Broadband & Digital Equity Local Action Plan

Okanogan County

June 14, 2023

Introduction

Vision Statement:

Broadband knows no boundaries, capable of connecting communities across physical, political, cultural, socio-economic, and language barriers. Okanogan County and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation understand the impacts broadband can have across their shared communities. With this understanding, entities within the County and the Tribes have made substantial investments into the broadband planning, services, and infrastructure necessary to bridge the digital divide separating rural north-central Washington from the benefits of a robust and resilient broadband network. Yet, barriers persist as communities struggle to create places with 21st-century livability factors; living wage jobs, resilient businesses, highest quality healthcare, emergency management systems, highest quality education outcomes, economic and cultural diversity, and emergent markets supportive of the creative class. Simply, the 5,266 square mile region that is Okanogan County and the associated portion of the Colville Reservation is too vast to adequately implement and monitor these livability factors of community and economic development without the assistance of a strategic broadband plan.

Attempting to meet the broadband and digital equity needs of the 43,127 residents through deployment without a professional planning process guiding efforts have resulted in a fragmented and piecemeal approach to address a county and tribal-wide problem. For this reason, the County and Tribes have created the Okanogan County and Colville Confederated Tribes Broadband Action Team (Ok Co CCT BAT). The development of a plan will assist in establishing a collective county-wide and tribal vision for broadband and digital equity, inventorying existing assets and conditions, prioritizing areas of deficiencies, identifying emerging opportunities, and mitigating threats to the treasured assets associated with the rural character and culture of the region.

The BAT has identified a vision of providing critical infrastructure that results in the creation of communities of choice, providing the services capable of retaining talent, recruiting the highest quality workforce, and proving resilience in the face of adversity and natural disaster. Additionally, this vision includes digital equity goals that all residents of Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation will have equal access to broadband services and digital navigation training opportunities, to assist residents in increasing digital literacy skills.

Much of Okanogan County, including the Colville Reservation within Okanogan County, is plagued with high unemployment, excessive poverty, and an absence of quality-of-life amenities that have proven to be undesirable to most residents and insurmountable barriers to 21st-century economic and community development. Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation are historically and economically distressed areas. Historically, the surrounding areas within Okanogan County have been dependent on a resource-based economy. Community and economic resources have decreased dramatically since the Omak Mill closed, as many individuals have struggled to find work elsewhere and have either had to move, find government work, or start their own businesses.

Simply put, this area lacks the reliable, widespread broadband access necessary to overcome these challenges. Access to broadband will help bolster both a dormant and burgeoning economy within Okanogan County and on the Colville Reservation. Better broadband will help to support both tribal and county relations with the local community and economic development, as well as the potential for more robust communication tools like precision agriculture, telemedicine, virtual classrooms, videoconferencing, VoIP, big data blockchain opportunities, etc. In addition, it will also help with existing business retention

efforts and other economic development strategies that should subsequently support and/or help to provide new employment opportunities and increased distance learning options for K-12 and higher education for local students, which in turn should help improve the homework efficiency gap and competitive academic divide. It will provide improvements to public safety communications systems needed by local EMRs and residents, and ultimately improve the landscape for building and community resilience.

The short-term benefits will include national media attention, improved federal/state political support, additional local stakeholder buy-in, more community awareness, the establishment of public/private partnerships, and through the BAT we have generated regional awareness of Okanogan County community and economic development. Another short-term benefit is community progress with local and regional economic development strategies that will help to enhance the quality of life for all area residents, including the elderly, young adults, and other local youth in the community. The long-term benefits of improving broadband access in Okanogan County will lead to better articulated economic development plans, equal access to broadband for youth, elderly and other covered populations, improved access to cell phone coverage or Wi-Fi, increased awareness of broadband opportunities, robust home-based and/or rural small businesses and other cottage industries, improved access to Town Hall or county meetings through live streaming, and increased business development and retention or recruitment campaigns.

