

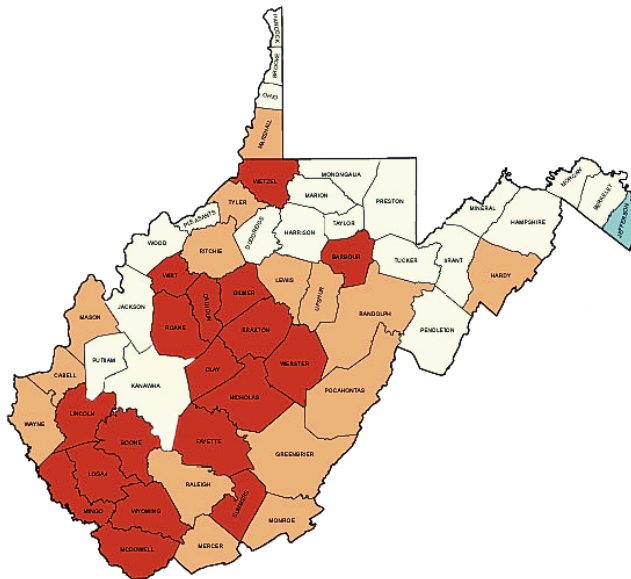
The Connect Humanity Appalachia Digital Accelerator

About this Project

Generation West Virginia and Regional Optical Communications are leading work in 18 counties to improve access to affordable internet through Connect Humanity's Appalachia Digital Accelerator project.

Over the past three years, GWV has focused on planning and supporting communities to access funds to build broadband infrastructure. With this foundational piece in motion and BEAD deployment funds expected fall 2024, we are taking this opportunity from Connect Humanity to look beyond internet infrastructure to other barriers, such as affordability and digital skills, that must be overcome so West Virginians have meaningful connectivity and all that it enables.

Through August 31, 2024, this project will support local partners in 18 counties to leverage existing planning work, fill the gaps, and secure the partnerships and funding they need to meet their communities digital inclusion goals.



Target communities are the counties of: Barbour; Boone; Braxton; Calhoun; Clay; Fayette; Gilmer; Lincoln; Logan; McDowell; Mingo; Nicholas; Roane; Summers; Webster; Wetzel; Wirt; Wyoming. These 18 counties were all classed as distressed counties by the Appalachian Regional Commission in 2023.

West Virginia Vision for Digital Equity

“Ensure that all West Virginians have the resources they need to participate in the digital world and achieve the economic benefits of digital equity.”

- [WV Department of Economic Office of Broadband Digital Equity Plan of 2023](#)

Project Goals

- The goal of this project is to develop Connectivity Plans for the FY23 18 ARC Distressed counties in West Virginia.
- Building on the WV State Office of Broadband planning efforts, [local planning](#), and data collection, and the existing WV [State Digital Equity Plan](#), this project gives counties the opportunity to think about what projects and goals are most applicable for them on the local level.
- Each county will have a **Community Workshop** where the project research team will share compiled assets and data, and work with community members to identify existing asset gaps, set community goals, and start identifying potential digital equity projects.
- Connectivity plans will provide each county with the **necessary tools to identify and secure funding for Digital Inclusion efforts.**
- The [Digital Equity Act Competitive Grant Program](#) is expected to open in October 2024.

Project Structure



The Connect Humanity Appalachia Digital Accelerator is a Regional grant covering counties and communities across Appalachia. In other states, this project is focused on infrastructure project development. However, in West Virginia, thanks to the hard work of the WV Office of Broadband, Regional Optical

Communications, and local partners across the state, this project is focused on digital equity and digital inclusion.

Core planning team: Generation WV has contracted with [Regional Optical Communications](#) (ROC), a coalition of 19 counties spearheaded by Regions 1 and 4, to help implement this project. We have a core planning team of GWV staff, ROC members, and [WV Office of Broadband](#) that meets weekly.

Each of the 18 counties have two ways for stakeholders to get engaged:

Steering Committee

County Steering Committees will help guide the planning process for each county's community workshop. These team members will help build out the invite list and guide the initial report structure in preparation for the workshop. These are smaller teams, likely made up of those most engaged and interested in guiding the process. If you'd like to learn more about the Steering Committees, you can check out the [Steering Committee Kickoff Meeting Recording- Nov 23](#) and the [December Steering Committee Meeting Slides](#).

Community Workshops

Each county will have a Community Workshop where the project research team will share compiled assets and data, and work with community members to identify existing asset gaps, set community goals, and start identifying potential digital equity projects.

Community Workshops are expected to take place February-April 2024.

The County Steering Committee and ROC will be taking the lead on reaching out to their local community partners and stakeholders. Key stakeholders include the general community and those that are members of, or working with, the 8 targeted populations outlined by NTIA:

- Individuals who live in covered households (income under 150%% poverty level);
- Aging individuals (60 and above);
- Incarcerated individuals;
- Veterans;
- Individuals with disabilities;
- Individuals with a language barrier,
 - including individuals who are English learners;
 - and have low levels of literacy;
- Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group;
- and Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.

If you're interested in participating in this project, please reach out to GWV's Broadband Program Director, Annie Stroud, at annie@generationwv.org.

FAQ

For our FAQ section, please click [here](#).