

NRV Digital Opportunity Plan
Local Stakeholder Session
Pulaski County IT offices, 89 Commerce Street, Pulaski
July 9, 2025, 9:30 to 11:00 am

Session Summary

Welcome and opening remarks

Clay Howlett, Director of Information Technology for Pulaski County welcomed the attendees and talked about the City's objectives in convening stakeholders for digital opportunity and improving broadband use.

Clay and NRVRC Project Manager Christy Straight gave an overview of the state of broadband deployment efforts in the region and in Pulaski specifically.

The group talked about what kind of broadband service is available and the limited options due to cable franchises and cost of deploying new service where current service is available. The group recognized universal coverage will exist, but competition for reliable service will not be part of that scenario. With the region approaching universal coverage, the digital opportunity plan is looking at the broad range of affordability and use.

Facilitated Discussion

The conversation kicked off with a series of questions:

The Icebreaker poll: If you could solve one challenge to broadband use in Pulaski, what would it be? The group's responses included

- Cost/Affordability
- Limited options (All Points - FTTP, Comcast is the main provider for Town of Pulaski, Limited competition between providers based on geography).
- Training
- Digital/Computer literacy
- IT support needed

What isn't easy or accessible to do online? How can we make it easier and more accessible (and/or more affordable)? Included the following responses:

- Telehealth appointments
- Applying for services, benefits, etc.
- Communicating services to different populations

- Government websites (Opportunities to improve accessibility?)
- Connectivity among service providers (PeerPlace - database program - Unite Us is also an option, No Wrong Door)
- Business paperwork for licenses/permitting
- Access must be intergenerational (simple, large font, high contrast, ADA compliant, phone friendly)

What programs and policies can help increase more and higher level broadband use?

- Digital trainings
- Shared spaces for computer use with support
- Subsidies for cost
- Social media + TV Ad push
- Educate those creating websites about accessibility/readability
- Hotspot rentals
- Enhance safety considerations
- Grant resources for home-based businesses - tax write-off assistance
- Remote work opportunities
- Time Bank program

With these responses, the group further discussed a few key points more in-depth.

Training and digital literacy

- Keeping up with changes in technology and how online services are accessed is a challenge for everyone; training resource experts in the community can help share the information and expertise across a range of audiences. This works best when they can support residents one-on-one in a "meet them where they're at location" rather than relying on one central location to send them to.
- The library currently hosts training and provides on-demand help for residents, but many people are not necessarily going to the library for that support.
- Creating connectivity among providers is important to ensuring broad-based outreach. Participants mentioned the "No Wrong Door" program among social service providers to connect the right service with clients no matter which agency they start out with. "Unite Us" is a similar platform; both use written agreements among agencies and a shared database to function.
- Creating and tapping into shared spaces with computer support would also be a benefit for the community whether they're a computer space to access

the internet such as a co-working space or privacy unit for confidential meetings such as telehealth appointments or space for training.

User-friendly online resources

- Online paperwork: This centered around being able to access services. One example is challenges in completing application paperwork online versus paper forms posted to a website.
- Website development: User training was identified above, the group also expressed a need for websites being navigable/accessible for those with physical limitations as well as any other citizen attempting to navigate outdated or poorly designed sites was also identified. The group discussed challenges in creating user-friendly and ADA-compliant websites and suggested training and educational resources for those creating or commissioning new and updated websites that outlines challenges and best practices on how to ensure a navigable and accessible interface.

Safety

- The more people go online and become digitally literate, the more they will be exposed to issues related to online safety across all generations. Younger users will face a different set of issues than older populations, but all need the tools and knowledge to identify threats and protect themselves.
- The group discussed communicating the issue can be challenging given the audience range and finding people where they're at to broadcast these messages.

Affordability

- Cost subsidies where access will be available is a critical element in at-home internet use. There are programs available with limitations in how to or who can qualify: Virginia CARES and 10/month Internet for youth with ComCast.
- Hotspot rentals would be useful in connecting people who don't have affordable internet access.
- Device availability is a component of affordability for at-home use. There is a local program supporting this with digital refurbishment and distribution through a partnership including PC Land, Valley Harvest, private schools, and the library.
- Grant resources for home-based businesses such as tax write-off assistance could help reduce the cost for business-level broadband subscriptions.

