Regional Convening
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Bloomington's Digital Equity Plan and Local Collaborations Across Indiana (Panel)

Presenters: Bloomington CIO/Director of IT Rick Dietz and American Connection Corps Fellows Reneisha Rudder, Olivia Hayworth, Gary Thompson, Iris O'Donnell Bellisario, and Cory Knipp

Rick Dietz, Bloomington CIO/Director of IT

- Prior to the pandemic, Bloomington started the process of developing a digital equity strategic plan in partnership with Joanne Hovis CTC Technology and Energy. Rick worked with CTC for a long time on a number of broadband issues and doubled down to work on a Digital Equity Strategic Plan.
- Bloomington Digital Equity Survey:
    - 6500 households, 1080 responses. Survey delivered after start of pandemic
    - Broadband services available in Bloomington, but incumbent providers speed, reliability, customer service, and costs are limitations to public adoption.
    - Survey found that low-income households are much more likely to lack Internet access or only have Internet access through their smartphones and 12% of low-income respondents to our survey never interact with the Internet at all.
    - Respondents said the existing federal subsidy programs through providers aren't being used by eligible residents. Nearly 0% of respondents indicated that they were aware that subsidy programs exist.
    - Half of respondents indicated that they do not believe that they have the skills that they need to use the Internet effectively or comfortably in some capacity.
    - Fully half of respondents indicated that their job requires internet access at home
    - Survey found broad support amongst the Bloomington Community for the city as a government entity to do more to address digital equity issues and improving broadband in the community.
- Bloomington Digital Equity Strategic Plan
    - Plan uses same four lenses as as National Urban League's 2021 Digital Equity Plan: Availability, Adoption, Utilization and Institutionalization
    - Recommendations:
        - Create a coalition of stakeholders to guide strategy and establish a leadership position within the City to implement digital equity programs, enhance coordination and drive action.
        - Expand a new City grants fund to launch and expand programs such as device provision and loaner programs, and potentially to launch technical support and training programs that serve target populations.
        - Work to expand utilization of Internet Essentials and other subsidized broadband programs, including through sponsored subscriptions, education and outreach efforts, and potential third-party support to assist indebted consumers.
        - Engage with local foundations and explore means of financial and technical support and partnerships to scale programmatic responses to meet the full need.

- - Facilitate broadband competition to potentially improve service and lower prices; consider the feasibility of expanding Wi-Fi in public housing and in City public spaces.
  - Actions taken in alignment with strategic plan:
    - Rolled out digital equity grants in 2020-2021 and another round in 2022
    - Worked to expand loaner pools within the community in partnership with the Monroe County Public Library.
    - Deploying Wi-Fi to underserved areas with a focus on our local parks again in areas of need.
    - Pitched a number of digital equity projects for state funding
    - Working with a potential new market entrant fiber provider to provide more ubiquitous high speed service within our community.

American Connection Corps Fellows

The American Connection Corps is the nation's largest fellowship program focused on bridging the digital divide.

Emma Woods - Digital Inclusion Fellow working with eleven counties (Uplands Regions) to develop a regional Digital Equity Plan that will be the pathway to expanding digital equity and resources across those communities

Reneisha Rudder - Digital Inclusion Fellow working with Southeast Indiana Regional Planning Commission located in Versailles to establish a community broadband task force and achieve Broadband Ready Community certification. Also working on rolling out a regional digital inclusion plan that has been put together with substantial community input, engaging community leaders to build buy-in for four goals.

Olivia Hayworth - Digital Inclusion Fellow working with 'Thrive West Central' and their Digital Inclusion Alliance to plan and execute a regional broadband survey and turn it into a regional Digital Equity Plan

Gary Thompson - Digital Inclusion Fellow working with the East Central Indiana Regional Planning District on a master plan for Delaware County and their broadband infrastructure. Also working on data collection, education and outreach to local community leaders around Digital Equity and connecting with Indiana Office of Technology on cybersecurity initiatives.

Iris O'Donnell Bellisario- Digital Inclusion Fellow working with Southern Indiana Development Commission and local Chambers of Commerce on small business digital equity programs and integrating broadband into different aspects of regional economic resilience strategy

Courtney Nip - Digital Inclusion Fellow working with the Eastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission across five counties to develop their Digital Inclusion Plans and promote the

Affordable Connectivity Program. Also working with Purdue Extension to offer digital ready business classes to small businesses within five counties

Q: Are there any resources that would have been helpful from the beginning that you wish you would have known about before you got started on this work that you might want to recommend to someone else who is just getting started?

- [National Urban League's 2021 Digital Equity](#)
- Building relationships will be key and it's a lot more than just the plan, but also the people behind it to keep it sustainable.
- That you need to oversample the most disparately impacted yet underrepresented populations
- Urban and Rural areas have very different needs
- Reach out to Roberto Gallardo, Director of the Purdue Center for Regional Development and a Purdue Extension Community & Regional Economics Specialist
- [Indiana Digital Divide Index](#)
- The [National League of Cities published digital equity resources](#) that could be helpful for municipalities of varying sizes to identify places to start.
- The [American Connection Corps](#) is the nation's largest fellowship program focused on bridging the digital divide.
- "None of us were experts when we started this work"
- "You have allies, you have colleagues in this effort, and there's a lot of other folks in other communities that have been working on this as well. So we can all pull together and make progress on this."
- "Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Try to find the digital equity work already underway in your communities and help build from there"

Q: Where can I get information on your work in regards to small business digital inclusion and literacy work by your group?
- Reach out to iris@sidc.cc for more information about the Southern Indiana work
- Summary of the content of [Digital Ready Business](#)

Q: What's the timeline that you are giving yourself to create and implement your digital equity plan?
- Uplands Region started with 6-9 months of planning and a 5 year implementation timeline
- Southeast Indiana Regional Planning Commission has a similar planning timeline with goals have varied timelines with a minimum of five years
- Eastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission has a five to ten year planning timeline, with short-term goals around awareness and outreach
- Timelines will vary by current-state level of maturity in the region.

Q: How does a region get an ACC fellow?
- Email Center for Regional Development Annie Cruz-Porter: acruzpor@purdue.edu