



# Indiana Statewide Broadband Strategic Plan

Office of Lieutenant Governor Suzanne Crouch,  
Office of Broadband Opportunities

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STATE OF INDIANA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
State House, Second Floor  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

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Eric J. Holcomb  
*Governor*

Dear Hoosiers,

Connectivity is crucial to our state, whether it is a student using Wi-Fi to complete an assignment, moving goods across our state or competing in the digital world. That is why improved access to broadband is part of my Next Level Indiana plan.

Broadband is part of cultivating a strong and diverse economy. More broadband deployment enables us to grow Indiana as a magnet for jobs and prepares our 21<sup>st</sup> century-ready workforce. It delivers greater educational opportunities, empowers farmers, provides higher paying jobs and encourages entrepreneurship in our state.

Those are some of the reasons I committed \$100 million in grant funding to expand broadband access to unserved or underserved areas of the state. The Office of Community and Rural Affairs is overseeing the grant application process and the broadband division of Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch's office is creating a statewide strategic plan. This will ensure that Indiana organizations can compete for federal funds and provides stakeholders a collective starting point.

Join me in improving Indiana's quality of place and creating an effective, connected broadband network that serves all Hoosiers.

Respectfully,

*ERIC  
HOLCOMB*



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Dear Hoosiers,

In today's digital economy, a lack of broadband access means a lack of access to education, healthcare, job opportunities and everyday needs. Broadband is what connects most constituents to the everyday world. However, many Hoosiers remain underserved in this regard, especially in our rural communities.

To ensure no Hoosier gets left behind, Governor Holcomb and I created the Office of Broadband Opportunities to expand broadband coverage and create a more innovative Indiana. When connected:

- Hoosiers have access to a larger job market, and businesses have access to talent in rural areas.
- Farmers can make data-driven decisions, connect with agri-business counter parts and utilize the full scope of their machines.
- Students have access to a wider range of educational opportunities and can take classes in a variety of different ways.

These are just a few examples of the impact of broadband throughout the state.

Each Hoosier knows what an amazing place Indiana is to live and grow. Broadband connectivity only enhances its quality of place and ensures that our state continues to be seen as a leader in innovation.

This Indiana Statewide Strategic Plan is a vital next step in our efforts to expand broadband to all Hoosiers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Suzanne Crouch".

Suzanne Crouch  
Lt. Governor, State of Indiana

# table of contents



**INTRODUCTION..... 1**

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**

- 1. ENGAGE THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY.....4**
- 2. BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE.....6**
- 3. ENHANCE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY OF PLACE.....9**
- 4. FOCUS ON TALENT ATTRACTION FOR BROADBAND..... 12**

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES.....13**

**CONCLUSION.....16**

**APPENDIX A.....17**





# INTRODUCTION

Speed and connectivity are a part of Indiana's DNA, from the famed Indianapolis Motor Speedway where cars travel 220 miles per hour to the vast interstates which give the state the nickname "Crossroads of America".

Moving physical goods around the state has always been important, but the movement of information and data has become critical in the digital age. It is this high-speed, reliable and affordable connectivity that enhances community development, enables businesses to grow, and equips Hoosiers with the ability to learn and compete in today's competitive job market.

Broadband is the vehicle that moves information at high speeds and allows every corner of the state to be digitally connected.

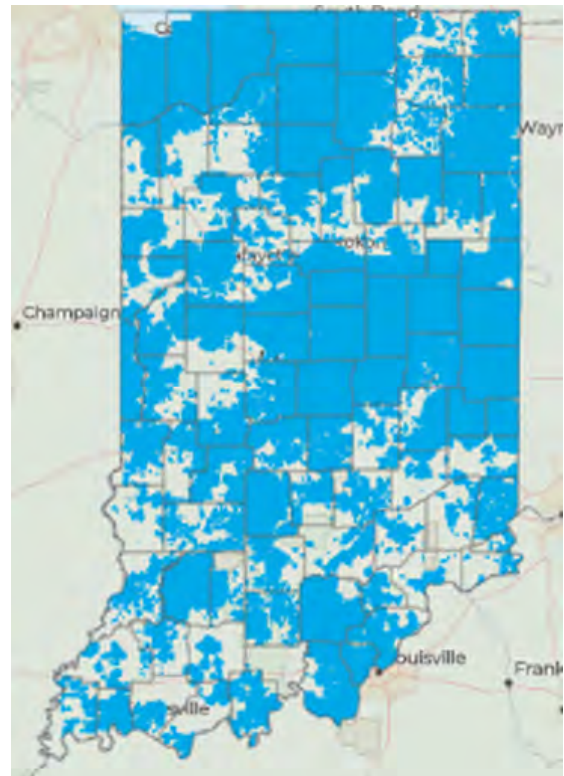
Broadband speeds are characterized by both download and upload speeds measured in Megabits per second (Mbps). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) sets a benchmark for evaluating broadband speed at 25/3 Mbps. Providing fast, reliable and affordable Internet to Hoosiers will help to future-proof Indiana's economy.