Economic Development

- Identifying and promoting remote work opportunities would boost local employment and create economic stability for some who may not be able to take on traditional on-site jobs.
- Relocation incentive programs for remote workers could help boost local development and employment in the area.

Communication

In all of these ideas communications was critical to successful execution. Some of this is touched on in the sections above. Participants also shared ongoing activities they knew of that were related or could be connected with digital opportunity success. Those known resources and programs to tap into locally and replicate from other areas include

- Sheriff's Dept morning breakfast with seniors
- Partners' social media channels to communicate about safety, training and resource opportunities
- Triad group in the Office of Attorney General to speak about email scams and other online threats
- Ruritan Club or other spaces where these populations come together
- Time Bank program, especially in reference to training and user support

Participants noted it is important to address access considerations with cultural sensitivity and awareness rather than assuming one-size/message-fits-all as well as involving as many voices as possible. Some specific groups will have experiences and perspectives that influence how they receive and act on messaging related to access and opportunities presented to them.

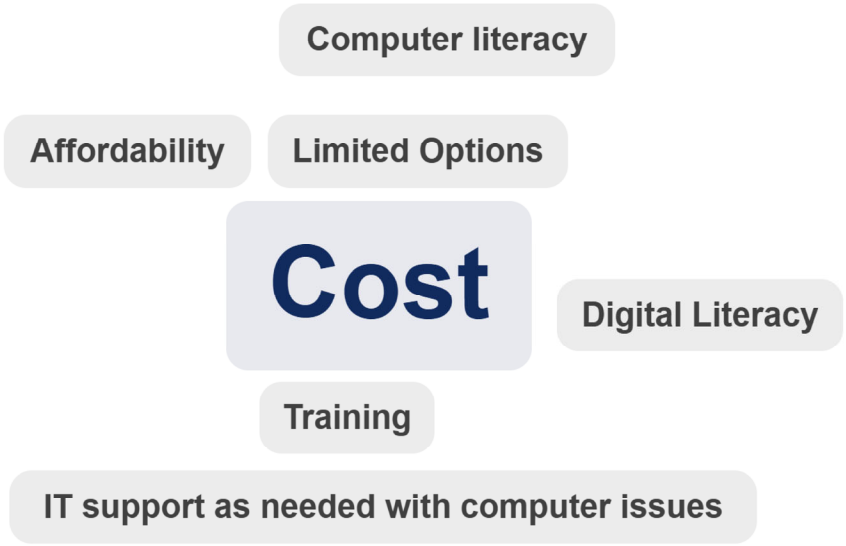
The groups determined more conversation and consideration is needed to identify how to empower residents to create and take advantage of partnerships and training

What's next for the digital opportunity planning process:

Local stakeholder sessions will continue in June & July at the other four localities. A public survey is being developed for additional input to be posted to the website in development where additional information will be shared. The plan is due to be completed in October.

If you could solve one challenge to broadband use in Pulaski, what would it be?

Wordcloud Poll | 8 responses | 3 participants



slido

What isn’t easy or accessible to do online?

