NRV Digital Opportunity Plan
Local Stakeholder Session

Mark Hollingsworth Community Room, Floyd County Library
Tuesday, June 24, 2025, 9:30 to 11:00 am

Agenda

1. Welcome and opening remarks
    a. Welcome
    Lydeana Martin, Floyd County Community & Economic Development Director
    b. Broadband Deployment and Digital Opportunity in the NRV
    Christy Straight, Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Resources, NRVRC and Digital Opportunity Plan Project Manager
    c. Goals for the session, opening questions
    Christy Straight
2. Conversation: How to Optimize Broadband Use throughout the Community
    a. Brainstorming for implementation projects and programs that will expand and improve broadband affordability and use in these areas:
        - Economic development (workforce, business growth)
        - Education and Distance Learning (K-12, post-high school education, training)
        - Telehealth and Medical Care
        - Government services
        - Community [development] and Quality of Life
    b. Working to address specific populations
        - Aging Individuals (60+)
        - Incarcerated Individuals
        - Veterans
        - Individuals with Disabilities
        - Individuals with a Language Barrier/Low Literacy
        - Individuals of a Racial or Ethnic Minority
        - Rural Area residents
        - Workforce
        - Small businesses
        - K-12, College & Continuing education, distance learners
3. What's next for the digital opportunity planning process

NRV Digital Opportunity Plan

Tuesday, June 24, 2025

Floyd County Stakeholder Session

	Name	Organization/Representing	Email / Phone Number
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22	Kathy Fott	Floyd Co. Chamber	executive director floydchamber.
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25	David Bates	OZMO	Floyd@dlBates.com
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Session Summary

Welcome and opening remarks

Lydeana Martin, Floyd County Community & Economic Development Director, welcomed the attendees and talked about Floyd's efforts in convening stakeholders for digital opportunity and improving broadband use. Each participant introduced themselves and talked about their specific connection to the topic. The attached sign-in sheet provides specific names and affiliations; the group consisted of Information Technology experts, Citizens staff, and business representatives.

The group discussed the state of broadband deployment efforts in the region and in Floyd specifically, recognizing that Citizens Coop has established universal coverage in the county.

Conversation on How to Optimize Broadband Use throughout the Community

Topics of interest discussed by the group included

1. How to create local connections

- There are many information technology companies in Floyd who collaborate well "in their bubbles," but there is interest in expanding the networks for collaborate – "breaking the bubble."
- Potential solutions include a digital directory, meeting spaces for conversation café's, and meetups (as education, with speakers) to entice people to come out and meet in person.
- A trusted moderator to act as a valid resource for disseminating information, sorting out the real and reputable information from scams and misinformation is important. Citizens noted they could be that resource to share out what other valid sources are organizing and sharing.
- Activities should be happening "where people go" – at community centers, reliable wifi access points, where the tech is current, and also where audiences of interest could or do spend time.
- Collaborate with known community groups such as Junebug Center, Floyd Media, Floyd Center for the Arts, and the Chamber

2. Combat Security Issues and Misinformation with Education and Training

- See note above about a trusted moderator and valid resource. The group identified that misinformation and scams target older users who do not have the knowledge or skills to assess the validity of what they're receiving; this impacts their use of the internet as much as their experiences using the internet.
- Group members noted educating citizens about these challenges is important as AI creates more believable misinformation and opportunities to get past ordinary cybersecurity practices – creating a "safe surfing" program.

3. Devices – Use, Availability, and Training

- It was noted that groups like Consumer Cellular provide basic devices that access the internet. Cellular services are not 100% available in Floyd.
- Other sources for refurbished and other electronics to provide to residents who may not have usable technology included schools phasing out used Chromebooks, older robotics equipment that can be repurposed for extracurricular STEM training (such that organized by the New River Robotics Association).
- Again, training would be needed to help individuals make the most of the equipment being offered.

4. Expanding physical capacity to process data in Floyd County

- The key challenge is having access to sufficient computing power to launch next-level use of the internet in innovative and vanguard technology and industry. In addition to access to compute, businesses would need data ownership and security of data and devices.
- A different style of data center (co-location) and computing power access, possibly with IT services and STEAM training and maker space to build interest with youth, could create opportunity to shift to a higher level of broadband use.
- New opportunities in fields like biotechnology are a good fit with the county and existing knowledge and skills. The security of Floyd's current remote location from most activity in this field is a positive asset as is its power availability.
- The group discussed the potential and the drawbacks of various scenarios of developing a data center in the county, noting the challenges, the strengths and opportunities, and the impacts of those scenarios.
- Citizens had proposed a Community Technology Center in an earlier BEAD post-deployment grant application that could be relevant to this topic.