Ideally, planning and analysis will unify the community as key stakeholders to economic vitality and success. The planning process values stakeholder input, lending to community involvement and ownership of broadband deployment efforts. To achieve sustainability in economically distressed areas such as Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation, stakeholder input facilitated through the planning process is required and will reflect our shared values of respect for our natural environment, yet balanced with the built environment, and bolstering the economic opportunity each community member and stakeholder is afforded as their birthright. As a broadband desert, seeing this project to completion will be monumental in bringing the economic benefits associated with broadband to the community. Economic stability is the ultimate goal in bringing better access to broadband to the community and ensuring all community members have the digital literacy skills necessary to access and use broadband in their personal and professional lives.

The Okanogan County and Colville Confederated Tribes BAT accomplished a successful launch in 2019 and has continued to meet monthly to continue its work on promoting local broadband access, identifying current gaps and brainstorming solutions to ensure digital literacy and equity for all community members throughout the county and Colville Reservation. As a result of its continued collaboration with the Colville Confederated Tribes (CCT) staff and the County Commissioners, Okanogan County now has the potential to become a state leader in local economic growth, community revitalization, and stability.

The aim of this effort is to expand our local capacity to provide and promote community revitalization and economic development opportunities for both residents and area businesses as a means to improving local business recruitment and retention efforts and attracting the much-needed talent that many of our major employers need. This vital element will be accomplished through broadband and as a direct result of this effort, better economic stability and local job growth will rise within and around the county and with the tribes. Our vision is to increase the accessibility, reliability, and quality of broadband in unserved or underserved communities within Okanogan County and the Colville Indian Reservation because this lack of access has impacts on education, economic growth and viability, emergency services, and quality of life.

This project is value-driven, and through its collaboration with all of its stakeholders, broadband will have a cost-benefit to the following: anchor institutions, rural small businesses, schools and libraries,

county and tribal departments, as well as other county and tribal satellite locations. In other words, our strategic plan will identify the needs, challenges, and opportunities for common County and Colville Tribal Departments like IT, Emergency Management Services (EMS), Public Works, Planning Department, public hospitals, Sheriff's Department, and various local schools and districts which demonstrate a significant need for, and/or improvement of, local broadband access. Broadband will highly benefit these collaborators and stakeholders because it lends to equal access to broadband in a way that supports the community and stabilizes the economy. Overall, this collaboration across both political and geographic boundaries with Tribes, institutions, agencies, departments, businesses, individual departments, and community members will improve both data collection and data analysis, which are extremely vital to broadband connectivity and planning in Okanogan County.

In collaboration with the Colville Confederated Tribes, Okanogan County will continue to leverage the BAT in order to achieve better planning success that leads to both implementation and construction projects. Additionally, targeted efforts will be employed to ensure that all Okanogan County and Colville Reservation residents have equal access to broadband and equal opportunity to participate in digital navigation trainings to increase digital literacy as a whole.

Demographics:

The following demographics are intended to provide a brief snapshot of Okanogan County and its residents, and the portion of the Colville Reservation which is located within its boundaries. The data was gathered from United States Census Bureau data and the Okanogan County Broadband and Digital Equity Map created by NoaNet for this project. These characteristics serve as the lens through which we interpret and analyze the information collected through the 5-year broadband action plan, the digital equity and digital inclusion planning process, and in the writing of this document.

