

BROADBAND

Steps to Success

One Create Leadership Group Or Task Force

Establishing a broadband task force will help prioritize bringing broadband to a community. Participants for this task force may include the following:

- school system superintendents, principals, tech officers
- county commissioners, clerks, council members
- community foundations
- business leaders
- banks/investment institutions, other anchor institutions
- economic development officials
- city/town leadership, mayor's office, clerk, treasurer, town planner, utilities dept.
- public library official
- hospitals/healthcare
- agriculture community leadership

Task Force Contact Information

Case Study: Switzerland County For Switzerland County, the focused interest in expanding broadband began at a regional level with their Southeastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (SIRPC) board. They had been discussing the limitations of broadband access around their 8-county region and the negative effect on economic development concurrently with the states' push for a more regional approach to infrastructure projects. The work of their task force eventually led to a Broadband Ready Certification and a successful Next Level Connections grant in partnership with Southeastern Indiana REMC and SEI Communications. Working together regionally made all the difference in their success.

"Establishing a taskforce was vital to the success of our project. Broadband is complicated. So simply coming to a mutual understanding of what broadband means was crucial. Getting together as a group and sharing the challenges and experiences of the different agencies and businesses regarding broadband led us to educating ourselves about broadband in general, different technologies available, and solutions that other communities have found. Once we had a solid understanding of what was possible and how we could make broadband work, we became a solid, united force."

-Sarah Brichto, Workforce Education/Grant Development Director for Switzerland County Joint Initiative



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Two Become a Broadband Ready Community (BBRC)

Communities that are BBRC certified send a signal to the telecommunications industry that the community has taken steps to reduce barriers to broadband infrastructure investment.

To be certified, a local unit of government will need to be compliant with requirements listed in IC 5-28-28.5-7.

Broadband is not guaranteed to those who become certified, though it is a step in the right direction to reduce regular hurdles throughout the infrastructure investment process.

Learn how to become a BBRC and see which communities are already registered here.

Case Study: Owen County Owen County experienced many changes within their leadership in 2021. Old and new officials set the goal to become a Broadband Ready Community. This cooperative success story prompted the Owen County Chamber of Commerce to showcase how the town and county had worked together for the benefit of the citizens. The cooperation on display in this case study has spread throughout the community and continues to excite others about future possibilities of broadband access.

"Providing Owen County with fast, reliable, and affordable internet is a leading focus for both the Owen County Commissioners and the Spencer Town Council. The COVID-19 pandemic advanced the importance of this need to a greater extent with businesses shifting to 'Work from Home' and education turning to an increased need for online schooling. The Owen County Chamber and EDC became the liaisons to provide each local entity with the necessary information and took the lead on organizing the required steps. Simultaneous collaboration between the county and the town proved to streamline the process of preparing for BBRC designation by having the same contact person as well as shared ordinance development. Working together towards this unified effort also built greater social capital among our county and town officials."

-Marce King, Executive Director of the Owen County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development.

"The Town of Spencer is very excited about becoming a Broadband Ready Community. This initiative will continue to unite our town as well as our county. Our students can now look forward to having more resources available to them to advance their education and prepare for the workforce. This designation opens the door of opportunity for our entire community! We are very excited about the potential this designation brings."

-Michael Spinks, Town Council President.



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Three Consider A Broadband Plan Or Feasibility Study

A broadband plan or feasibility study encourages communities to plan for long-term development. These can be funded through programs like OCRA's Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) or through self-funding.

- 1) OCRA Broadband Readiness Planning Grant (CDBG) [minimum technical requirements](#)
- 2) Self-funding a plan or study using existing funds, private contributions or COVID Recovery funds

Case Study: Greene County "In this new working climate, it is vitally important for rural communities to put a strong emphasis on broadband and place it at the top of their list of priorities. Greene County was fortunate to have been selected as a pilot community prior to the pandemic, but we still have a lot of work to do. The Broadband Readiness Program allowed us the opportunity to get a closer look and really understand our current situation. Without this study, we would still be relying on outdated information to help guide our decisions. To those communities looking to pursue this program, make sure the steering committee chosen is one that is active and engaged and work closely with the consultant throughout the process. It is invaluable."

*–Brienne Jerrels, Executive Director of Greene County Economic Development,
1 of the 5 pilot communities for OCRA's CDBG Broadband Planning Grant*



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Four Engage With Providers To Encourage Investment

Communities should form a strong working relationship with providers in the area.

- Ask what we, as community leadership, can do to help.
- Become familiar with state and federal funding opportunities by means of press releases, newsletters, social media, etc.
- Seek to understand where provider currently has assets and ask where they are looking to expand.

Case Study: Crawford County Crawford County Economic Development Corporation and Mainstream Fiber held local studies funded by OCRA planning grant funds focused on ROI and broadband planning. The county also partnered with Roberto Gallardo with the Purdue Center for Regional Development to produce a local digital divide presentation. All sources outlined broadband access as being the top priority for additional development within Crawford County.