When analyzing broadband coverage at a benchmark speed of 25/3 Mbps through fixed and wireless service, there are opportunities to enhance coverage in Indiana, particularly in rural areas while maintaining affordability and reliability.<sup>1</sup>



According to the FCC's 2018 Broadband Deployment Report, **42%** of Hoosiers in rural areas do not have access to wired broadband internet at speeds of 25/3 Mbps.

**Source:** Communications Commission. (2018). FCC 2018 Broadband Deployment Report (p. 60).



**Source:** Indiana Broadband. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.indianabroadbandmap.com/>

<sup>1</sup> Federal Communications Commission. (2018). 2018 Broadband Deployment Report. Washington, D.C.

As a vital infrastructure piece, broadband enables students to complete homework assignments, seniors to leverage telehealth services, and farmers to utilize big data crop analysis tools. Additionally, broadband fuels Hoosier businesses to fulfill orders online and process employee paychecks. A lack of broadband coverage can impede Hoosier quality of life and stifle business growth throughout the state.

It is the intent of this strategic plan to showcase a number of initiatives that promote the benefits of expanding broadband to Hoosier families and businesses who are currently unserved. These initiatives are grouped into four strategic areas.

## strategic areas

- 1) Engage the Business Community
- 2) Bridge the Digital Divide
- 3) Enhance Community Development & Quality of Place
- 4) Focus on Broadband Talent Attraction

These strategic areas are a starting point and not an exhaustive list. The Office of Broadband Opportunities has collected feedback from the stakeholder community and will use their insights to continue to investigate additional strategic areas in the coming years. In doing so, broadband will be expanded throughout the state and Indiana will continue to be an unrivaled place to live and work.

## Leading through Action

Governor Holcomb acknowledges the importance of broadband and the need to bridge the broadband digital divide across Indiana. Through his NextLevel Plan and the establishment of the Indiana Office of Broadband Opportunities, Governor Holcomb has laid the foundation of two key components that will drive Indiana's focus on broadband expansion throughout the state.

## NextLevel Plan

Governor Holcomb's NextLevel Plan focuses on innovation for the Hoosier state. The Plan's five pillars include:

1. Economy
2. Infrastructure
3. Workforce and Education
4. Public Health
5. Good Government

Broadband is a foundational element of the NextLevel plan, and positively impacts each pillar.

Included in Governor Holcomb's infrastructure pillar is \$100 million to establish the NextLevel Connections program to improve broadband access. It is one of the largest state investments and the Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) will award funds to providers that seek to invest in initiatives across Indiana.

# Indiana's Office of Broadband Opportunities

Indiana's Office of Broadband Opportunities

To position Indiana as a national leader in broadband expansion and digital inclusion, Lieutenant Governor Suzanne Crouch created the Office of Broadband Opportunities (OBBO) in 2018.

The OBBO's purpose is to optimize expansion efforts by coordinating with federal, state and local agencies and other stakeholders to identify needs and eliminate roadblocks related to broadband deployment and increase digital literacy across the state. The office, led by the Director of Broadband Opportunities for Indiana, acts as a single point of contact for communities, residents, businesses and providers.

The OBBO is responsible for this strategic plan and engaged 90 stakeholders throughout the state for its development. These stakeholders represented:

- Providers: responsible for delivering broadband to homes and businesses.
- Businesses: businesses and associations who rely on broadband for their continued success.
- Public Sector and Non-Profit Partners: organizations interested in the effects of broadband deployment.

**90 Stakeholders**  
**68 Organizations**

**14**                      **12**                      **42**

**Providers**

**Corporate**

**Public Sector &  
Non-Profit**



**Engage the Business Community**



**Bridge the Digital Divide**



**Enhance Community Development  
& Quality of Place**



**Focus on Broadband Talent Attraction**

# ENGAGE THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Broadband empowers the business community to perform daily operations, to support innovation and to promote growth.

Local businesses can champion broadband expansion and encourage investment in areas that are left unserved.

The lack of broadband access and telecommunication infrastructure creates a barrier for local businesses. It is through expanded deployment that new markets for customers and talent open. A Purdue University study forecasts that quality broadband expansion in rural areas can provide \$12 billion in net benefits to Indiana in just over 20 years.<sup>2</sup> This economic influence is largely attributed to an increase in sales and market expansion of local businesses.

The business community can be a community advocate for broadband through investment, planning, and supporting digital literacy and adoption efforts.

## Partnership Business Model

Business access to broadband leads to investments and job creation which spurs economic growth. Broadband is also an important consideration as firms look to relocate. In understanding these benefits, it's important for businesses to play a part and partner where necessary to expand broadband.

Businesses in a region may look to a collaborative model and develop partnerships to facilitate deployment for their community. These partnerships allow parties to pool resources which helps address density and cost issues through increased purchasing power.<sup>3</sup>

## Broadband Benefits

- 1) Expands the available talent pool
- 2) Reduces business costs
- 3) Promotes collaboration



“As a business owner based in rural Posey County, the lack of decent internet service is severely inconvenient to our Web business. We spend countless hours every week waiting on our internet, which crashes frequently. This is no way to run a business.”

