



Navigating Broadband Challenges: Wood County's Strategic Approach

Situation

Wood County, Wisconsin, faced several challenges, including a flat and aging population, economic difficulties in the medical and paper industries, and spotty broadband coverage. Recognizing broadband as a critical component of economic development, the county began addressing this issue even before the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted its necessity.

Response

Wood County adopted a team approach, forming the Digital Equity Solutions Team, engaging a diverse group of experts from UW Extension, PSC, and consultant MaryAnn Lippert. The team focused on comprehensive broadband solutions beyond just laying fiber. They conducted Requests for Information (RFIs) to understand provider plans and potential partnerships, applied for grants, and maintained momentum through continuous efforts despite challenges.

Outcomes

- **Broadband Coverage:** Progress has been made in expanding broadband coverage, with only 36 square miles remaining to be addressed.
- **Grant Applications:** The county has consistently endorsed applications in every PSC grant round, demonstrating persistence and dedication.
- **Provider Partnerships:** Successful partnerships with ISPs have led to leveraging federal programs like enhanced A-CAM to improve rural broadband.
- **Community Engagement:** Formation of a well-rounded team, ensuring diverse perspectives and expertise.

Lessons Learned

- **Team Approach:** A diverse and dedicated team is crucial for sustained progress and overcoming broadband fatigue.
- **Adaptability:** The team must evolve to address all facets of broadband, from infrastructure to equity.
- **Persistence:** Continuous effort and maintaining momentum are key, even when facing setbacks.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Building strong relationships with ISPs and leveraging federal programs can significantly enhance broadband efforts.

Wood County's strategic approach to broadband highlights the importance of teamwork, adaptability, and persistence in overcoming digital connectivity challenges.

Learn More

Jason R. Grueneberg, *Director*

Wood County Planning & Zoning

jgrueneberg@co.wood.wi.us

(715) 421-8466

