

NRV Digital Opportunity Plan
Regional Stakeholder Session

NRCC, Edwards Hall 117

May 30, 2025 – 9:30 am to 11:30 am

Agenda

1. Welcome and opening remarks
    a. Welcome
    Kevin Byrd, Executive Director, New River Valley Regional Commission
    b. Message on state priorities
    Dr. Tamarah Holmes, Director, Office of Broadband, DHCD
    c. State of the NRV deployment efforts and broadband funding
    Christy Straight, Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Resources, NRVRC and Digital Opportunity Plan Project Manager
    d. Goals for the day's work and some opening questions
    Christy Straight
2. Facilitated breakout sessions (45 minutes)
    a. Breakout groups to brainstorm for implementation projects and programs that will expand and improve broadband affordability and use
    (Choose the topic that most aligns with your interests)
        i. Economic development (workforce, business growth)
        ii. Education and Distance Learning (K-12, post-high school education, training)
        iii. Telehealth and Medical Care
        iv. Government services
        v. Community [development] and Quality of Life
3. Break for refreshments (15 minutes)
4. Reconvene for breakout highlights and next steps
    a. Breakout results will be highlighted.
    b. What's next for the digital opportunity planning process:
        i. Five local stakeholder sessions
        ii. Public survey for additional input. A website is in development to continue sharing information about the project.



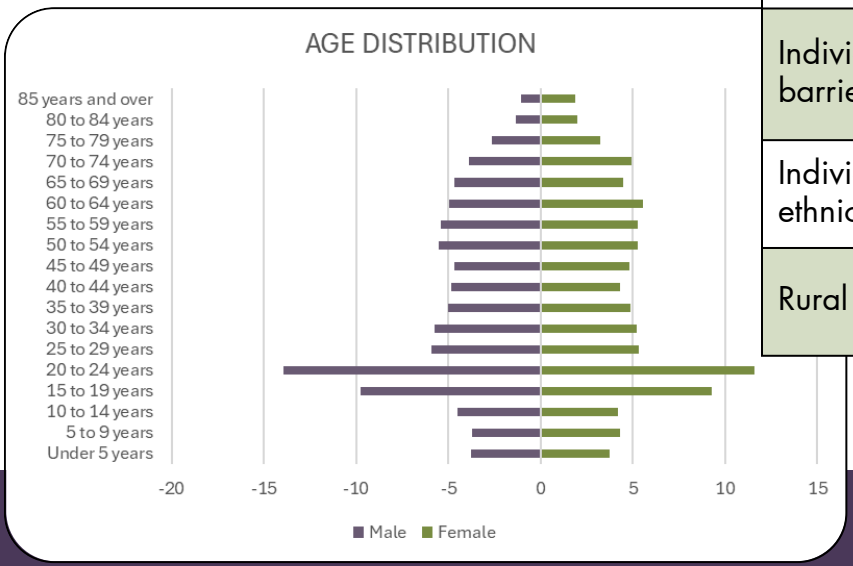
NEW RIVER VALLEY
DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR COMMUNITY

Expanding affordable high-speed internet creates opportunity for all and closes the broadband usage gap (-13.5%).

NEW RIVER VALLEY: WHO WE ARE

- **TOTAL POPULATION: 181,605**
- **MEDIAN AGE: 34.9 YEARS**
- **POPULATION THAT ARE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES OR HIGHER: 93.5%**
- **MEDIAN INCOME: $61,672**

ELIGIBLE POPULATIONS (NRV)	
Households below 150% poverty level	32,975
Aging individuals (60+)	40,648
Incarcerated individuals	991
Veterans	8,420
Individuals with disabilities	22,969
Individuals with a language barrier/low literacy	2,746
Individuals of a racial or ethnic minority	26,947
Rural area	113,496