"Crawford County has been an outlier of sorts with data that did not reflect the reality of the landscape. OCRA and PCRD provided the much needed resources to establish the data needed to draw a more accurate assessment. Dr. Roberto Gallardo and his team helped us make a stronger case for broadband access. We still have a long way to go, but at least we have engaged the public and private sector partners to bring the much needed utility for our future connectivity and growth."

- Michael A. Thissen, Executive Director, Crawford County Economic Development Partnership



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Five Showcase Incentives And Benefits Of Broadband Expansion

Tax exemptions such as those outlined in Senate Enrolled Act No. 560 (Infrastructure Development Zone) make it appealing for broadband providers to invest in an area by offering exemptions to business and personal property taxes on broadband investment.

Without this investment, the business and personal property taxes on the investment would not exist. At the end of the exemption period the tax would then be applicable. Communities enacting an IDZ have shown over and over that this process has been the deciding factor for a provider to begin their project.

Case Study: Daviess County "By designating all of Daviess County as an Infrastructure Development Zone, our community leaders and elected officials are taking a major step in addressing the broadband accessibility challenges that face us today. By establishing this zone, we were able to move quickly to get the incentive program established and enable our broadband partners to begin work immediately on qualifying fiber expansion projects. In this instance, our Infrastructure Development Zone opened up the potential for a nearly \$20 Million countywide fiber expansion from RTC Communications, which is based right here in Davies County."

-Bryant Niehoff, Executive Director of Daviess County Economic Development.



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Six Increase the Adoption Rate in Your Community

Adoption rate refers to the ratio of those who subscribe to broadband out of those who have access. Increasing the adoption rate will make an area more attractive to providers and investors.

- Use of Purdue Partnership/Digital Inclusion Planning ([Purdue Center for Regional Development](#))
- Provide adoption assistance for families of free and reduced lunch students
- [Emergency Broadband Benefit \(EBB\)](#)
- Digital literacy programs for community members
- Repurpose laptops, computers and devices

Case Study: Rush County The Rush County Broadband Task Force's mission is to work with providers, community leaders, organizations and residents to improve internet access and digital literacy. The Rush County Digital Inclusion Plan 2020-2025 has four main goals: (1) Improve infrastructure for greater adoption; (2) Provide devices that can access the internet to those who need them; (3) Train individuals on how to use the devices for internet access; and (4) Improve economic development. The task force envisions every home and business equipped with affordable, adequate and reliable internet access where residents are able to fully participate in the digital economy and society.

"To improve broadband is seemingly a long-term project. Finding even small wins and celebrating them is important to keep moving us towards completing our goals."

-Carole Yeend and Mark McCorkle Rush County Broadband Task Force Co-Chairs



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Seven Compile Inventory of Public Resources/Assets

Having an inventory of public resources and assets will help providers interested in your area, eliminating much of the groundwork on their behalf.

- What are the vertical assets? (i.e. towers, grain silos, etc.)
- Is there any existing or unused fiber which could handle more traffic?
- Compile list of ordinances/permits/requirements for the submission process.
- Streamline the permit process and ensure rapid review of all submitted permits/applications.

Case Study: Parke County In following the Indiana Broadband Ready Community ordinance, section 3, the Parke County Commissioners appointed a single point of contact for all matters related to a project – Parke County Redevelopment Director Cyndi Todd. This was intended to create a smooth process for providers to move through permitting and other requirements. As the POC, Cyndi lead the efforts in Parke County to do the following:

- Gather feedback from a provider on the Highway Permit to Utilize Right of Way resulting in an updated form.
- Obtain the permits to appropriate departments for timely approvals.
- Communicate and collaborate at the local level to contribute to the success of the projects.



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Eight Gather Data: Surveys, Mapping, and Eligibility

Data can be used in conversations with providers, grant applications and more. It is important to have reliable data at your fingertips.

- Map areas where service is needed.
- Use surveys to identify those served/unserved areas.
- Identify areas eligible for federal, state, local and private funding.

Case Study: Allen County "Surveying the Allen County community was a real eye-opener with respect to existing needs. The data collection process enabled a better understanding of where some of the affordability and coverage gaps are and should allow for a quicker resolution to those identified issues."

–Nelson Peters, Allen County Commissioner



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Nine Identify Funding Sources

Identifying funding sources can assist communities with broadband planning as well as making them more attractive and competitive for investment.

- COVID relief funding from ARPA and CAA
- Federal, state and local resources
- Community foundations and other philanthropic institutions
- Anchor institutions
- In-kind materials, labor or administrative support



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Ten Engage with Partners to Increase Local Workforce in Anticipation of Buildout

Broadband brings more opportunities than just internet. It brings new jobs, new residents and new businesses. Communities should be prepared to increase their local workforce.

- Become or look for assistance from a 21st Century Talent Region (21CTR)
- Utilize 21CTR for representation across government, education, workforce, economic development and philanthropy
- Identify career pathways already in place that can expand/be replicated
- Encourage those unaware of 21CTR to join/have an understanding of the need to be involved and engaged
- Visit the [21st Century Talent Regions](#) website for more information



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