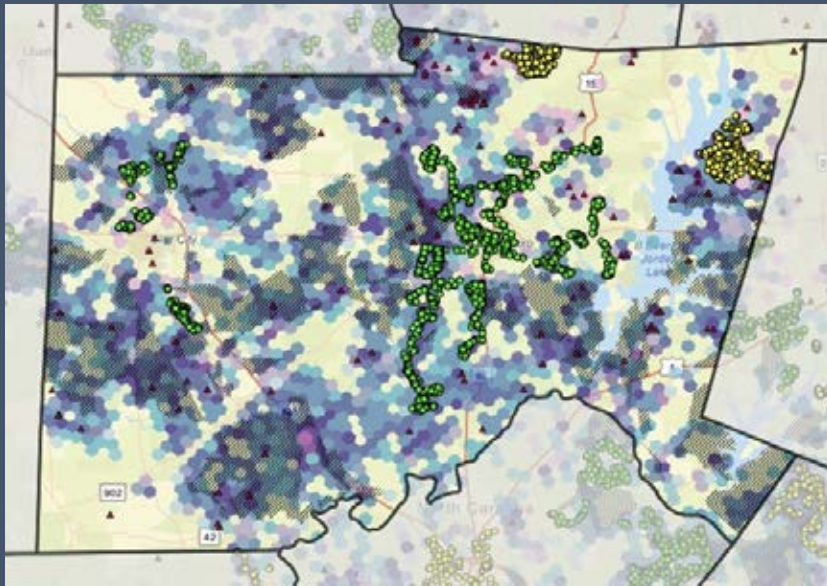
Brenton Hart – August 25th, 2023
116th Annual NCACC Conference

Agenda

1) Chatham County Broadband Background
2) Digital Inclusion Coalition
3) Background on Digital Inclusion Planning
4) Availability
5) Access
6) Adoption
7) Challenges and Successes
8) Continuing the Work and Next Steps

Chatham Digital Inclusion Plan

Chatham County, NC
Digital Inclusion Plan Coalition

Draft in Progress
September 30, 2022

CHATHAM COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA
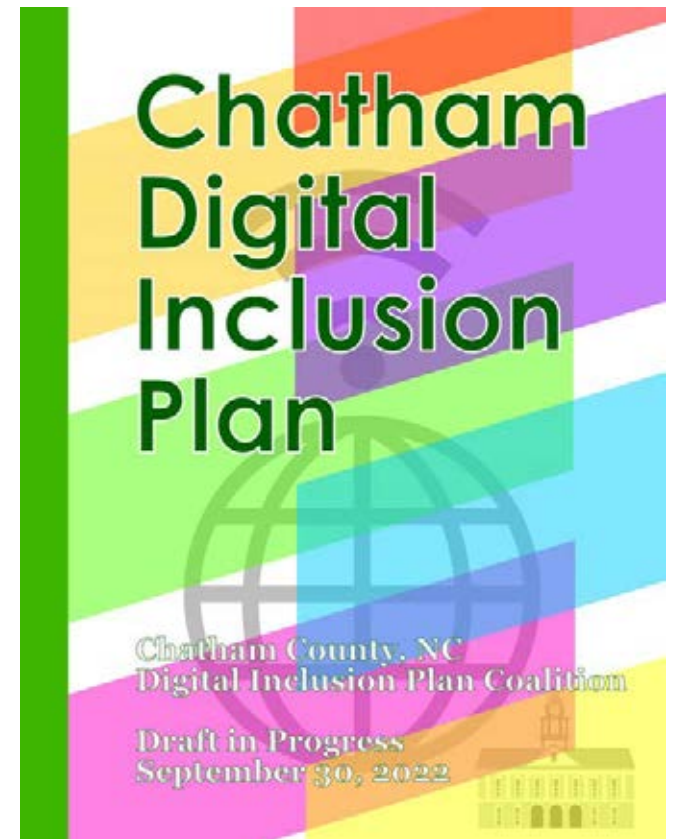
Background on Chatham County Broadband

