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## What is Internet Adoption?

Is Your County including ALL citizens in its broadband planning? Those of us who are actively working to get broadband to all communities of Wisconsin frequently talk about the 3 A's of broadband: *Access*, *Affordability* and *Adoption*. And while *Access* or getting infrastructure built to enable you to connect to the internet is the most pressing issue of the moment, I would ask if you are considering ALL of your local residents in your planning efforts?

The old catch phrase “build it and *they* will come” does not work in the instance of broadband. Why not? To begin with, many people are unable to *afford* broadband on a sustainable basis. In 2022, Consumer Reports conducted a nationwide survey of 21,000 consumers' broadband bills and found that the median monthly internet bill was \$74.99. Studies have shown that rural areas in particular have the highest broadband pricing and a recently completed analysis from a consultant for the Wisconsin Public Service Commission showed that monthly internet pricing in rural areas is 15% higher than in urban areas. So, on the pathway to *adoption*, one critical goal becomes making broadband *affordable* for ALL consumers.

Residents who are eligible can find assistance in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) at <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>, a federally administered program, which provides a \$30 per month – and now in some designated areas \$75 per month - boost to the monthly broadband bill. As of August 2023, 380,000 of Wisconsin's 894,000 eligible households are registered for the ACP, or 41 percent.

A good way to find out how many people are subscribing to broadband in your area is to find out the take rate (subscription rate) from local internet service providers (ISP's). That is useful information for your area. If people are not subscribing to broadband, why not? Is it because they can't afford it? Is it because they don't have digital devices to connect to the internet? Or do they lack the digital skills (know-how) to use those devices? Those are the primary questions of digital *adoption*, the third A. The higher the *adoption* rate, the greater the return on investment for an ISP and the greater the boost to the local and state economy.

Internet *adoption* is about getting ALL people connected (except for the very few who choose otherwise). This last A is hard because it comes with the necessary additional task of teaching digital skills to those without. Yet, it is our responsibility to complete the job of *adoption*. To me, teaching those digital skills is at once the end game of adoption and the end game of broadband. It has left us with a responsibility, in a sense, to finish the job of broadband.

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At present, libraries are a favorite location to learn digital skills because they are ubiquitous, are served with reliable internet, trusted by the public, and often have additional computer terminals and staff that know how to use a computer.

Besides libraries, nonprofits such as United Way and Wisconsin Literacy, recognizing the social and economic value of teaching people digital skills, have created and funded positions to do exactly that. Wisconsin Literacy's tutor-trainer is Madison-based, and the United Way has people in the Milwaukee area and in Eau Claire that are involved in teaching digital skills to people. At present, Forest County is the only truly rural county that has a person to teach digital skills. That position is funded by a three-year grant from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/>.

Increasingly, organizations and counties nationwide and in Wisconsin are considering hiring individuals who are good teachers of digital skills. To obtain more specifics about these developing programs, I will write a future piece detailing the efforts of these trailblazers at <https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/topics/broadband/>. They are a critical piece of helping with internet adoption, helping to finish the job of broadband.