– **Comments of Frazier Aviation LLC**  
submitted June 8, 2018

**Source:** Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission Staff. (2018). 2018 Report on the Indiana Universal Service Fund & Broadband Deployment in Indiana. Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>2</sup> Grant, A. E., Tyner, W. E., & Deboer, L. E. (2018). Estimation of the Net Benefits of Indiana Statewide Adoption of Rural Broadband. *Research & Policy Insights*. (pp. 4). No 006. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University: Center for Regional Development

<sup>3</sup> BC Co-op. (n.d.). Co-op Business Model. Retrieved from <https://bc-ca.coop/knowledge-centre/co-op-business-model/>





## OBBO Initiatives

- Share partnership success stories and lessons learned
- Coordinate a series of Regional Summits



Rural electric membership cooperatives (REMC) are actively pursuing investments in broadband, and may provide an opportunity for partnership. These organizations are member-owned and are not-for-profit electric utility companies. They are particularly invested in local affairs and are typically directed by local boards. REMC's serve businesses and people through extensive community engagement by understanding and fulfilling their service needs.

An analysis conducted by Purdue University showed rural broadband by REMC's would provide Indiana with \$2.25 billion in net benefits. Rural communities would see benefits in education, job creation, consumer savings and healthcare.<sup>4</sup>

## Connecting Interested Businesses

Today, businesses struggle with where to start or who to partner with to embark on expanding broadband in their region.

Since inception, the OBBO has maintained a pulse on the broadband activity throughout the state.

Recognizing a need, the Office of Broadband Opportunities will coordinate a series of Regional Summits designed to bring together key stakeholders, industry experts and the local business community. These summits will highlight best practices, share success stories and point stakeholders towards potential solutions to overcome their struggles, both common and unique.

<sup>4</sup> Grant, A. E., Tyner, W. E., & Deboer, L. E. (2018). Estimation of the Net Benefits of Indiana Statewide Adoption of Rural Broadband. Research & Policy Insights. (pp. 4). No 006. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University: Center for Regional Development

# BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Technology surrounds every Hoosier on a daily basis. An inability to understand or leverage today's technology creates a divide that allows some Hoosiers to prosper and others to remain stymied. Education and learning are the key resources that will help close this digital divide. Steps need to be taken to help Hoosiers safely navigate the internet, effectively use digital services and properly manage their digital reputation and online identity.

Community organizations are key in bridging the digital divide. They can be strategically engaged in training residents and businesses in digital literacy and awareness. According to a report published by AARP, only 66% of African Americans and 60% of Hispanics across the country own a desktop or laptop computer, but that figure climbs to 83% for Caucasians.<sup>5</sup> These figures reflect the technology gap faced by many communities throughout the country. Additionally, 97% of people between the age of 65 and 74 use broadband, but 48% need help setting up a new device.<sup>6</sup> Awareness of digital technology, and how to use it, is essential in today's digital economy. Broadband and device access is necessary for educational enhancement, job searches, telemedicine and more.



<sup>5</sup> AARP. (2019). 50+ Voters Support High-Speed Internet Access for All Hoosiers.

<sup>6</sup> AARP. (2019). Technology Adoption and Digital Literacy.

<sup>7</sup> Heitin, L. (2019, February 20). What Is Digital Literacy? Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2016/11/09/what-is-digital-literacy.html>

## Digital Literacy

For today's Hoosiers, literacy goes beyond the ability to read and write and now includes the ability to use the internet and technology. The American Library Association (ALA) defines digital literacy as "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills."<sup>7</sup>

Digital literacy includes enhancing Hoosier's internet acumen, developing online classroom environments and advancing digital skills training along with teaching internet basics and safety.

Understanding how to use the internet and making associated technologies affordable is essential for Hoosier's today. Digital literacy training programs should be developed, promoted, and shared across communities, classrooms and businesses to reach as many Hoosiers as possible.

## Broadband Benefits

- 1) Empowers citizens to develop a professional online acumen
- 2) Reduces the generational digital divide
- 3) Creates awareness around how technology impacts a user's daily life

One institution leading the charge on digital literacy training are libraries who provide training to residents. Indiana's libraries have robust, effective digital literacy programs working to train and educate the community<sup>8</sup>. Daily, libraries provide residents with digital literacy classes from how to turn on the computer to using Excel along with technology rental and hardware setup. They also troubleshoot computer issues and train staff to stay up to date with technology updates, especially at local schools.

According to the Indiana Library Federation, at least **93.2%** of Hoosiers have access to a library.

Source: Indiana State Library 2018 Statistics. (2018, October 10). Retrieved from <https://www.in.gov/library/5719.htm>

## Awareness Initiatives

The Office of Broadband Opportunities increases broadband awareness because it knows that when Hoosiers gain exposure to technology and understand how it works, new possibilities can be realized. Today, broadband is woven through daily interactions from paying a bill to seeding a field to video chatting with a grandchild.

A best practice on creating awareness comes from AARP who deploys a technology tour bus through their Tech Roadshows program.

