

NRV Digital Opportunity Plan
Local Stakeholder Session
Multipurpose Room 2, Montgomery County Government Center, 755 Roanoke St, Christiansburg
July 16, 2025, 2:30 to 4:00 pm

Session Summary

Welcome and opening remarks

a. Welcome

Carley Graves Andrews, Broadband Project Manager for Montgomery County welcomed the attendees and talked about the County's objectives in convening stakeholders for digital opportunity and improving broadband use.

Carley and NRVRC Project Manager Christy Straight gave an overview of the state of broadband deployment efforts in the region and in Montgomery County specifically. She emphasized that today's discussion is in support of digital opportunity with the upcoming universal coverage in place. 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, with discussion among the group included in these responses.

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

- Affordability
- Accessibility for those that don't have access
- Quality of service in rural areas
- Digital skilling/Effective use of tools

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:

- Medical care
- Human local connection
- Resistance to tech adoption due to a lack of trust including a fear of scams

- Lack of internet savvy combined with trust can also lead to scams. The lack of internet savvy also raised concerns for individuals with language barriers and youth populations

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

The group identified training as a significant opportunity to develop and listed several aspects and methods for addressing this topic. Partnerships, affordability options and device access were also identified and discussed in varying detail. The theme trended toward "connecting those who know with those who need support." Responses most relevant to training included the following:

- Digital Navigator
- Train the trainer programs for digital skilling (the group also questioned how low-income funding support could be provided, such as subsidies for devices and connections).
- Free or affordable instruction programs
- Small business and start-up support through various partners locally, in the region and at state and federal levels, particularly to catch entrepreneurs before entering the pipeline to access support:
    - Virginia Smal Business Development Center
    - Local governments
    - Chamber of Commerce
    - Workforce (Virginia Career Works)
    - US Small Business Administration
    - Virginia Economic Development Partnership
    - These options need to connect existing resources to a coordinating host.
- Schools requiring at least distance learning class for each high school student as a way of developing and using online skills
- Access to CRC Knowledge Works
- Connecting with Digital Literacy NRV as a partner
- Digital upskilling on managing email
- Creating a reverse mentorship program with youth and elderly population
- Providing an open-to-the public long-term IT Support: possibly as a network or a county/town-provided help desk; establishing a known time and place (e.g, Tech Tuesdays) to receive free community support
- Building digital literacy and skills through training, education for senior citizens, but also other populations vulnerable to scams and loss of privacy & security online

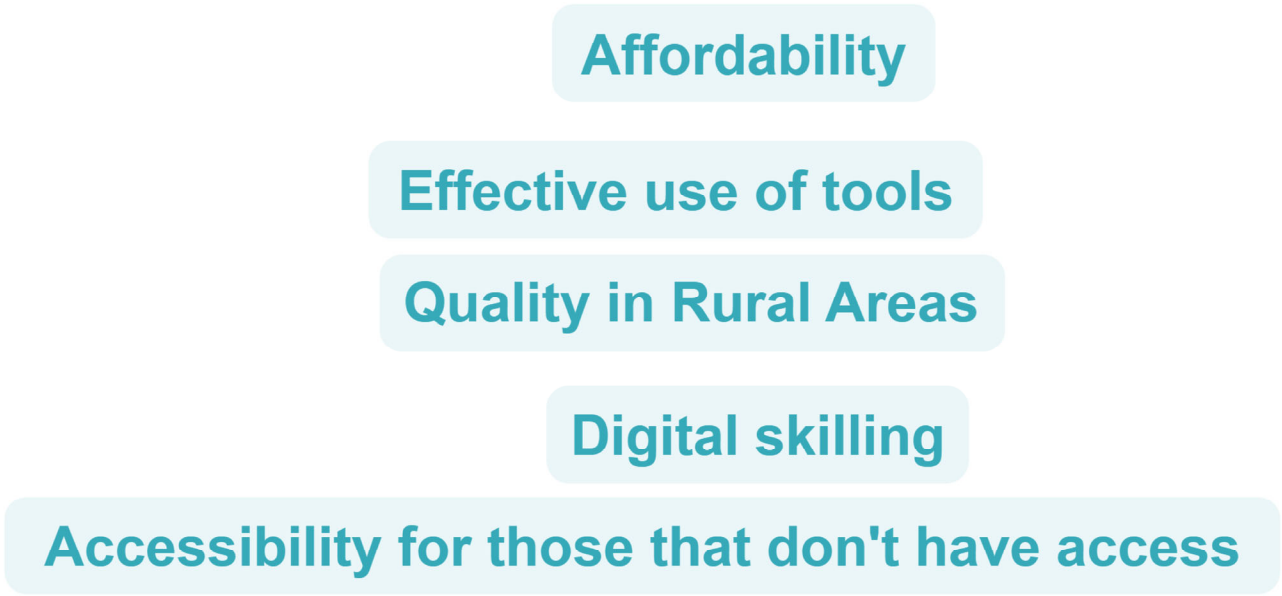
- Greater awareness of services and tools (ex. JobNow with library): People usually need just-in-time and one-on-one assistance
- How do we support these ideas financially?
- Who handles the coordination and connection to implement?
- Connection affordability and Device availability
    - Implement local income funding support (such as lifeline, ConnectAll, and subsidies from ISPs)
    - Giving interns computers and training during their internship: Device distribution
    - Consider a summer device lending K12 program to youth
    - Electronic donations to PC Land (refurbishes and donates) from businesses and school systems: Could donate to Community Action or Volunteer Montgomery