1. Geography

Okanogan County is a large county in north central Washington State, east of Whatcom, Skagit, and Chelan counties, north of Douglas, Grant, and Lincoln counties, and west of Ferry County. It has a total population of 43,127 people, a land area of 5,266 square miles, and a population density of 8 people per square mile.
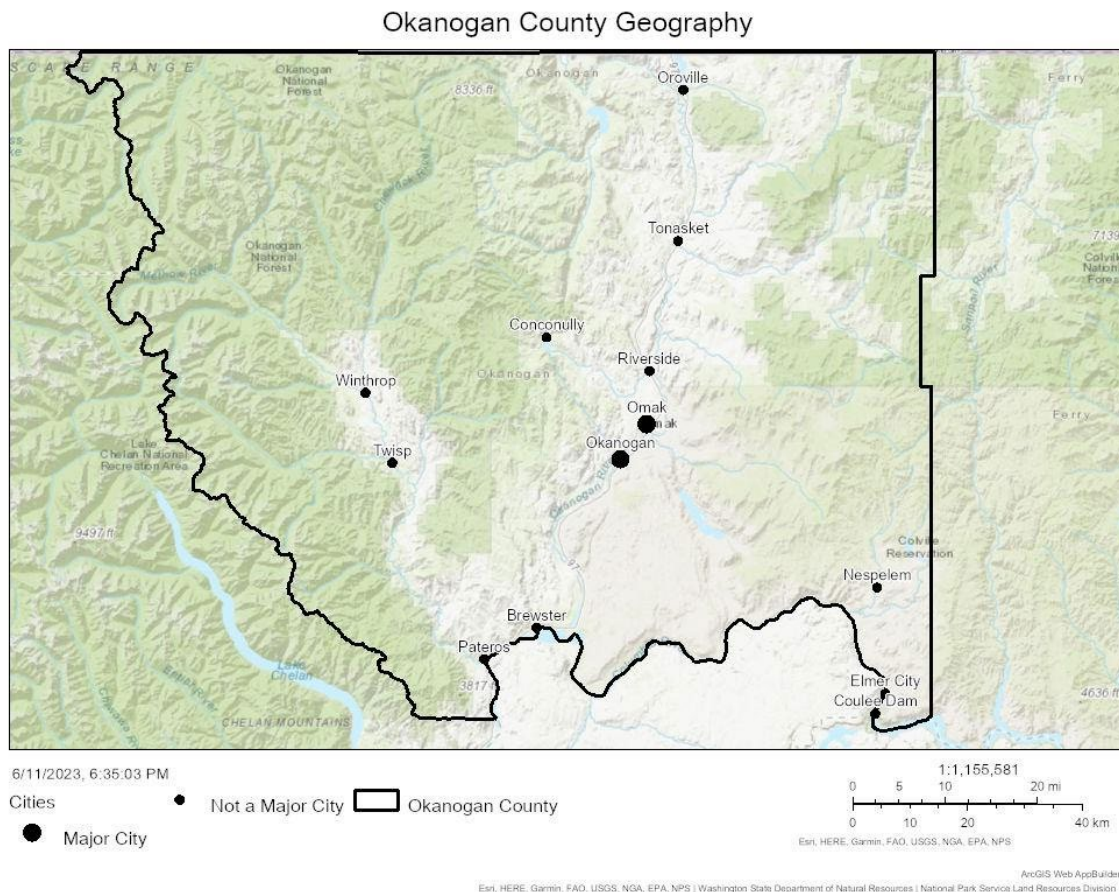
2. Population

Okanogan County is heavily rural and the dense population centers are concentrated along the middle of the county along the highways that run through the county. Reaching the rural areas is a

challenge because of the many mountains and dense foliage. The population of the county has grown around 5% from the 2010 census until July 2022. The percentage of the population under 65 that has a disability is around 12.1%, which is higher than the 8.9% of the state, and 8.7% nationwide.

3. Race and Ethnicity

The Okanogan County population identifies primarily as white at 64.1%. The Hispanic or Latino population is around 21.3%. The American Indian population is around 12.9%.

4. English as a Second Language

In Okanogan County, the amount of people where any language other than English is spoken at home is around 17.9%. This is below the state average of 20.3% and the national average of 21.7%.

5. Income

The median household income for Okanogan County from 2017-2021 is $51,992. The Washington state median household income is $82,400 and the national median household income is $69,021.

6. Poverty

The amount of people in poverty in Okanogan County is around 16.0%. This is higher than the state average of 9.9% and the national average of 11.6%.

7. Housing

The amount of housing units available in Okanogan County is around 22,254. The median value of owner-occupied housing units is around $218,100. This is almost half of the median value for the state of Washington, which is at $397,600.

