

Rush County among First in State to Adopt Five-Year Digital Inclusion Plan

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Rush County's Digital Inclusion Plan 2020-2025 is the first of its kind in Indiana, according to Dr. Roberto Gallardo, assistant director of the Purdue Center for Regional Development. Gallardo has guided Rush County's all-volunteer broadband task force over the past year. The plan has four main goals with defined objectives that go well beyond the task force's vision of affordable, adequate and reliable internet access for every home and business in Rush County. Not only does this plan address the issue of broadband infrastructure, it also charts a course to leverage this technology for community economic development.

Digital inclusion, the meaningful use of technology to improve the quality of life, is every bit as important as internet connectivity. Developing digital inclusion in Rush County is critical given that more and more information is demanded online: job searches and applications, e-learning, banking, farming, medical information, social services - and the list grows. Plans are underway to connect high school students (the digital natives) with the older generations. Studies have shown that reversing teaching roles helps to foster bonds of understanding and helps senior citizens feel less forgotten. They can stay more easily connected to their families and friends. Rush County students will be able to earn community service credits toward graduation requirements. Computers and laptops are often replaced by businesses every few years. When donated to this program, they will be reformatted and offered to those who have completed a series of free internet essentials classes. Residents receiving government assistance will be offered less expensive internet subscriptions if they reside within ascertained service areas. These are only a few of the strategies to help bridge the digital divide in Rush County, integrating technology into the fabric of the whole community.

With a total population of less than 17,000, this rural community knows the important economic advantages of being broadband-ready, having received their certification from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation several months ago. Residents are also well aware of the expense and difficulty in getting the last mile of "to your front door" service. This plan works with providers to ease these impediments wherever possible.

Rush County is finding ways to help its residents fully participate in the rapidly developing digital economy and society, helping span the digital divide and improving the quality of life for everyone.

To view the complete five-year digital inclusion plan, go to www.rushcounty.in.gov/broadband. For more information, visit us on Facebook or contact task force co-chairs Mark McCorkle markdmccg@gmail.com and Carole Yeend at broadbandconnect@rushcounty.in.gov