The bus displays and demos in-home smart technology solutions such as video doorbells, thermostats, applications for appliance control, and monitoring systems to assist aging in place Hoosiers. Attendees have the option to take technology for a

test-run in their own home. According to AARP, only 10% of older Americans are using these devices but between 39% and 59% of seniors are interested in using them. Tech Roadshows educate people on how to take full advantage of broadband connectivity.

Another initiative is the Indiana Digital Citizenship Week, sponsored by the Indiana Department of Education each September. Communities across Indiana can leverage this existing resource to teach people how to make good decisions in a digital environment. The Department of Education's website includes a list of resources for hosting Digital Citizenship Week including a picture book with recommendations, lesson plans, videos, activities and family tips.

## Emerging Industries

In addition to technology that Hoosiers interact with at home, awareness of how broadband impacts emerging industries is key. Telehealth and precision agriculture are two emerging industries that rely on broadband.

### Telehealth

Broadband deployment allows for the adoption of telehealth, the practice of medicine using technology to deliver care at a distance.<sup>9</sup> Telehealth can increase affordable access to health services, and reduce the need for travel. Telehealth investment increases Hoosier health outcomes, decreases medical cost, and expands coverage throughout the state.

<sup>8</sup> Indiana Library Federation. (n.d.). *Leading Edge Librarians*. Retrieved February 26, 2020, from <https://www.ilfonline.org/page/leadingedgelibrarian>

<sup>9</sup> Telehealth and Telemedicine. (2016, September 6). Retrieved from <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/telemedicine.html>

With telehealth access, rural residents can access world class physicians without leaving the comfort of their own home and healthcare providers can engage in preventative medicine. Increased access also greatly assists vulnerable Hoosier populations such as seniors and those with opioid-dependencies. According to analysis conducted by Purdue University, telemedicine would save rural Hoosiers in REMC areas \$21.4 million dollars after three years; this level of saving would continue into succeeding years.<sup>10</sup>

## Precision Agriculture

At a more advanced level, broadband deployment and subsequent digital adoption includes the use of precision agriculture technologies. Agricultural equipment is becoming dependent upon broadband access in order to utilize data and crop analysis information. The use of technology and analytics in agriculture allows farmers to see real-time information on soil conditions, water availability, fertility needs, and pest affects. During a harvest, farmers can track crop yields and quality. This information allows farmers to make better decisions and optimize land use.

One precision agriculture technology features a dashboard which displays crop health, weather, and commodity markets. Farmers can review recent activity in their fields and share information across staff through in-server notes.

Precision agriculture information can only be transmitted through broadband as agronomy machines connect to phones or tablets. Therefore, broadband must reach the furthest corner of every Indiana farm.

It is critical that these emerging technology use cases are captured and their impacts on Hoosier families and business are recognized. They strengthen the story for why broadband expansion is critical to underserved or unserved areas so that all Hoosiers can leverage their benefits.

## OBBO Initiatives

- Promote Digital Citizenship Week
- Expand the concept of the traveling tech roadshow
- Keep a pulse on additional emerging industries



<sup>10</sup> Grant, A. E., Tyner, W. E., & Deboer, L. E. (2018). Estimation of the Net Benefits of Indiana Statewide Adoption of Rural Broadband. Research & Policy Insights. (pp.12). No 006. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University: Center for Regional Development.



# ENHANCE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY OF PLACE

Investment in broadband means investment in Hoosiers. It means empowering local leaders, reintroducing veterans to the workforce and creating access to technology. Broadband promotes community development and improves quality of life. Most importantly, it prevents brain drain and helps attract people to rural communities through quality jobs and dynamic towns.

Community development and quality of place are enhanced by broadband deployment. Coordinated community development helps to standardize broadband initiatives across the state and leverage economies of scale to encourage rural deployment and breakdown investment barriers. Quality of place enhancement is a key step in the economic and community development processes. According to CityLab, the news publication dedicated to reporting on community development, quality of place is essential to the attraction and retention of people 25 to 49 years old.<sup>11</sup> Broadband investment enables a brighter, more innovative Indiana for everyone.

## Local Broadband Champion

Indiana is built on strong local communities and important change does not take hold without trusted community advocates. Most government leaders today understand the importance of broadband, but that understanding does not turn into action for a myriad of reasons.

Local broadband champions can facilitate deployment. This person can be an elected official, local government employee, or any resident passionate about community development.

Local broadband champions are broadband information officers and advocates. They will share information coming from the Office of Broadband Opportunities, host annual meetings, and inform neighbors on the importance of digital literacy and adoption.

Local champions might also facilitate training to improve digital literacy in the community or knock on doors to encourage adoption of new services in the area. It is important for local broadband champions to work with community leaders and ensure broadband stays on the agenda.

The Office of Broadband Opportunities is developing a program for local champions that will provide training, seminars and information to encourage best practices.