- Unserved/Underserved Areas

- Internet Service Providers (ISPs)

- Copper/Fiber

- Federal Funding

Chatham County Digital Inclusion Planning Coalition

Digital Inclusion Planning

- Mission, Vision, and Values

- Asset Inventory

- Challenges

- On-Going Efforts

- Goals, Strategies, and Objectives

"We envision a dynamic and inclusive community in Chatham County where every resident has access to reliable high-speed broadband, digital technology, and the skills needed to participate and fully achieve their goals in the digital age." –

Vision of Draft Chatham County Digital Inclusion Plan

Goal 5: Expand access to digital devices.

Strategy 5.1: Expand device ownership within the county.

Objectives:

A) Partner with organizations to expand device ownership to those in need.
B) Gain funding for programs that distribute computer devices to community members.
C) Promote volunteering and donations to organizations that provide devices to community members.

CHATHAM COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA

FCC National Broadband Map - Wired

Map Legend
Served Units Percentage

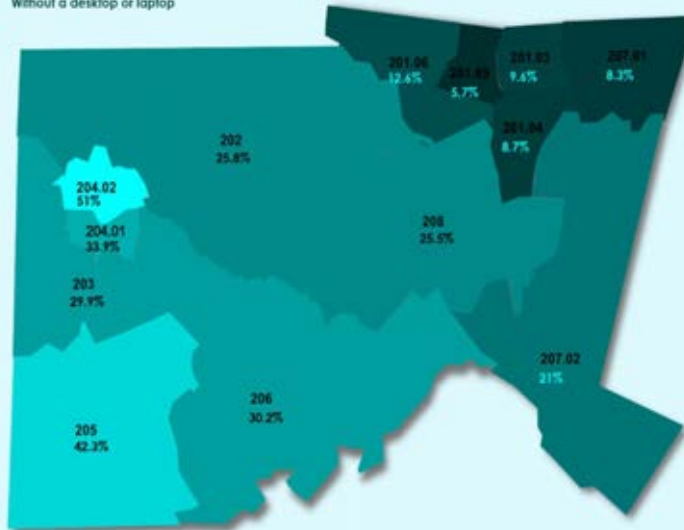|	
	0%
	0 - 20%
	20 - 40%
	40 - 60%
	60 - 80%
	80 - 100%

Availability

- Broadband Infrastructure
    - Mobile
    - Wired
    - Satellite
    - Fixed Wireless

- Asset Inventory

- On-Going Efforts
    - Grant Funding
    - Federal and State Initiatives

BI Driven Percent of Residents Without a Desktop or Laptop

Access

- Access to Devices
- Affordability
- On-Going Efforts
  - Public Broadband Access Points
  - Digital Devices
  - Public Computer Access Points
  - Discount Programs

Adoption

Digital Literacy and Ongoing Efforts

Central Carolina Community College

- Computer Literacy Classes
- Student laptop lending program

Chatham County Public Schools

- Computer Literacy Classes
- Take-home computers for students

Chatham Community Library

- Adult Computer Literacy Classes
- Public Computers and Wi-Fi

CENTRAL CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CHATHAM COUNTY SCHOOLS

Internet Basics
August 7 & 21
3:00 pm
Chatham Community Library

CHATHAM COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA

Challenges & Successes

Challenges

- Mappings

- Understanding On-Going Efforts

- Managing the Plan in the Interest of all Parties

Successes

- Community-led Nature of the Plan

- Development of Asset Inventory

- Goals, Strategies, and Objectives Development

CHATHAM COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA

Continuing the Work & Next Steps

- Adoption (Community-wide)

- Responsibility to Upkeep Plan

- Utilize Metrics to Understand Impact of Plan and Adjust

- Continue Community Outreach

- Facilitate the Completion of Plan Goals and Strategies

Thank You!

Brenton Hart, MPA

Policy Analyst

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CONNECT ROCKINGHAM

Rockingham County's collective planning and funding approach to digital equity.

Better Together.

