

July 22, 2013

To: NITC Commissioners
From: Anne Byers
Subject: Community Council report

Through the planning component of the Public Service Commission's broadband map grant, regional groups were formed to develop regional broadband plans. These plans are currently being finalized. Priority areas identified in the regional plans include economic development/agriculture, digital literacy, education, and health care. A summary of the regional plans is included.

A state broadband plan will also be developed, building upon the regional plans. The presentation of regional broadband plans at the Nebraska broadband conference Oct. 16-17 in Kearney will kick off the planning process for the state plan. A joint meeting of the Community Council and other interested stakeholders (including NITC council members and commissioners) will be scheduled for late October or early November to identify priority areas for the broadband plan and to form workgroups to address the priority areas.

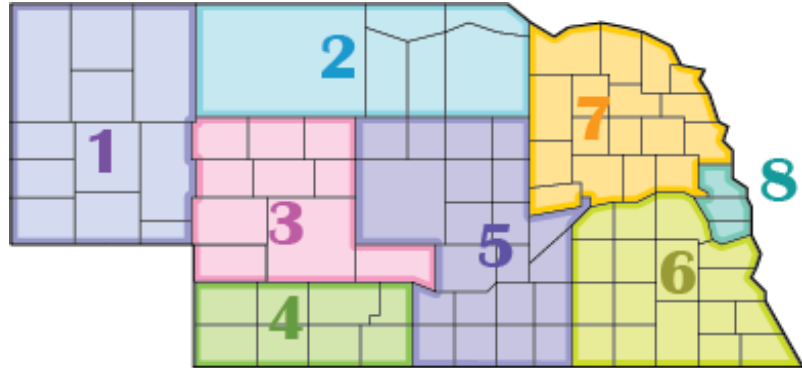


Regional Priorities

This document provides a summary of broadband priorities identified through the regional planning efforts.

Broadband is a foundation for economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness and a better way of life. Broadband adoption and Internet use in some areas of the state and among certain population groups

remains low. The regional plans reflect the differences and similarities in broadband adoption and Internet use across the state. Digital literacy, health care and economic development, including agriculture, are cited often, as they are clearly areas where Nebraskans, and the communities in which they live, have the most to gain by adopting the latest broadband technologies. The realization of the priorities, the regional plans and the growing success of the regions, depend on access to broadband services by all geographic areas. Currently, access varies by region and community. Reliable access to high-speed Internet service and training are necessary to achieve increased adoption and use.



Each regional summary is unique and reflects results obtained through a process identified by each regional planning team. Following is the breakdown by region in order of the numbering system identified on the map:

1. Western Region

A regional summit was held that identified a long-term vision that increases youth retention, increases business development and transition, and decreases the digital divide and deserts. The following priority areas and initial objectives were identified to achieve that vision:

- **Digital Literacy and Adoption and Advanced Technology Training** – *Coordinate and increase educational offerings around digital literacy skills and advanced technology training.*
- **Economic Development** – *Expand awareness and growth of technology educational offerings to strengthen economic development, agritourism and entrepreneurs.*
- **Agriculture** – *Explore ways to increase access to basic and adequate broadband services for ag producers and those living outside city limits.*

2. North Central Region

Three priorities were identified at the broadband regional forum and further enhanced by the planning team and focused conversations. Currently, access is varied across the region. For the priorities to be achieved, all North Central region residents and businesses must have access to the various types of communication technology for future needs. The priorities, written as a vision statement, and initial steps for each are:

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- **Business and Economic Development/** – Economic development efforts will target high-tech entrepreneurs and a workforce with technology skills. Businesses, including agricultural producers and agribusinesses, will use information technology to improve profits and grow their customer base. *Initial steps include working with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development and identifying ways to help businesses learn from each other.*
- **Education** – Schools will be highly networked environments; classrooms will have broadband access and teachers will be trained in its use. Students, parents, teachers and administrators will have equitable access in a way that facilitates learning. *Initial steps include efforts to improve broadband access at home and improving coordination between distance education providers.*
- **Health Care** – Health care providers will utilize electronic health records, e-prescribing, health information exchange and telehealth technologies effectively. Patients will be able to access health care information. *Initial steps include identifying sources of funding assistance to for-profit and non-profit health care providers.*

3. New Frontier Region

Being a vibrant region, ensuring availability of quality broadband service for all residents, and promoting broadband adoption to attract and retain rural youth and working age adults is a vision of the New Frontier planning team. The following priorities and activities were established:

- **Educate and engage people on the value of broadband** – *Hold annual technology fairs to build awareness and promote other educational opportunities.*
- **Increase availability of broadband to all communities, including those outside of a city limits** – *Work with providers, government and regional leadership to increase coverage for areas that are underserved or communities that are not satisfied with their current broadband.*
- **Work with telecommunications providers and other key stakeholders to ensure that redundancy and reliability are available to health care providers** – *Promote importance of high-speed Internet to rural hospitals to attract new physicians, connect with specialists and utilize telehealth services.*
- **Explore how businesses and non-profits can better utilize broadband technology** – *Connect businesses with resources to better understand how broadband technology can strengthen their business.*
- **Provide education to farmers, ranchers and agriculture businesses to enhance their bottom line** – *Provide education about precision agriculture and how using advanced equipment and monitoring systems, facilitated by broadband access, can increase crop yields and/or save resources.*