NRVRC
new river valley regional commission

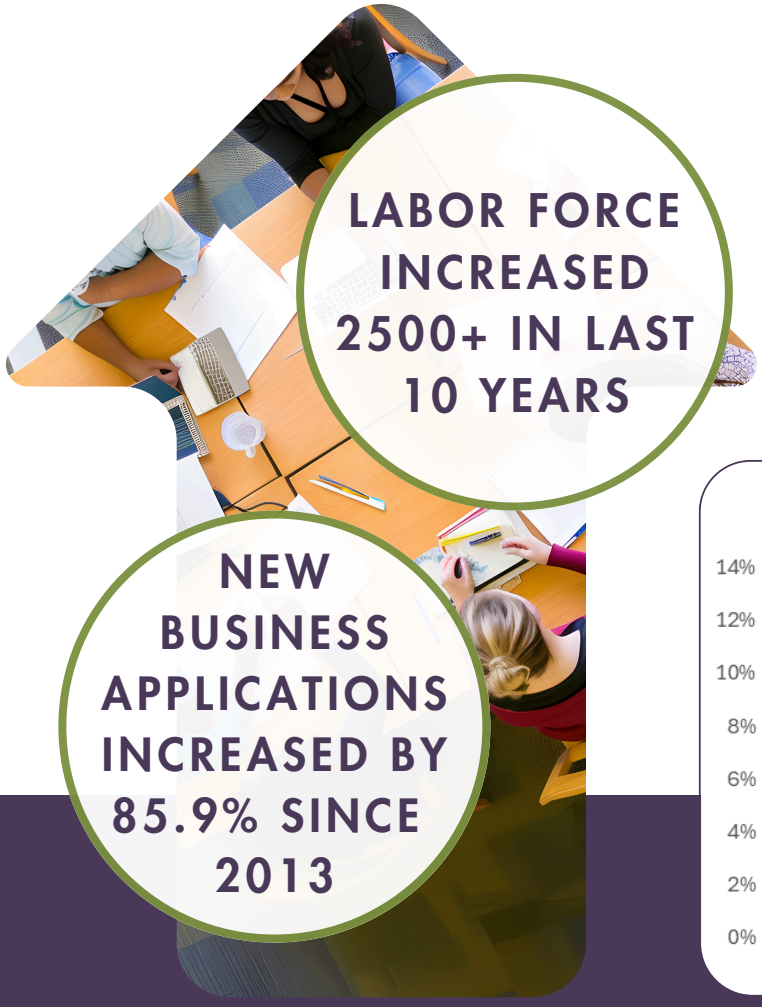


NEW RIVER VALLEY
DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Broadband is essential to the growth of NRV's target industries, enabling greater connectivity and data-driven advancement.

NEW RIVER VALLEY'S CORE INDUSTRIES

- ADVANCED MANUFACTURING
- UNMANNED SYSTEMS
- EMERGING TECH AND IT
- FOOD PROCESSING AND AGRIBUSINESS

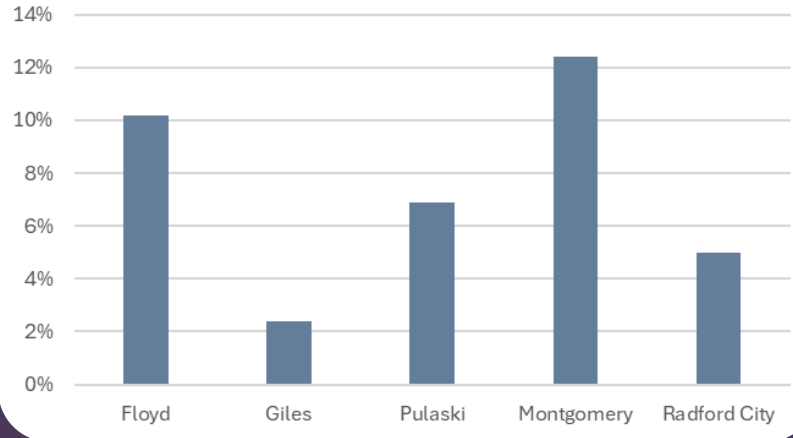


LABOR FORCE INCREASED 2500+ IN LAST 10 YEARS

NEW BUSINESS APPLICATIONS INCREASED BY 85.9% SINCE 2013

426
SMALL BUSINESSES

% REMOTE WORKERS



NRVRC

New River Valley
DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES



WHO WAS SURVEYED

25 AGENCIES (TO DATE)

- **20%** Nonprofit
- **16%** Government
- **16%** Education
- **12%** Library
- **12%** Health
- **12%** Economic Development
- **8%** Senior Services
- **4%** Workforce development

IDENTIFIED BROADBAND CHALLENGES:

- Affordability
- Access
- Slow Speeds
- Disruptions in Service
- Data Limits

IDENTIFIED AFFORDABLE RANGE:

$20-$50
A MONTH



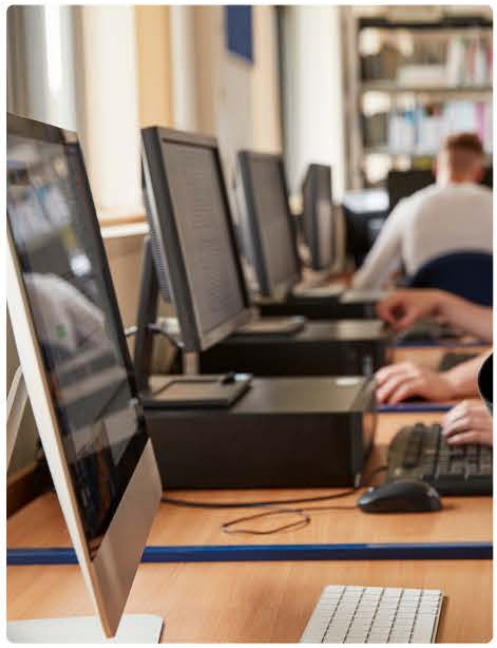
NRVRC

New River Valley
DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES



SPECIFIC CHALLENGES USING THE INTERNET:

- Troubleshooting Skills
- Knowing What's Available
- Online Safety & Security
- Keeping Up With Changes
- Using Online Education Services



MOST USED DEVICES

- Cell Phone
- Laptop
- Tablet
- TV
- Desktop
- Hotspot



TOP AGENCIES PROVIDING USER SERVICES:

Public Libraries

Workforce Development

New River Community College

Literacy Volunteers of the NRV

New River Valley
DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES

Digital Opportunity Plan for the NRV
(NRV Regional AAPG (5 Localities))
May 30 Regional Stakeholder Session Summary

1. Welcome and opening remarks

   Opening speakers set the stage for the session, speaking on

   - the background for how the NRV got to this point in developing broadband infrastructure and access for residents and businesses.
   - the state's priorities and ongoing efforts to reach universal broadband coverage and expand access to and optimal use of the internet across various populations throughout the state including current and future funding potential and developing partnerships with other state agencies.
   - highlights in the region's many efforts to reach universal coverage such as the additional "passings" or number of businesses and residences who can now connect to at least one provider without considerable additional installation costs due to the public-private partnerships of ISP investment and state and federal funding support.

   The session proceeded with icebreaking and questions to prepare attendees for small group discussions in brainstorming challenges and opportunities to implement affordability and use solutions. The attached word clouds provide responses submitted at the session.

2. Facilitated breakout sessions

   Breakout groups considered the proposed solutions and discussed their application, relevance, and potential within their populations of interest.

   i. Who will this serve?

   ii. How can this idea be implemented?

   iii. Who can help make these ideas happen? (Any group that can bring funding, build partnerships, implement activities, spread the word)

   iv. What financial resources are needed? Do they exist within our partners' capacities? If not, where can we find them?

3. Reconvening as a larger group, each breakout group noted the themes and highlighted implementation projects examined in their discussion. Summaries from each group are provided in the following pages.

New River Valley
DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES

Idea	Who will this serve?	How can this idea be implemented?	Who can help make these ideas happen?	What financial resources are needed?
Universal Access, Broadband as a Utility	New business growth		Local and regional economic development organizations, workforce development	
Innovative Research in Agriculture and Other Fields	Higher education, students and faculty, agriculture-based businesses	Partner with higher education, cooperative extension, and ag businesses	Virginia Tech, Radford University, New River Community College, Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau	Grants - USDA, university research funds
Guarding against security threats	Businesses small, medium & large	Conduct cybersecurity training and audits	Small business development centers and small business support roles, Chambers of Commerce, Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council, and subject matter experts	Small Business Administration
Tourism and Remote Work promotion	Tourism-based businesses (retail, dining, hospitality, etc.) and remote-based businesses	Target remote work incentives and tourism campaigns to areas with broadband	County tourism agencies, regional and local economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, small business development centers, and small business support roles	Virginia Tourism Corporation, SBA

Idea	Who will this serve?	How can this idea be implemented?	Who can help make these ideas happen?	What financial resources are needed?
Community Awareness of Existing Providers	Low-income residents, underserved areas, and businesses	Mapping of provider options for residents and businesses	Localities and nonprofits, Small business support roles	
Improving Business' Digital Literacy Skills by Leveraging Local Assets	Small businesses	Create a toolkit to support digital literacy skills	Higher education institutions (Virginia Tech, Radford University, New River Community College), Small Business Development Center, Small Business support roles, and Chambers of commerce	
Virtual Upskilling for those businesses employing Disabled Individuals	Disabled Individuals, remote learners	Create virtual and in-person training modules to upskill the workforce	Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, workforce development boards, online learning platform resources	
Affordability	Lower income students and families (esp. to address stigma of accessing)		ARC, NRVRC, Maybe OAA funding? Donors for equipment, School system programs. NRVCS for services	pilot programs through the ARC
Equipment/Access to Service as a Utility	Lower income students and families	Pilot programming to distribute equipment and provide myfi;	ARC, NRVRC, Maybe OAA funding? Donors for equipment, School	pilot programs through the ARC