## Broadband Benefits

- 1) Increases opportunities for economic development
- 2) Breaks down investment barriers
- 3) Reduces exodus rate of younger generation

<sup>11</sup> Florida, R., & Small, A. (2016, December 28). Who Cares About Urban Amenities? Retrieved from <https://www.citylab.com/design/2016/12/why-quality-of-place-matters/509876/>

## Community Broadband Certification

Often, communities are conflicted on where to start with broadband expansion initiatives. The State of Indiana assists communities in taking the right first step by offering a broadband readiness certification process.

The Broadband Ready Community certification sends a signal to stakeholders that a community has taken the steps necessary to reduce broadband deployment barriers and is ready for infrastructure investment.

To comply with statutory requirements, a community seeking the certification must institute procedures from identifying a single point of contact for all broadband project matters to establishing requirements where all broadband permits are reviewed within 10 business days after filing.

While investment in broadband infrastructure is not guaranteed to follow once a community obtains the certification, reducing the regulatory hurdles that may deter investment is a key step towards creating an environment ripe for broadband investment. For more guidance and information on how to proceed with certification, monitor the OBBO website at: [www.in.gov/ruralbroadband](http://www.in.gov/ruralbroadband).

## Anchor Institutions

Anchor institutions within a community are vital to its quality of place. They establish strong connections with the local community, promote stability and educate and serve their surrounding geography.<sup>12</sup> In rural communities all over Indiana, libraries are not just for checking out books or finding a quiet place to study.

They are technology arteries, learning spaces, e-government centers and vital service providers.

For example, Jay County Public Libraries provide residents space to connect with lawyers in Hamilton County via video chat. In other counties, Indiana Department of Child Services meetings and telehealth conferences are conducted in library meeting spaces. Many residents also use the library to access government services such as renewing driver's licenses or paying taxes because there are no government buildings in a reasonable distance or broadband access at home. People also frequent libraries after hours to use the Wi-Fi connection.

Libraries, especially in rural communities, benefit when the appropriate broadband infrastructure is in place to serve the various needs of its community members. By helping Hoosiers, libraries improve the community's quality of place.



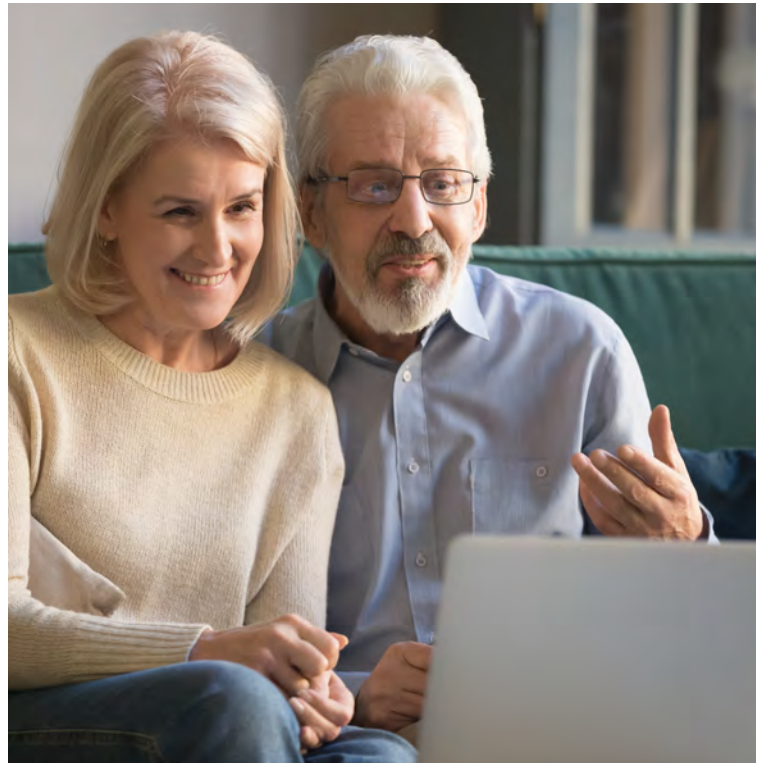
<sup>12</sup> Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. (2017, April 13). Anchor Institutions: The Economic Benefits of Putting Community First. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/communities-and-banking/2017/spring/anchor-institutions-the-economic-benefits-of-putting-community-first.aspx>

## Financial Institutions Spur Growth

Financial institutions, such as banks, play a critical role in enhancing the quality of life in Hoosier communities. They can provide benefits to businesses and local governments through funding broadband initiatives and granting constituents financial freedom through online banking.

Businesses looking to partner and expand broadband in their region need to leverage the value of a financial institution. Financial institutions provide insight into the various funding options that are available to finance a broadband project.

Funding options can take the form of debt and equity financing, short-term and long-term loans, or bonds to name a few. Banks can also provide insight into credits such as the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) when financing activities, such as construction, improvements, maintenance or operations of systems, relate to broadband deployment for low- and moderate-income residents.<sup>13</sup>



With the ability to provide financing assistance to local business and government, financial institutions create a footprint in the community which enables them to also provide essential financial services to its constituents.

