Washington County
Digital Inclusion Plan

Washington County Digital Inclusion Plan

Goals & Strategies

Goal 1: Ensure residents have access to quality and reliable devices.

Strategy 1a) identify businesses and organizations in the community that may be willing to donate devices including desktops, laptops, and tablets.

Strategy 1b) work with local schools and other nonprofits to launch a tech savvy volunteer corps (TSVC) made up of students and adults than can a) reformat donated devices; b) provide technical assistance; c) and/or provide digital literacy workshops.

Strategy1c) establish a device give-away or loan program in partnership with community nonprofits. Device program should be administered by a local organization and coordinated with donating businesses and organizations as well as the tech savvy volunteer corp.

       i.   Initial focus may be on low income families with children entering school so parents can learn with children

Strategy 1d) partner with local nonprofits involved in the delivery of social programs to potentially identify community residents in need of devices and/or digital literacy workshops. Likewise, work closely with schools to identify families in need of devices as well.

Strategy 1e Create an on-call network to supplement the TSVC.

Goal 2: Improve digital literacy and skills among all residents.

Strategy 2a) Partner with IVY-Tech Sellersburg to inventory existing digital literacy workshops and classes to identify gaps and niches to be filled including but not limited to efforts conducted by schools, nonprofits, Washington County Economic Growth Partnership, Washington County Chamber of Commerce, etc.

Strategy 2b) Once locations conducive to hosting digital literacy workshops and existing efforts are identified, jointly develop a schedule to offer frequent workshops for free or at a discounted price targeting multiple groups in the community. TSVC can help conduct these workshops in addition to existing teaching and faculty.

Goal 3: Increase the educational attainment level of residents to enable more residents the ability to afford internet access.

Strategy 3a) In partnership with IVY-Tech Sellersburg, create a robust apprenticeship/internship/two-year degree completion program for local high school students.

Strategy 3b) in partnership with the Washington County Economic Growth Partnership, Washington County Chamber of Commerce, and/or Main Street Association, survey existing businesses to identify their information technology and workforce needs. Use this information to inform effort outlined in Strategy 3c.

Strategy 3c) Depending on the results of 3b, develop training programs for local employers.

Goal 4: Integrate digital inclusion strategies into community, economic, and workforce development.

Strategy 4a) in partnership with the Washington County Economic Growth Partnership, Washington County Chamber of Commerce, and/or Main Street Association, survey existing businesses to identify their information technology and workforce needs. Use this information to inform effort outlined in Strategy 3c.

Strategy 4b) identify facilities in the community that could potentially be transformed into business incubators, co-working spaces, telework nesting, and/or tech hubs.

Strategy 4c) in partnership with Washington County Economic Growth Partnership, Washington County Chamber of Commerce, and/or Main Street Association develop and implement an entrepreneurship ecosystem with an emphasis on developing products and services more aligned to the digital economy (e.g., artificial intelligence startups, app development, online services, consulting, data analysis, etc.) as well as assess and improve business and organization's online presence.

Strategy 4d) conduct annual "hackathons" to complement existing business plan competitions where students or residents compete to develop app or online services to improve city services, community responsiveness, and/or quality of life in general.

Strategy 4e) deploy incentives to a) subsidize home internet subscriptions for remote workers; b) provide a nesting and/or co-working facility to remote workers (see Strategy 4b); c) make it easy for businesses to allow and/or hire remote workers; d) potentially subsidize outside employers to hire residents as remote workers.

Strategy 4f) assess the community's online presence and reputation; develop and implement a digital engagement plan to a) improve online presence; b) proactively manage community's online reputation; c) and leverage digital platforms to increase civic engagement, trust and responsiveness.

Strategy 4g) survey manufacturers and other businesses to better understand the barriers or workforce needs around the adoption of artificial intelligence. Develop tools and resources to help organizations adopt and benefit from artificial intelligence.

Strategy 4h) provide resources to farmers to adopt digital agriculture strategies (e.g., precision agriculture) and encourage and support farm-to-table programs

Goal 5: Strive to establish and sustain a digital equity ecosystem (Note: digital equity ecosystems are defined as the interactions between individuals, populations, and their larger socioeconomic and technical environments that play a role in shaping digital inclusion work).

Strategy 5a) expand the digital advisory team into a broader coalition of digital inclusion stakeholders in the community. This coalition can monitor implementation of the plan and review progress twice per year, coordinate networking around digital inclusion, and serve as a liaison to additional community coalitions.

Strategy 5b) constantly update inventory of a) facilities conducive to digital literacy workshops; b) businesses and organization donating devices; c) existing digital literacy workshops and topics available.

Strategy 5c) formalize tech savvy volunteer corps by establishing a recruiting, management, and mentorship system as well as providing continuous funding.

Strategy 5d) gather more timely and detailed information regarding internet access, availability, cost, and utilization. This data should continue to inform the

implementation of the plan and monitor progress in reducing digital exclusion in the community.

Strategy 5e) ensure that digital inclusion is a community and economic development priority in addition to a social justice issue.

Goal 6: Build/upgrade affordable and adequate broadband connectivity throughout the community and improve adoption

Strategy 6a) relying on primary or secondary data sources (including school district data), identify broadband investment priority areas (BIPAs) in the community. These may include areas in need of broadband investment to upgrade existing service and/or stimulate competition.

Strategy 6b) draft a request for proposals (RFP) for providers to invest in the BIPAs. This RFP should establish a minimum level (e.g., internet speed available) desired. RFP should result in an estimated cost to invest in the BIPA at the level required.

Strategy 6c) secure buy-in from local government and other stakeholders to provide funds and other resources to providers investing in the BIPAs. This includes identifying potential local, state, or federal sources.

Strategy 6d) streamline easements, rights-of-way, property tax abatements, incentives, and others to ensure ROI is maximized for providers. Offer help to providers that have secured federal or state funds to invest in your community so they can begin construction/upgrades as soon as possible.

Strategy 6e) identify or develop discounted internet service plans in partnership with internet providers, schools, and other key stakeholders.

Strategy 6f) design and implement an awareness campaign of discounted service plans (if any) as well as efforts to increase adoption among community residents, businesses, and organizations.

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