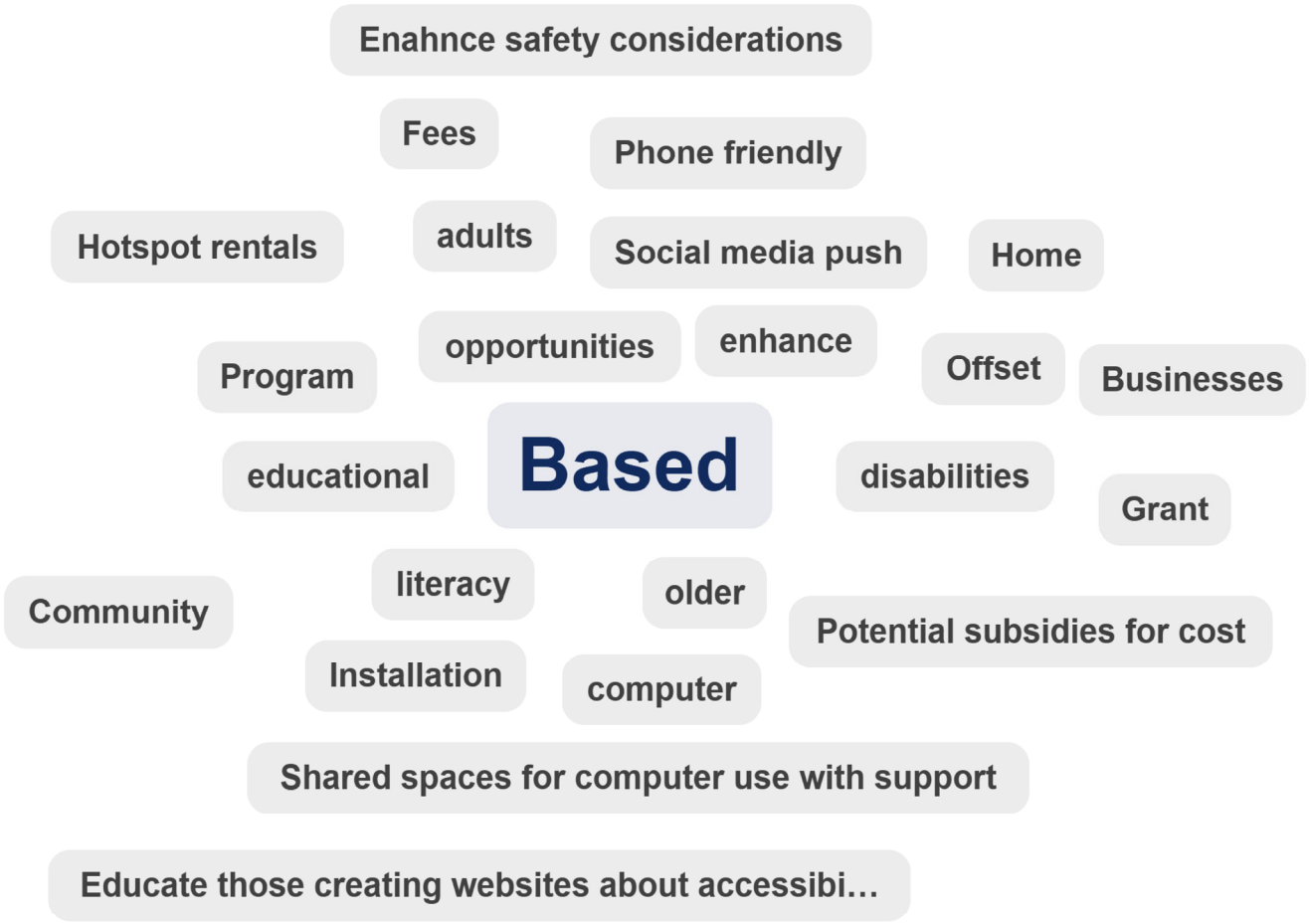
Wordcloud Poll | 5 responses | 3 participants



slido

What programs and policies can help increase easier, more, and higher level broadband use?

Wordcloud Poll | 9 responses | 4 participants



slido

NRV Digital Opportunity Plan

Wednesday, July 9, 2026

Pulaski Stakeholder Session

	Name	Organization/Representing	Email / Phone Number
1	Janet Brennend	NRV Agency on Aging	ombudsman@nrvaoa.org
2	Sam Edwards	Pulaski County Chamber	info@pulaskivachamber.org
3	Katie Thompson	Pulaski Co., Office of Prevention	kthompson@pulaskicounty.org
4			
5	Staff:		
6	Clay Howlett	Pulaski County	
7	Christy Straight	NRVRC	
8	Emma Carroll	NRVRC	
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			