Online banking, powered by the ability to leverage broadband, allows constituents to have access to savings or checking accounts, loans, mortgages and other investments. Access to online accounts give Hoosiers and local businesses financial freedom in regions that are considered banking deserts. These deserts, that lack a brick and mortar bank, are far too common in rural areas, but broadband access alleviates these deserts by bringing financial services to rural communities.<sup>14</sup>

## OBBO Initiatives

- Construct a local broadband champion program
- Promote the Broadband Ready Community certification program

<sup>13</sup> Carrier, M. (2018). *Community Development Investments: Expanding Internet Access, Bank Financing for Rural Broadband Initiatives* (p. 5). Office of the Comptroller of the Currency.

<sup>14</sup> Cookson, T. (2020, February 20). *Column: How growing up in a bank desert can hurt your credit for the rest of your life*. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/making-sense/column-how-growing-up-in-a-bank-desert-can-hurt-your-credit-for-the-rest-of-your-life>

# FOCUS ON BROADBAND TALENT ATTRACTION

Broadband impacts the job market on two fronts. First, broadband enables telecommuting and a work from home option expanding the talent pool for companies across the state. This benefits both existing small businesses who are looking to grow along with new businesses who are looking to relocate and leverage a rural workforce.

Second, the expansion of broadband requires a workforce to design, deploy and manage the infrastructure once it is installed. This places new talent demands on providers and creates jobs from entry level to highly skilled positions.

Broadband community stakeholders are advocates for programs that positively impact talent attraction. Examples of these programs include expanding technical certification programs and apprenticeship for youth, growing vocational training for adults, and developing creative partnerships with employers to develop needed skills.

## Certification Programs

As the demand for broadband grows exponentially and technology changes continuously, a large telecommunication workforce is needed. Vendors must update their networks and increase infrastructure density. This requires both engineers and technicians. Indiana's vast network of technical schools including Ivy Tech Community College and Vincennes University are passionate about building out a broadband curriculum. In their 2018 report, the Wireless Infrastructure Association recommended a telecommunications training program that blends classroom instruction and apprenticeship.

This combination improves retention, provides immediate feedback, and builds learning from a solid foundation.<sup>15</sup>

## Broadband Benefits

- 1) Develop broadband skills from installation through maintenance
- 2) Expand curriculum offerings
- 3) Increase awareness of certifications and career paths

## Workforce Programs

Broadband offers an alternative employment avenue for people who are not looking to spend their career behind a desk. Promoting this alternative career path is important to Hoosiers from students in high school to veterans returning from deployment.

There are many great programs that are created and facilitated by organizations across Indiana. While a few are mentioned below, the Office of Broadband Opportunities will continue to work towards connecting interested Hoosiers with their programs of interest.

The National FFA Organization, formerly known as the Future Farmers of America (FFA), is a leader in this space with the frequent promotion of non-traditional career paths through their national blog.

<sup>15</sup> WIA Innovation & Technology Council. (2018). *Getting Ready for 5G: Preparing a Skilled Workforce for Future Wireless Networks*.



One example is their “Women in Welding” program which presents girls with career options in welding. Indiana organizations might look to their local National FFA chapters to develop broadband curriculums to promote this technical opportunity.<sup>16</sup>

Another workforce development program that targets young Hoosiers and provides them with greater opportunity is Girls Who Code. This non-profit organization uses after-school programs and summer camps to encourage girls’ interest in computer science.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, at the state level the Indiana Department of Correction has many certification programs related to broadband workforce development including welding, business technology and coding. One example is their Last Mile vocational program that teaches participants web programming languages. Indiana is the second state to adopt the program and it currently operates in 5 Indiana facilities.<sup>18</sup>



## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The State of Indiana, through the Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA), and the federal government offer funding opportunities to assist local government and provider organizations in broadband deployment. This strategic plan aims to raise awareness of available grants and encourage applications to use these funds.

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.ffa.org/search-results/?\\_sf\\_s=workforce+training](https://www.ffa.org/search-results/?_sf_s=workforce+training)

<sup>17</sup> <https://girlswhocode.com/>

<sup>18</sup> Indiana Department of Correction. (n.d.). Vocational Programs. Retrieved from <https://www.in.gov/idoc/3516.htm>

## OBBO Initiatives

- Support technical education curriculum development
- Identify and promote workforce programs related to broadband across the state

### Office of Community and Rural Affairs

Established in 2005, OCRA, housed within the Lieutenant Governor’s office, works with local, state and national partners to provide resources and technical assistance to aid communities in shaping and achieving their vision for community development.

### Broadband Readiness Planning Grant

Through the Broadband Readiness Planning Grant, OCRA helps communities gain an understanding of their current broadband conditions and needs, create a long-term vision of broadband in their community, and identify options for achieving that vision. Planning grants are scored on a points basis, so applicants should look to achieve the maximum score of 450 points. Scoring criteria are broken down into seven categories;

- National Objective
- Community Distress Factors
- Local Match Contributions
- Program Specific Details
- Project Description
- Project Need
- Financial Impact

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, so communities may apply for this funding at any time.

In addition to providing these grants, OCRA provides the technical assistance training needed to properly apply. Communities looking to expand broadband should begin with OCRA's training program. The Planning Grant website offers a webinar recording, workshop presentation and detailed requirements.<sup>19</sup>

### **NextLevel Connections Broadband Grant**

The \$100 million NextLevel Connections Broadband Grant Program, also managed by OCRA, has over \$70 million available for award after the initial round of project funding in 2019.