Idea	Who will this serve?	How can this idea be implemented?	Who can help make these ideas happen?	What financial resources are needed?
		purchase equipment through donors than providing on-going service access	system programs and NRCC, local governments and internet providers. NRVCS for services	
Sustainability of anything with ongoing or replacement costs	Lower income students and families	higher level security training for end users, especially where organizations don't have dedicated IT staff	VCCS, ARC, NRVRC, Maybe OAA funding? Donors for equipment, School system programs. NRVCS for services	
Security Training for users	Students and families	DHCD working with VDoE to get out to schools; NRCC could provide training/course for this too	ARC, NRVRC, Maybe OAA funding? Donors for equipment, School system programs. NRVCS for services	pilot programs through the ARC, Perhaps something that isn't cost but need to sell it to educational partners to provide it
AI safety and ethics concerns			ARC, NRVRC, Maybe OAA funding? Donors for equipment, School system programs. NRVCS for services	pilot programs through the ARC
Affordability	Low/middle income households Elderly	Two tier payment system Sliding scale (could use medicaid payment scale)	Could argue that internet is a necessary medical expense for telehealth Pilot program through local VDH district	Medicaid Wireless on Wheels in MontCo

Idea	Who will this serve?	How can this idea be implemented?	Who can help make these ideas happen?	What financial resources are needed?
		Hospital by-in? Telehealth is cheaper by far than in person	Telehealth urgent care	
Free internet access points/mobile resources Elderly/Technical support	Students Elderly Low income People with disabilities	Possibly hot spots in downtown areas, grocery stores, public schools, "3rd space" areas (malls, churches, parks) Rental hotspots from a library Expanded transportation opportunities to get people to the free internet Education around adoption of telehealth and technology 55+ community classes (college student volunteers) Rooms available at places like NRVCS and libraries, VA, etc. And possibly a person to help access telehealth	Agency on Aging partnerships Meals on Wheels partnerships NRVCS in home case management Disablity Resource Center Senior Centers Libraries Lions Club and Ruritan	DRC does educational programming with grant funding and is applying for the grant cycle again to provide classes Universal access, community by-in, funding, different service agencies all have same talking points as to why telehealth More affordable to pay for a monthly internet voucher than to pay for rides to an office visit. First and foremost is affordability and then digital literacy.

Idea	Who will this serve?	How can this idea be implemented?	Who can help make these ideas happen?	What financial resources are needed?
Support independent living with access, equipment, training	Aging Individuals (60+) Veterans Individuals with Disabilities Rural Area residents		New River Health Department Disability Resource Center NRV Health care providers Home visiting programs Community anchors (more broadly redefined)	Sliding scale fee Partnered funding

