



# Overcoming Failure: Langlade County's Strategic Approach to Connectivity

## Situation

Langlade County faced significant challenges in expanding broadband access due to its rural nature and the need for collaborative efforts. The issue was compounded by a failed municipal broadband utility in the city of Antigo, which left a bad taste regarding government involvement in broadband. The County Economic Development Director aimed to address these challenges by fostering public-private partnerships and building trust among stakeholders.

The city of Antigo built its own broadband utility in 2005 but faced financial difficulties when the expected revenue fell short. A private internet service provider (ISP) stepped in to lease and eventually purchase the utility, approved by the Public Service Commission in 2010. This historical context sets the stage for future collaborative efforts.

## Response

To tackle the broadband issues, Langlade County implemented several key actions:

- **Economic Development Task Force:** The Economic Development Corporation (EDC) formed a task force to explore grant opportunities and build out broadband infrastructure. They partnered with an ISP to leverage available grants and strategically plan broadband expansion.
- **Formation of the Broadband Commission:** Recognizing the need for a dedicated body, Langlade County established the Broadband Commission. This commission provided a structured approach to addressing broadband issues.
- **Community Engagement:** The EDC Director and the Broadband Commission held various community engagement events to raise awareness and gather input from residents and ISPs. Quarterly town unit meetings were established to ensure consistent communication and updates. These meetings brought together all the players in one room, facilitating better collaboration.

## Outcomes

The efforts led to several positive outcomes:

- **Formation of the Broadband Commission:** The establishment of the Broadband Commission provided a structured approach to addressing broadband issues and coordinating efforts with ISPs.
- **Increased Collaboration:** Partnerships with ISPs were strengthened, leading to better communication and shared goals. The commission worked directly with ISPs to understand their plans and ensure commitments were met.
- **Community Involvement:** Regular town unit meetings and community engagement events helped build awareness and support for broadband initiatives. These meetings were held in the county board room, bringing all stakeholders together.

- **Strategic Planning:** The Broadband Commission developed strategic plans to guide broadband expansion and ensure accountability. This included a scoring matrix to compare project proposals.

### ***Lessons Learned***

Several key lessons emerged from this initiative:

- **Importance of Partnerships:** Building strong public-private partnerships is crucial for overcoming broadband challenges. Collaboration with ISPs and other stakeholders ensure shared goals and effective solutions.
- **Community Engagement:** Engaging the community through public meetings and events is essential for raising awareness and gathering input. Conducting quarterly town unit meetings provides a consistent platform for communication.
- **Building Trust:** Establishing trust among stakeholders is vital. Consistent efforts to communicate and collaborate help to build trust. ISPs initially hesitate to share information, but ongoing efforts to build relationships improve transparency.
- **Capacity Building:** Small towns and EDCs have limited capacity. Focusing on partnerships is key to building capacity for all.
- **Persistence and Adaptability:** Overcoming initial resistance and failed attempts requires persistence and adaptability. Learning from past failures and continuously seeking new opportunities are key to success.

This case study highlights the importance of partnerships, community engagement, building trust, capacity building, and persistence in overcoming broadband challenges in rural areas.

### ***Learn More***

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