This grant is designed to promote access to broadband service for all Hoosiers in order to function in a 21st century economy.<sup>20</sup> These grants build off existing industry and non-profit investment to bridge the digital divide with a fully-integrated network.

NLC grants require speeds of at least 25/3 Mbps. Providers must complete detailed budgets, project narratives and Census Block lists.

## **Federal Grants**

As outlined in the 2020 State of the Union, broadband deployment to rural areas is a national priority.

This federal focus on broadband expansion has created grant programs that are available at the state level including the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) ReConnect Program, the newly announced FCC Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, and the FCC 5G Fund for Rural America.

"...[I am] committed to ensuring that every citizen can have access to high-speed Internet, including and especially in rural America."

*– President Donald Trump*

## **USDA ReConnect Program**

The ReConnect Program provides loans and grants to provide sufficient broadband service in rural areas.

Funding can be applied to construction, improvement, facilities acquisition and improvement costs. State and local governments, agencies, non-profits, corporations, co-ops and limited liability organizations are all eligible to apply for these funds. Organizations can partner together for an application and use of the ReConnect funds to increase project impact.

Applicants are awarded points based on their State's broadband activities. This updated strategic plan helps Indiana organizations receive full point allotments.

To apply, organizations should view the 2019 Funding Opportunity Announcement and submit an Authorized Representative Request to use the secure system. ReConnect questions can be submitted online or by reaching out to General Field Representatives. Indiana also has a state office who can assist with technical questions. To contact Indiana USDA Rural Development, visit their website [www.rd.usda.gov/in](http://www.rd.usda.gov/in).

<sup>19</sup> OCRA Planning Grants . (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.in.gov/ocra/2371.htm>

<sup>20</sup> NextLevel Connections Broadband Program: Round 2 Grant Overview. (2019, February 7). Retrieved from <https://www.in.gov/ocra/nlc.htm>

## FCC Rural Digital Opportunity Fund FCC 5G Fund for Rural America

The FCC Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) works to bridge the digital divide with \$20.4 billion in high speed fixed broadband. In line with Indiana priorities, RDOF is committed to a reliable and future-proof network. The Fund will service rural homes and businesses in two phases.

Phase I begins in October 2020 with up to \$16 billion of funding available through a multi-round reverse auction. This phase looks to target census blocks entirely unserved by a download speed of 25 Mbps. Phase II will provide up to \$4.4 billion in funding to census block areas partially served or not funded in Phase I.<sup>21</sup>

RDOF was announced on January 30, 2020, so application information is not yet available. Questions regarding RDOF should be submitted to [auction904@fcc.gov](mailto:auction904@fcc.gov).



<sup>21</sup> Federal Communications Commission. (2020, February 18). Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Retrieved from <https://www.fcc.gov/rural-digital-opportunity-fund>

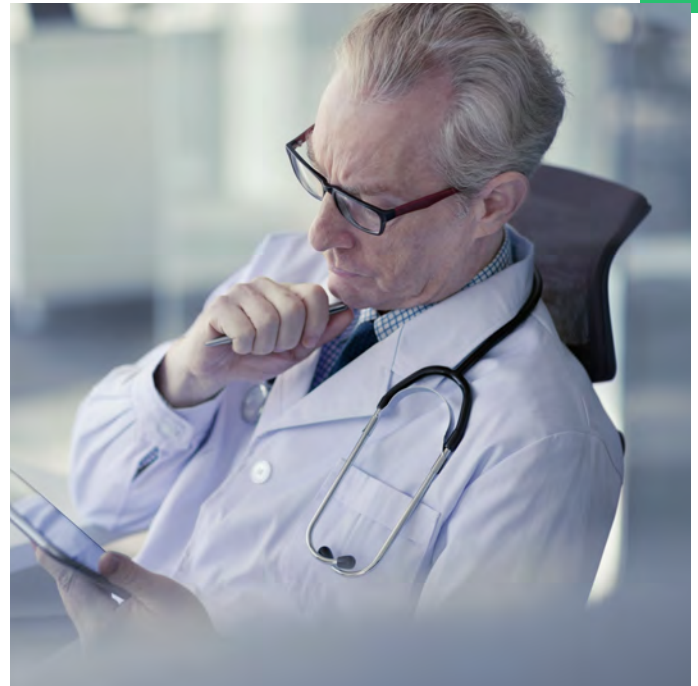
In December 2019, FCC Chairman Ajit Pai announced his intentions to set aside \$9 billion in the Universal Service Fund for rural 5G deployment. Funding would take place through a reverse auction and take place over 10 years.

The FCC is targeting hard to serve areas with sparse populations or rough terrain and agriculture communities. \$1 billion is to be set aside for facilitation of precision agriculture through 5G deployment.

The program is still in the planning stages, so application and contact information is not yet available.<sup>22</sup>

"We must ensure that 5G narrows rather than widens the digital divide and that rural Americans receive the benefits that come from wireless innovation."