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 Montgomery County, what would it be?

Wordcloud Poll | 5 responses | 4 participants



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What isn’t easy or accessible to do online?

Wordcloud Poll | 3 responses | 3 participants

Medical care

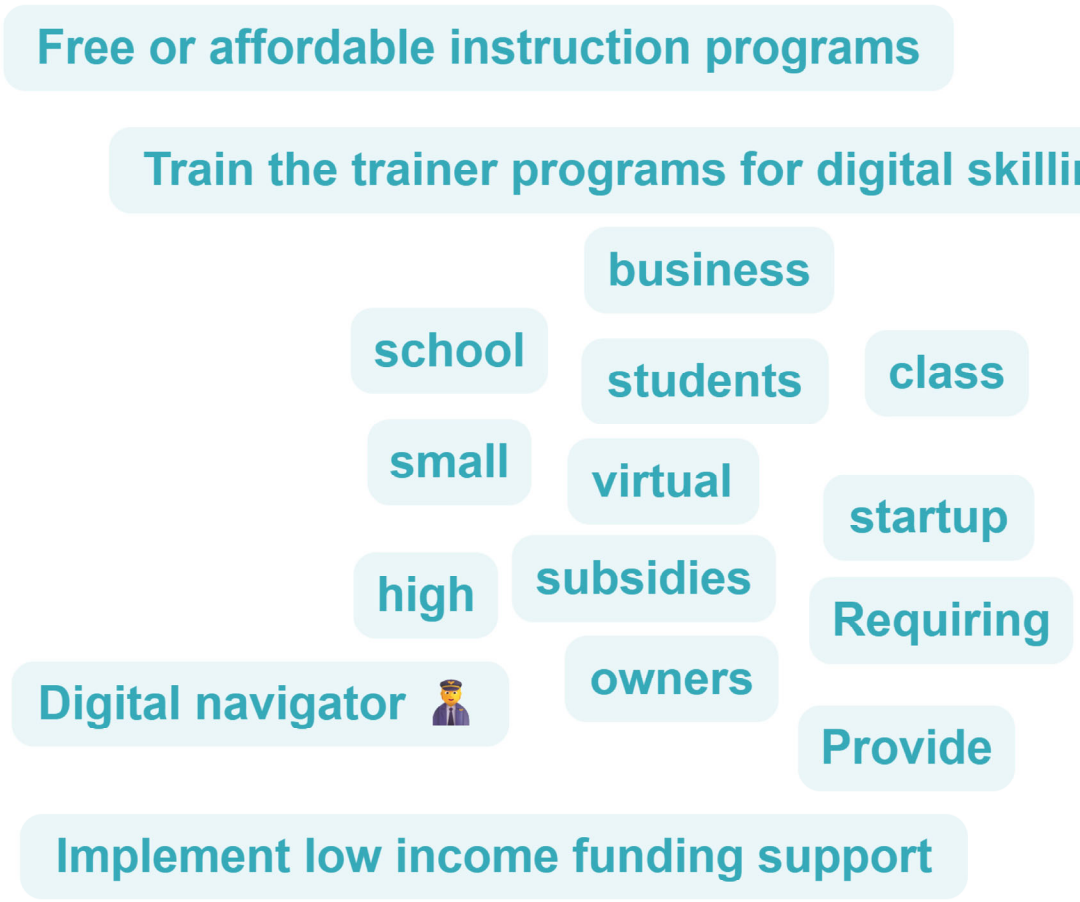
Not fall into a trap

Human local connection

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

Wordcloud Poll | 6 responses | 4 participants



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NRV Digital Opportunity Plan

Wednesday, July 16, 2025

Montgomery County Stakeholder Session

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