We are seeking to tackle challenges to broadband access, affordability and adoption within Rockingham County - the scale and complexity is much bigger than any one organization.

Involved 27 agencies in the process.

Leading Outcomes

- Countywide Digital Inclusion Plan

- Ongoing meetings to prioritize efforts

- Collaborative Broadband Infrastructure Funding

- Well-positioned for affordability/adoption funding

ECT ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

Inclusion Plan
ss Report
ry 2023   **DRAFT**

PROJECT STATUS COLOR MAP

| Achieved | Maintain | In Process | Not Started | Other |

⭐ Indicates coalition's priority for future grant funding.

AND OBJECTIVES

ILITY: Physical broadband infrastructure, including all supporting technology needed to deliver Internet service.

Improve Maps. Strategy 1.1: Encourage residents and local officials to contact legislative representatives to request r additions to the laws that will improve broadband infrastructure mapping.

A: Create policies mandating that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) provide NCDIT with current and planned y by street and address. — **In Process**

B: Dedicate Federal and State funds to broadband projects to collect information from individual households esses regarding the availability and speed of internet connections. — **In Process**

Improve Maps. Strategy 1.2: Maximize the efforts of Rockingham County Information Technology to create complete g new and existing information.

A: Build upon ISP relationships to expand mapping of current coverage, gaps, and plans for expansion.

B: Consolidate maps for greater understanding of issues regarding availability versus access deficiencies. — **In Process**

C: Dedicate Federal, State, and Local funds to collect information from individual households and business the availability and speed of internet connections.

Increase Connectivity. Strategy 2.1: Dedicate State and Federal funds to expand broadband access.

A: Increase the number of grant applications to connect eligible areas of the County, including cities and nty government should assist in GREAT grant applications; cities and towns should capitalize upon d downtown designations to seek grants to fund public Wi-Fi networks in those areas. — **Not Started**

B: Work with County and local governments to develop an RFP to determine the scope of need for future d projects. — **In Process**

Improve Connectivity. Strategy 3.1: Encourage residents and local officials to contact legislative representatives and anges or additions to the laws that hinder fiber-based broadband expansion.

A: Create or change laws to allow use of existing dark fiber and government fiber infrastructure construction l in areas where internet service providers will not invest in improvements. — **???**

B: Create or change laws to provide for more competition in the broadband market among ISPs.

Improve Connectivity. Strategy 3.2: Regionalize the effort to increase availability to leverage more funds to create s for internet service providers to expand fiber infrastructure. (MAY WANT TO REVISIT GOAL FOR FEASIBILITY).

A: Piedmont Triad Regional Council should capitalize on its relationships with municipal officials to e regionwide efforts at broadband expansion. — **In Process**

Focus on where internet connectivity may be available, but barriers exist to keep that keep them from accessing it.

Expand Wireless Access. Strategy 4.1: Complete a community scan of private businesses, churches, and community-anizations that provide free Wi-Fi network access. Use GIS mapping to overlay public and private access maps.

A: Collect internet access data from private businesses and community-based organizations and submit to am County's Broadband Initiatives Team for mapping. — **Maintain**

B: Make maps easily accessible to the community through County, municipal, and Coalition member websites. — **Not Started**

pand Wireless Access. Strategy 4.2: Within five years, increase the areas that have no-cost Wi-Fi network availability, im of no-cost free public or private access points within no more than 10 miles of each Rockingham County residence.

A: Enable Wi-Fi access in government buildings where feasible. Update: Public/Private networks for security.

B: Enable Wi-Fi access in all community and neighborhood parks by installing weather protected routers at ies that would expand access to parking lots and picnic areas. List of recommend parks in full report.

C: Enable Wi-Fi access development in churches, income-based housing, and community based organization Funding will be needed. Pilot: Federal HUD's Connect Home USA and Neighborhood Works Program. — **In Process**

D: Equip public and medical transportation options with Wi-Fi access (school busses, RCATS, Pelham)

E: Fund infrastructure needs like sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and public transportation to decrease barriers to i opportunities (long-term objective).

d on next page.

