

A complex network diagram with nodes of various sizes (small, medium, large) and colors (dark blue, red, grey) connected by thin lines. The background is a light grey gradient.

Connect Rockingham

Rockingham County's collective planning and funding approach
to digital equity.

Philanthropy is uniquely positioned to play a role in connecting the dots within community and driving public/private partnership solutions.

- Trusted community partners
- Convening superpowers, brokering connections and collaboration
- Minimize power dynamic, elevating community voice
- Deep knowledge and skill base
- Ability to leverage expert networks
- Flexibility to innovate untested or little-known solutions

Our Foundation's Role in our Community's Digital Inclusion Plan and collaborative infrastructure funding project.

Philanthropy Assets	Implementation
Trusted Community Partner.	Early pandemic discussions and survey of grantees and community partners – able to convey "urgency" in discussions with government partners.
Ability to leverage expert networks.	Made connections and received guidance from local Council on Governments, Rural LISC, NCDIT, National Digital Inclusion Alliance.
Convening superpowers, brokering connections and collaboration.	Broadband 101 session with NCDIT. Transitioned to workgroup - Convened 27 individuals from 17 different organizations for engaged learning and candid conversation. Sparked insight, partnerships, and clear, coordinated action.
Minimizing power dynamic, elevating community voice.	Acknowledged different motivations, thus established group norms, values, and processes that included feedback loops and shared decision-making. Structured sessions (7 total meetings). Three workgroups – availability, access, and adoption/affordability.
Flexibility to innovate untested or little-known solutions.	Used networks to identify 3500 homes without internet, increasing accuracy of state level maps; School bus and government building hotspot testing; Funding collaborative with Impact Alamance for digital literacy and adoption efforts regionally.

IDENTIFIED STRATEGIES FOR DIGITAL INCLUSION

	GOAL	STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVES
Availability	Improve Maps	Encourage advocacy with legislative representatives for laws that will improve broadband infrastructure mapping.
		Maximize the efforts of RC Information Technology to create complete maps using new and existing information. ✓
	Increase Connectivity	Dedicate Local, State and federal funds to expand broadband access. ✓
		Advocate for an increase in satellite and fixed wireless options for the most rural areas of the county.
	Improve Connectivity	Encourage advocacy with legislative representatives for changes to laws that hinder fiber-based broadband expansion.
		Regionalize efforts (to leverage more funds) to create incentives for service providers to expand fiber infrastructure.
Access	Expand Wireless Access	Complete a community scan of private businesses, churches, and community based organizations that provide free, reliable Wi-Fi network access. Use GIS mapping to overlay public and private access maps. ✓
		Increase reliable Wi-Fi network availability, with the aim of access points within 10 miles of each residence.
		Establish a countywide Broadband Resource Education Center (long-term goal).
	Increase Access to Low-Cost Broadband	Address gaps in hotspot funding as well as connectivity for students residing where hotspots are ineffective.
		Increase enrollment in established programs (i.e., Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, provider plans) that give broadband stipends, scholarships or subsidies. ✓
	Increase Access to Devices	Utilize current programs to increase device distribution to students K-12 (RCC, RCS, RCPC). ✓
		Expand device ownership within the community through refurbishing and digital navigation programs. ✓
Adoption	Create and Communicate Resources	Connecting digital literacy training with relevant content and services.
		Exploration of secondary and post-secondary curriculum and certifications in Digital Literacy and Navigation.
	Address and Fill gaps in information technology assistance	Running more public access computing centers across Rockingham County.
		Work with retail and corporate entities inside of Rockingham County.
		Leverage local non-profits, grassroots organizations, and faith-based organizations to support county efforts. ✓