4. Southwest Region

Increasing the understanding and recognizing the importance of the benefits of broadband use for businesses and the residents is the focus of the Southwest regional planning team. Three priority areas and initial actions to increase the knowledge and use of broadband technology were identified:

- **Digital Literacy and Adoption** – *Collaborate with libraries and others to provide individual and small group training on the use of broadband; promote awareness and adoption through the news media, including papers and newsletters.*
- **Economic Development**– *Increase the number of business, including agribusinesses and agricultural producers, that utilize broadband technology. Efforts will include working with the Chamber of Commerce and providing educational opportunities.*

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- **Local Government** – *Identify options to expand the usage of broadband technology including training.*

5. Central Region

Understanding the benefits of broadband and encouraging individuals and businesses to use broadband is a focus of the Central region. Input from the Central planning team, utilizing broadband assessments, and conversations with economic developers and ag producers identified two priority areas and initial steps.

- **Economic Development** – *Create community or regional technology teams; develop educational programs on how businesses can capitalize on broadband; and explore ways to bring high-speed Internet to areas that currently do not have access.*
- **Agriculture** – *Provide education and develop a plan to encourage producers to explore technology that would benefit their decision making.*

6. Southeast Region

Priority areas for the Southeast region were identified with input from the planning team, conversations with economic developers and ag producers, and utilizing assessments. A long-term goal for this effort is to identify how broadband can be utilized as a tool to retain and return increasing numbers of the rural youth population. Two high-priority areas have initially been identified for the region.

- **Agriculture** – The Southeast region includes a high urban population; however, a very large number of production agriculture and agribusinesses dot the map of southeast Nebraska. The majority are multi-million dollar businesses that lack access to high-speed Internet. *Initial action steps include providing education and developing a plan to encourage producers to explore technology that would benefit their decision making.*
- **Economic Development** – Communities, local businesses, families, youth and senior citizens should recognize the important role broadband will play in building a sustainable community/region for the future. *Initial action steps include developing community or regional technology teams, developing educational programs on how they can capitalize on broadband, and exploring ways to bring high-speed Internet to areas that currently do not have access.*

7. Northeast Region

The Northeast planning team identified broadband as critical for economic development, as well as for retaining youth and attracting young families back to the region. Four goals were identified to address the priority areas of economic development and attraction/retention of youth and young families. Those goals and objectives are:

- **Work with telecommunications providers and other stakeholders to ensure the availability of quality broadband for all** – *Identify new ways to collaborate to build broadband infrastructure and increase digital literacy.*
- **Work with telecommunications providers and other stakeholders to ensure affordable broadband service** – *Encourage the provision broadband services at a fair range of affordability.*
- **Promote broadband adoption as an incentive to retain and return increasing numbers of rural youth and working age adults** – *Determine current broadband capacity and establish benchmarks, and provide broadband/IT education.*



- **Promote broadband adoption and utilization as an incentive for economic development** – Objectives focus on strengthening the case for adoption by demonstrating how it can make a real difference (i.e., technology education and creating IT jobs).

8. Omaha Region

According to the 2010 household survey, 87% of those living in Omaha indicated that they are utilizing broadband compared. In contrast, only 11% of the respondents in two zip codes in North Omaha are utilizing broadband. To address this difference in utilization, the focus of the Omaha region is on this underserved population. By increasing broadband implementation and utilization, the health and economic well-being of low resource families may be improved. The priority areas identified are:

- **Digital Literacy & Adoption** – Establish partnerships with key stakeholder groups to accomplish goals outlined in the regional plan and develop a series of workshops with the partners to provide effective education for their clientele.
- **Health Care** – Develop tools as needed to provide access to needed services (such as health care enrollment).
- **Economic Development** – Utilize AIM's Career Link for low-resource families to find employment opportunities.
- **Non Profits & Education** – Work with community partners to provide effective education and build awareness of how non-profits can increase their influence and effectively deliver services using technology.

Tribal Regional Plan

The availability, accessibility and affordability of cell phones, computers and connectivity on the tribal lands are a challenge. To address these, planning efforts have focused on working with the Nebraska Indian Community College (NICC). The college goal is to support and provide the tribal communities with increased education, healthy lifestyles and cultural awareness for at least 50% of tribal youth, students and adults. Broadband can be a tool for achieving this overall goal.

Priorities/activities that will increase demand for broadband include:

- **Education** – Increase continuing education of tribal youth and adults utilizing broadband. Connect three tribal college community campuses with tribal college radio station via broadband and subsequently deliver education to promote healthy lifestyle activities. Expand the availability of for-credit education classes online, including journalism, media and entrepreneurship classes.
- **Communication Access** – Explore how to improve the challenges of availability, accessibility and affordability of cell phones, computers and getting connected via high-speed broadband. Verify technology usage, including high-speed Internet connections on tribal lands.