NRV Digital Opportunity Plan Regional Stakeholder Discussion

30 May - 05 Jun 2025

Poll results

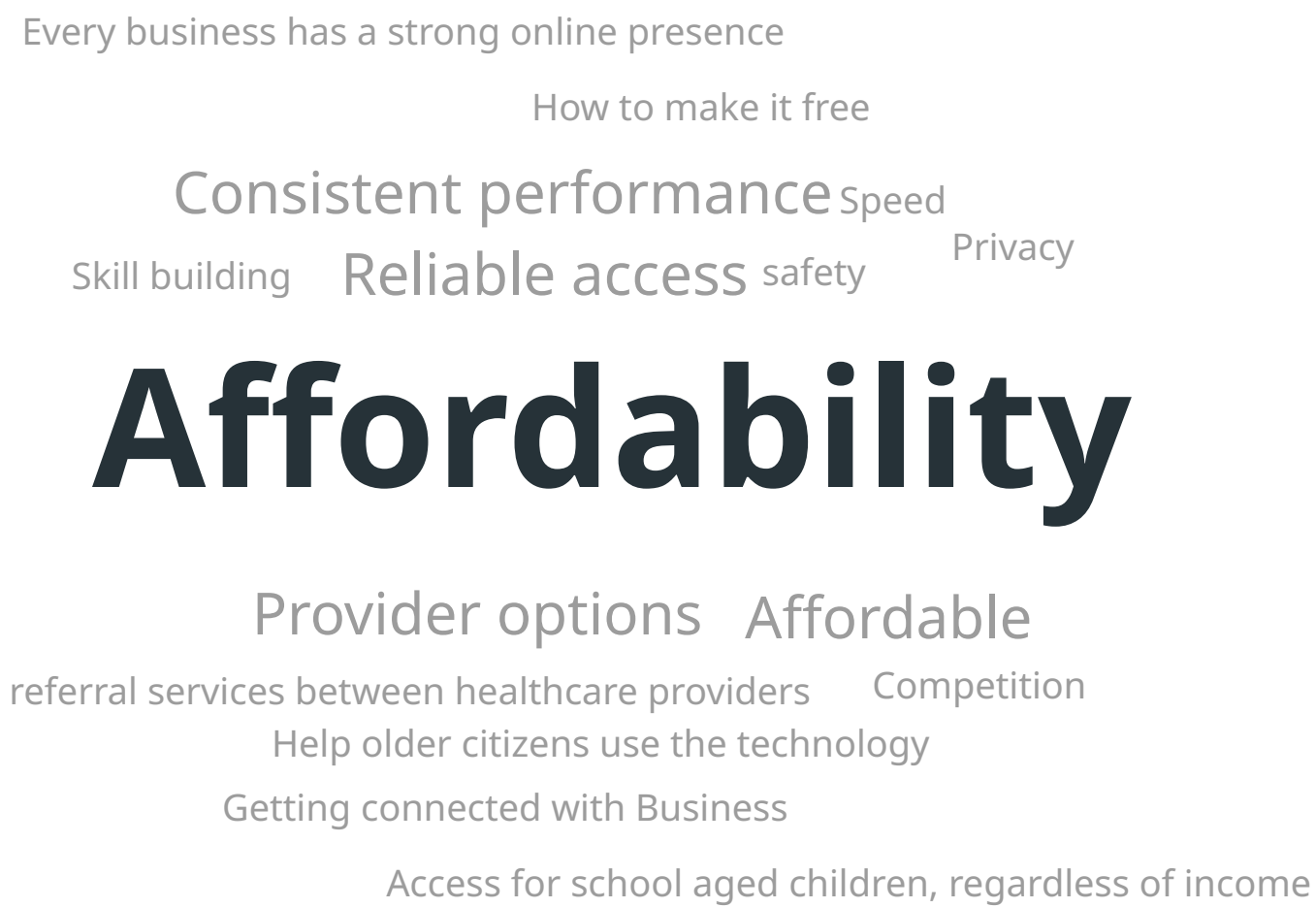
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- If you could solve one challenge to broadband use in the NRV, what would it be?
- What isn’t easy or accessible to do online?
- What programs and policies can help increase easier, more, and higher level broadband use?

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

0 2 0



What isn’t easy or accessible to do online?

0 1 5



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

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NRV Digital Opportunity Plan

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Regional Stakeholder Session

	Name	Organization/Representing	Email / Phone Number
18	KEVIN BYRD	NRVRC	KBYRD@NRVRC.ORG / 540-639-9313
19	Nichole Harr	Radford University	
20	Clayton Howlett	Pulaski County	cshowlett@pulaskicounty.org / 994-2555
21	Megan Atkinson	Mont Co. Public Schools	meganatkinson@mcps.org
22	Chris Cregger	Co M CAST	chris_cregger@cable.comcast.com
23	Kyle Johnson	Virginia Tech	kylejohnson@vt.edu
24	Cayla Trueheart	NRHD	cayla.trueheart@vdh.virginia.gov
25	JOHN HALE	GILES COUNTY	JHALE@GILESCOUNTY.ORG
26	Brian J. Hamilton	Montgomery Co., VA	hamiltonbj@montgomerycountyva.gov
27	Jack Watkins	NRCC	jwatkins@nr.edu
28	Mark Hanks	NRCC	mhanks@nr.edu
29	TAMARAH Holmes	DHCD	tamarah.holmes@dhcd.virginia.gov
30	Kassie Couch	DRC NRV	Kcouch@nrvdrc.org / 540-676-1920
31	KELVIN GRAVELY	DRC NRV	KGRAVELY@NRVDRC.ORG
32			
33			
34			

NRV Digital Opportunity Plan

Friday, May 30, 2025

Regional Stakeholder Session

	Name	Organization/Representing	Email / Phone Number
	= Staff Attendees		
35	Christy Straight		
36	Holly Lesko		
37	Chris Owens		
38	Bethany Peter		
39	Kinsey Weaver		
40	Julie Fox		
41	Anna Champion		
42	Leo Priddy		
43	Zoe Hunter		
44	Emma Carroll		
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