– Ajit Pai, FCC Chairman



<sup>22</sup> Federal Communications Commission. (2019, December 4). Chairman Pai Announces Plan to Launch \$9 Billion 5G Fund for Rural America [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-361168A1.pdf>

# CONCLUSION

The Indiana Broadband Strategic Plan highlights a number of initiatives that promote the benefits of expanding broadband to Hoosier families and businesses in unserved or underserved communities.

These initiatives fall into four strategic areas, but this is just a starting point for the Office of Broadband Opportunities. Thanks to the insight from many stakeholders engaged in this plan's development, more strategic areas will be investigated that will promote broadband expansion throughout the state, so that Indiana continues to be an unrivaled place to live and work.

The Office of Broadband Opportunities along with the Office of the Lieutenant Governor would like to thank all stakeholders who participated and provided insight into the creation of the strategic plan.

For more information on broadband news and opportunities in Indiana along with the work being done, visit our website [www.in.gov/ruralbroadband](http://www.in.gov/ruralbroadband).

## Strategic Areas

- 1) Engage the Business Community
- 2) Bridge the Digital Divide
- 3) Enhance Community Development and Quality of Place
- 4) Focus on Broadband Talent Attraction





# APPENDIX A – STAKEHOLDERS WHO PARTICIPATED

Organization	Contact Person
AARP	Sarah Waddle
Accelerate Indiana Municipalities	Rhonda Cook Lindsay Moss, Brian Gould
Association of Indiana Counties	Ryan Hoff
AT&T	Matthew Long
Beck's Hybrids	Brad Fruth
Charter Communications	LeeAnn Herrera, Patrick Haggerty
Comcast	Pete Nemeth
EDP Renewables	Paul Cummings
Electricom	Kelly Dyer
Enhanced Telecommunications Corporation	Kevin McGuire
Fayette County Indiana	Dan Parker
Federal Home L Banks	Erica Petty-Saunders, Megan Coler-Hasser
Frontier Communications	Robert Stewart
Indiana Association of Regional Councils	Brian Long
Indiana Bond Bank	Mark Wuellner
Indiana Broadband and Technology Association	Neil Krevda
Indiana Cable and Broadband Association	Joni Hart
Indiana Career Connections and Talent	Blair Milo
Indiana Department of Education	John Keller
Indiana Economic Development Association	Todd Mosby
Indiana Electric Cooperative	Brian Christenberry, Tom Havens
Indiana Energy Association	Mindy Westrick-Brown
Indiana Exchange Carriers Association	Alan Terrell
Indiana Farm Bureau	Katrina Hall
Indiana Finance Authority	Dan Huge
Indiana General Assembly	Sharon Negele, Erin Houchin, Eric Koch, Jean Leising
Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority	Jake Sipes
Indiana Library Federation	Lucinda Nord
Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs	Jodi Golden
Indiana Rural Health Association	Ally Orwig, Don Kelso
Indiana Small and Rural Schools	Chris Lagoni
Indiana Soybean	Steve Howell
Indiana State Department of Agriculture	Bruce Kettler
Indiana Technology and Innovation Association	Jennifer Hallowell
Indiana University	David Jent, Amelia McClure, Kirk White
Indiana Uplands	Tina Peterson

Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission	Kendall Querry, Ryan Hadley, Dave Ober
Indiana Wireless Internet Service Providers Association	Steve Barnes
Integrated Public Safety Commission	Kelly Dignin, Jane Ryderson
Intelligent Fiber Network	Jim Turner
Ivy Tech Community College	Sue Griffith Smith
Jackson County Rural Electric Membership Cooperative (REMC)	Mark McKinney
Joink	Josh Zeurner
KeyBanc	Kelly McNairy, Tom Coverick, Eric Rex
National Rural Education Association	Chris Lagoni
New Lisbon Phone Company	John Greene
NineStar Connect	Shira Dankner, George Plisinski
NITCO	Eric Galbraeth
Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership	John Sampson
National Telecommunications and Information Administration, Broadband USA	Andy Spurgeon, Emily Tseng
Perry Spencer Communications	Jim Dauby
Precision Data Solutions	Andy Trimmell
Purdue Federal Credit Union	Carolyn Probasco
Purdue University	Roberto Gallardo
Radius Indiana	Jeff Quyle
Regional Opportunity Initiatives	Jacob Hurt
Reynolds Farm Equipment	Mitch Frazier
Sigma Technologies	Matthew Hilton
Smithville Communications	Darby McCarty
Switzerland County Economic Development Corporation	Jon Bond
Tipmont Rural Electric Membership Cooperative (REMC)	Christopher Blaisdell, Jeremy Konkle, Abigail O'Neill
Union Health	Steven Holman, Vjay Kumar
United States Department of Agriculture-Indiana	Craig McGowan
Veteran Opportunity	James Morrison
Vincennes University	Christopher Blome
Wabash Heartland Innovation Network	Jack Stucky, Johnny Park
Wabash Valley Power	Greg Wagoner
Yates Engineering	Bart Bretsch