

HIGH SPEED INTERNET

AND RURAL COMMUNITIES



OVERVIEW

High speed Internet breaks down the barriers of distance and time, allowing residents of rural areas to participate in economic and civic life far beyond their geographic region. Communications made possible by broadband technology eliminates the logistical constraints of regionally-based business models, allowing businesses in isolated areas to compete with their big-city counterparts. Ultimately, the numerous economic and social advantages enabled by the availability of high speed Internet in rural areas benefits the entire country.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The Pew Internet & American Life Project has found that rural residents are much less likely to subscribe to broadband than their urban counterparts. A study by Connected Nation finds that 19 percent of rural residents say they do not subscribe to broadband because it is not available in their area. Equally challenging is that many residents are not aware of the enormous benefits provided to them by high speed Internet. Nearly half of rural residents without a home broadband connection say it is because they do not need it. Cost can also present a problem for both providers and residents: 22 percent of rural residents say they do not subscribe to broadband because it is too expensive. Infrastructure investment in sparsely populated rural areas is often seen as unsustainable by telecommunications companies.

BENEFITS OF HIGH SPEED INTERNET

- When given access to affordable broadband, rural businesses restricted to local markets, such as “mom and pop” shops or home-based businesses, can expand their market reach across the nation and even the world.

- Broadband brings the opportunity for direct access to education and health care for rural residents who are otherwise forced to travel long distances for college courses and medical treatment.
- Rural libraries newly enhanced by high speed Internet often experience a resurgence of community interest and participation. High speed Internet provides rural residents access to global information and cultural resources.
- Affordable broadband enables historically urban businesses like graphic design, Web site design, and other creative industries to experience new life in rural settings while competing on the same level as city-based companies.
- Farmers gain real-time access to vital information such as crop prices or weather forecasts, and marketing opportunities through high-speed networks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus efforts to expand high speed Internet infrastructure to unserved and underserved rural communities.
- Target communities with low adoption rates to increase public awareness about the importance of high speed Internet.
- Support initiatives to keep the price of high speed Internet in underserved rural communities affordable.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit connectednation.org and speedmatters.org

