

Improving Broadband Adoption

Strategies and Recommendations Local or Regional Broadband Awareness & Adoption Programs

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Background

Providing access to Internet services is only the beginning in achieving a digitally ready community that is realizing all of the benefits of broadband. In 2012, about 75% of the population in Virginia used the Internet, either from work, home or elsewhere. This means that over a quarter of Virginia residents do not use the Internet from any location. Whether by choice or economic circumstance, these residents do not access opportunities and services that provide a broad range of benefits to citizens and businesses.

Recognizing the benefits of increasing levels of Internet adoption is just the first step on the road to developing a coherent adoption strategy. A key consideration in designing that strategy is understanding who are the “non-adopters” and what are the barriers or motivations that keep them from using the Internet. Numerous research efforts have been carried out to determine the main barriers to Internet adoption. The results have shown that non-adoption is usually a result of a combination of factors, rather than any one factor. The three most critical factors include: costs of broadband service and owning a computer; digital literacy; and, lack of interest or perceived relevance of the Internet to the non-adopting individual, household or business.

The purpose of this document is to provide localities with strategies for eliminating these barriers which will in turn increase overall broadband adoption. Localities must take ownership of these strategies and set forth an action plan to turn these strategies into results which will translate into greater adoption and allow the locality to realize the benefits of broadband.

Goals

“Begin with the end in mind” is one of the seven habits of highly effective people, from Stephen R. Covey’s book of the same name. The ultimate goal, or “end state,” of a locality’s broadband adoption program is defined by the positive change it will make in the social, economic, or cultural life of its citizens. Based on commonly reported barriers, localities should focus upon the following goals to take broadband adoption to the next level. These goals are as follows:

1. **Remove or reduce the cost barrier** to allow those citizens who otherwise would have access to take advantage of broadband services.
2. **Increase awareness of non-adopters of broadband** to help them understand how being online can benefit their day to day lives as well as educating these citizens on the services that are available to them.
3. **Establish relevance for non-adopters of broadband** by making services available online that can benefit non-adopters giving them a reason to be online as well as those citizens who are already online.
4. **Continue to improve availability of broadband services** in areas where broadband service is not currently available.

Strategies

Target: Non-Adopters

Barrier: Awareness

Strategy: Establish a Broadband Specialist role who would “own” the adoption strategies and be responsible for managing their implementation.

It is important that the strategies necessary to boost adoption are “someone’s job”. If a locality depends on others who work on these strategies as time permits secondary to their primary responsibilities, these strategies will likely not be fully executed.

This position could be a position either within county administration, boards, councils, etc. It would likely not be a permanent position. Once the locality achieved the desired adoption level, the need for the role would diminish over time. As a result, consideration should be given for this being a contract position and not an FTE.

Strategy: Develop a comprehensive broadband awareness campaign to increase awareness for non-adopters.

- Define a set of standard messages that are to be communicated through multiple media channels including:
 - Benefits of being online
 - How can you use the Internet
 - Broadband access packages which are available through local providers
 - Digital literacy training offerings
 - Success stores focused on existing citizens
- Define media channels to be utilized for distribution. These may include but are not limited to:
 - Mailing sent to existing property tax database
 - Flyer sent home through the schools
- Consider a marketing initiative to ensure those that have broadband access are subscribing. Market the benefits of broadband, digital literacy offerings and low cost options through direct mailings, information delivered through the schools to parents, fliers included with tax bills, information on the locality’s website and at every public gathering opportunity.

Strategy: Develop a standard awareness and outreach program targeted toward seniors and delivered through local church groups demonstrating the relevance of Internet access to the group.

The Broadband Specialist would be responsible for developing a program/presentation that would be presented to local church groups or civic groups that have a predominately senior membership. This program would focus on the following:

- Provide basic digital literacy education.
- Demonstrate the benefits of the Internet to seniors:
 - Online resources (AARP, Healthcare.gov, etc.), Facebook for staying in touch with family & friends.
- Provide real world examples of how they would use the Internet.
- Partner with local providers and ask them to consider offering a special package deal to this group if they signup during the session.
- Consider implementing a site to support digital literacy training as well as acquisition and support of broadband service. One such example is <http://www.getconnectedtoday.com>.

Strategy: *Take the show on the road.*

- The Broadband Specialist would develop a multi-media presentation that would detail the benefits of being online.
- A portable display booth could be acquired which could be setup at public locations within the locality.
- If there is a participating provider perhaps they would consider offering a special package deal for citizens who are willing to sign up for service on the spot.