CONNECT ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

Digital Inclusion Plan
Progress Report
February 2023

PROJECT STATUS COLOR MAP

| Achieved | Maintain | In Process | Not Started | Other |

Goal #4: Expand Wireless Access. Strategy 4.3: Establish a countywide Broadband Resource Education Center.

⭐ Objective A: Identify and equip a facility in an accessible location that can serve as an advocacy/implementation hub for home and public broadband access, affordable personal devices and services, and local technology training and support programs (i.e., Digital Navigators). — **Not Started**

Goal #5: Increase access to low-cost or no-cost broadband. Strategy 5.1: Address gaps in unlimited bandwidth hotspot funding as well as connectivity for students residing in areas where hotspots are ineffective.

⭐ Objective A: Explore funding options to sustain unlimited bandwidth hotspots for all school students in need of the service beyond the FY2022 school year.

⭐ Objective B: Reduce connectivity barriers for e-learning or students in quarantine in areas unable to connect through hotspots. — **TBD**

Goal #5: Increase access to low-cost or no-cost broadband. Strategy 5.2: Increase enrollment in established programs (i.e., Affordability Connectivity Program, provider plans) that give broadband stipends, scholarships, or subsidies.

⭐ Objective A: Explore opportunities to implement assistance programs (similar to utility assistance programs) through the Department of Social Services or community-based organizations serving Rockingham County.

Objective B: Utilize local networks, marketing departments within participating organizations to increase community awareness of no-cost or reduced internet service. — **In Process**

Goal #6: Increase Device Ownership. Strategy 6.1: Utilize current education programs (Pre-K- Community College) to increase device distribution.

⭐ Objective A: Eliminate or minimize Chromebook insurance costs for students enrolled in Rockingham County schools (average cost = $30.00 per device).

Objective B: Increase the number of devices available to enrolled students through Rockingham Community College's device loaner program. — **TBD**

Objective C: Establish a device/equipment lending program through the County library system.

Objective D: Secure funding to reopen the financial assistance application process for students at RCC needing scholarships to purchase internet service plans (including installation costs).

Goal #6: Increase Device Ownership. Strategy 6.2: Expand device ownership within the community.

⭐ Objective A: Develop and sustain a refurbishing program with an identified lead organization (long-term objective) — **Not Started**

Objective B: Explore a Device Refurbishment curriculum with Rockingham Community College and RCS Career and Technical Education (funding would be needed until an ADM funding stream is established. — **TBD**

2 Objective C: Provide funding for programs that provide computer devices to community members. — **In Process**

ADOPTION: Digital literacy, awareness of access options, engaging community leaders to share resources locally.

Priority Needs:
1. Create and communicate resources for outreach about current internet access areas.
2. Fill the gaps of who else is supplying information technology assistance and education and address gaps uncovered by outreach in the community.
3. Build consensus on navigation/inclusion definitions between the community and resource providers; set baseline measures.

⭐ Objective A: Connecting digital literacy training with relevant content and services through direct outreach where people are meeting already, as well as creating space for focus groups and listening sessions. — **TBD**

Objective B: Running more public access computing centers across Rockingham County.

Objective C: Exploration of secondary and post-secondary curriculum and certifications in Digital Literacy and Navigation. Potential for a Digital Navigator support network that would help develop relationships with community members, as well as the exploration of a government sponsored staff position to expand and support digital literacy training and promotion. — **Not Started**

Objective D: Leverage local non-profits, grassroots organizations, and faith based organizations within Rockingham County to support County efforts. These groups can be leveraged to gain access to under-connected, underserved, and low-wealth residents.

Objective E: Work with retail and corporate entities to provide funding for hardware, software, reduced cost services, EBB, as well as establishing public/private partnership. — **TBD**

Strategy Examples

- Increase connectivity, expand infrastructure;

- Connecting individuals with digital literacy training and devices where they already gather (i.e., churches, libraries, etc.);

- Increase access to low-cost or no-cost broadband.