5. The next and immediate steps to executing these ideas is

- Setting a meeting with interested parties, starting with those present, and finding a project to collaborate on and begin building connections on this topic throughout the county.
- Building on the discussion with those who weren't present through additional conversations.

##. Additional summary of input

One participant posted his thoughts on the session to LinkedIn and provided a thorough perspective and summary of key points in the discussion:

> *From David Bates – posted to LinkedIn June 25:* David Bates • *Director of Innovation at Ozmo*
>
> Today, I had the opportunity to attend a gathering of the New River Valley Digital Opportunities (NRVDO) group, which focused on tech access and digital equity in our small Appalachian towns. A few things really stuck with me:
>
> Trustworthy Information Is Hard to Find
> A decade or so ago, the place to find out what was going on in your small town was the local newspaper. As small local newspapers were eaten up by larger media organizations, usage dropped, and many turned to social media as it was supposed to be the "Town Hall." The reality, however, is that it's too fractured to be useful. In our town alone we have at least 10 "Floyd Groups" where different people with different opinions started various groups to cater to their needs. Even though there is a main Floyd group the post about happenings is often buried or the validity of the post can't be verified. There are also a slew of half-implemented services that people have set up but no official channels that have been spread to the community at large... We need curated, trusted sources to stay informed.
>
> Scams Are Growing More Sophisticated
> This is super important for our community as we have a ton of older adopters of new tech. The scams aren't just increasing; they are becoming believable. Training is needed to help the tech adopters understand the difference between scam and actual news. One of the things we talked about was having community beacons to provide the training, someone that the community trusts and has the outreach to pull in those in need of the training.
>
> Tech Adoption Isn't One-Size-Fits-All
> Floyd is weird, just ask anyone who's visited, it's a quirky hippy, maker, craftsman, music, farmer vibe, and that's why I love it. But trying to plan for tech adoption is challenging. Some see digital tools as the solution, others as a threat to tradition. We need to carefully introduce tech in a way that enhances the community without displacing our culture. This requires local voices leading the effort, not external ones.
>
> Compute Remains a Quiet Barrier
> Even with solid power and internet, access to secure compute remains a hurdle for local privacy-conscious businesses. A datacenter or colocation

could unlock new potential, but it raises tough questions... Can we bring in investment without losing local control? Datacenters are expensive and with government grants drying up the town would have to look to regional companies to foot the bill. But is it worth it?

Anyway, I'm happy I had the opportunity to meet with other tech leaders and government officials in my area to try and tackle some of these big problems. I hope these insights are useful to your small town and I look forward to becoming more active in my own.

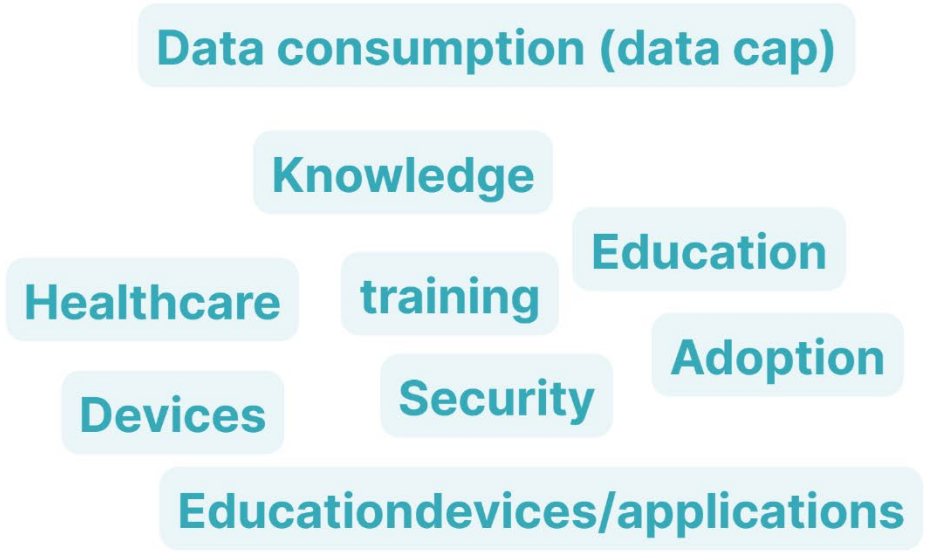
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What’s next for the digital opportunity planning process:

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.

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

Wordcloud Poll 9 responses 7 participants



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What isn’t easy or accessible to do online?

Wordcloud Poll | 8 responses | 6 participants



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