Strategy: *Enhance availability of e-Government services to engage citizens allowing them to interact with local government electronically.*

Localities have an opportunity to provide citizens with tools allowing them to interact with local government. This strategy may establish relevance for some of the non-adopters who feel they have no reason to utilize the Internet. In addition, this will also provide significant benefit to the locality and its citizens in that e-Government services play a significant role in bringing both individuals and business to the locality. The following are examples of action items which would be involved with this strategy.

- **Transform the public website into a contemporary citizen portal.** Many local governments are moving to a citizen portal model for their public websites which focus on a functional model allowing citizens to easily find services and interact with the government. Below are links to examples of some Virginia localities that have moved to this model.
- **Implement services to foster citizen interaction.** Localities have an opportunity to implement contemporary e-government services to foster communication with citizens as well as foster

economic development. Localities should consider implementation of services such as the following:

- Emergency Notifications
- Subscribe to County News
- Online Access to Board of Supervisor Meetings
- Online Business License Application
- Online Payments
- Search of Business Locations
- Report a Problem
- Register for Recreation Programs
- Apply for a Job

Resources:

City of Danville

<http://www.danville-va.gov>

City of Fredericksburg

<http://www.fredericksburgva.gov>

King William

<http://kingwilliamcounty.us>

Surry County

<http://www.surrycountyva.gov>

Charles City County

<http://www.co.charles-city.va.us>

Target: Low Income Non-Adopters

Barrier: Awareness, Cost

Strategy: *When residents apply for a building permit for a new home, encourage providers to participate by offering them a special rate for monthly broadband access.*

- This will provide an opportunity to interface with citizens who may not have broadband access.
- The special pricing would only be available if they take advantage of the offer when they acquire their building permit.
- Offering a special for broadband access to reduce the overall monthly cost may help low income families.

Strategy: *Develop a digital literacy program where attendees register for a one day class which educates them on the benefits of being online as well as focuses on basic digital literacy skills.*

- The Broadband Specialist would work with Department of Social Services to establish eligibility criteria and a selection process to select eligible participants for the program.
- The Broadband Specialist would develop a program to educate participants on the benefits of being online as well as giving them basic skills for navigating the Internet.
- Low-cost computers such as Chromebooks or other low-cost refurbished computers could be provided as part of the package for as low as \$150.
- Include marketing any local computer equipment refurbish programs to expand awareness of this option – both for those that want to donate and those that need a lower cost solution
 - Help promote Cox’s Connect to Compete or Comcast’s Internet Essentials programs if these providers are in your area.

Target: Student Family Non-Adopters

Barrier: Cost, Relevance

Strategy: *Public Schools should develop a strategic plan for enabling parents through technology.*

This strategy is an encompassing strategy with many different components. It may be appropriate to break this strategy into smaller strategies for the purpose of execution, monitoring and management. Overall, this strategy will focus on getting a computer and an Internet connection into the homes of students and engage parents in the education process. This should include the following key aspects:

- **Establish a leadership team.** Schools should establish a leadership team with representation from schools and parents to participate in the development of a strategic plan.
- **Put technology in their hands...and homes.** Encourage local providers to participate and partner to develop a program similar to the federal Connect2Compete Program for K-12 students and families which provides affordable Internet and devices to students and families that qualify. Programs could be modeled after the C2C program in terms of qualifications and requirements.
- **Establish relevance with a learning management system.** One of the primary tools for electronically engaging the parent in their student’s education is a parent portal or learning management system such as Blackboard. With this type of portal, teachers can develop and publish lesson plans, tasks lists for students or parents, grades, and many other features. Parents can utilize this environment to track and keep up with their child’s performance on a day to day basis.
- **Establish relevance with other electronic tools.** The more ways parents have to interact with the school and their student, the more likely they will be involved with their child’s education. Services such as mylunchmoney.com will allow parents to logon and manage their child’s lunch account to set up recurring payments as needed.

- **Parent engagement and education.** A program should be developed for parents to receive training on basic digital literacy, online safety, and communicating with the school utilizing some of the tools which have been previously mentioned.

Resources:

Connect to Compete

<http://everyoneon.org/about/c2c>

Blackboard

<http://www.blackboard.com>

mylunchmoney.com

<https://www.mylunchmoney.com>

School2Home

<http://www.school2home.org>

Children's Partnership

<http://www.childrenspartnership.org/>

Empowering Parents through Technology

<http://www.childrenspartnership.org/publications/126>

Parent Portal Example

<http://www.dadeschools.net/parents.asp>

Target: Business Non-Adopters

Barrier: Awareness, Education

Strategy: *Partner with local businesses to conduct on-site awareness and training classes.*

- The Broadband Specialist would develop a program to deliver at local businesses which focuses on educating workers on the benefits of being online.
- Partner with local providers and ask that they consider offering a special rate for businesses and employees that attend the session.