8. Education

The amount of people in Okanogan County who are over 25 years old who have a high school diploma is 84.9%, which is below both the Washington state average of 91.9% and the national average of 88.9%. The amount with a bachelor's degree for Okanogan County is 21.2%. This is significantly below the Washington state average of 37.3% and the national average of 33.7%. It further differentiates within the county, with the western section of the county having more education than the eastern section.

State of the County and the Confederated Tribes of The Colville Reservation

Where are Okanogan County and the Confederated Tribes of The Colville Reservation thriving?

Okanogan County has a healthy backbone to transfer traffic, but it is a challenge to develop a distribution network because of a lack of funding. Members of the various infrastructure organizations are involved in the BAT and regularly contribute to Ok Co CCT BAT conversations and plans. The BAT is a well-established organization in Okanogan County. The Colville Tribe has connected people that have never been connected before. Telehealth services have been developed to help the community. There have been heavy investments into the county to help develop broadband infrastructure by the local government and state administrators. There have been massive efforts to plan the future design of broadband networks and locations for future builds have already been identified.

Where is Okanogan County and the Confederated Tribes of The Colville Reservation struggling?

Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation have an extremely high rate of poverty, which poses considerable challenges for digital equity and literacy as well as the provision of other community services. Equitable and expansive broadband adoption could aid with the provision of remote health, educational, and economic services, but considerable infrastructure investments are needed to ensure that Okanogan County's underserved and covered populations have access to such services.

Abstract

Broadband

- In reality, the area of greatest need is the entire county.

- Looking at the median download map, it is fair to say the majority of the county is unserved. Okanogan city is the only area where some homes might be considered underserved.

- Previous successes or existing work that can be built upon is the infrastructure provided by the Okanogan PUD District No. 1, Electric co-ops, and the Colville Tribe. They have provided many broadband assets that can be leveraged by smaller ISPs to provide middle mile backbone, poles, strand, and more.

- Key partners of the BAT include: The Colville Confederated Tribes (CCT), The Economic Alliance, Okanogan County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), Okanogan County PUD, Okanogan County Electric Co Op, Twisp Works, WSU Okanogan County Extension, Ziply Fiber, Methownet, North Valley Hospital, and Three Rivers Hospital.

- The Ok Co CCT BAT's and Methow Valley BAT Feasibility Studies of the county have identified over 20 locations that are of primary interest for designing and deploying broadband. A copy of the feasibility studies has been sent to the Washington State Broadband Office. These proposed service areas are: Aeneas, Brewster, Chiliwist, Conconully, Crumbacher, East Omak, Harmony Heights, Keystone, Knob Hill, Loomis-Palmer, Malott, North Omak, Omak Flats, Orchard Grade, Oroville, Pateros, Riverside, S. Pine Creek Rd, Salmon Creek Rd, Synarep, Whitestone, North Okanogan County, Palmer, and South Pine Creek. (At one time, the Methow Valley BAT was a separate entity from the Ok Co CCT BAT. This is not longer the case, as the BATs have combined.)

- The biggest challenges are the lack of funding to build broadband infrastructure and the geographic barriers, including mountains, valleys, rivers and forests. Okanogan County is the largest county in state of Washington but the least populated. Large national forests prevent the construction of sustainable infrastructure, and public/tribal lands add to the challenge of federal government-owned lands not providing local revenues to local governments.

- The Ok Co CCT BAT has been developing the plans for building out broadband infrastructure in the county. All they need at this point is the funding.

Digital Equity

- The areas of greatest need include the entire geographic area of the county, all sectors and every population because there is a substantial lack of digital equity in Okanogan County and on the Colville Reservation.

- The most prominent barriers to digital equity among the covered populations include: funding, awareness, participation, rurality of the county and reservation, and perpetually unserved populations.

- The most prominent barriers to the successful provision of digital inclusion services include: funding, awareness, and community participation.

- The Ok Co CCT BAT has and will continue to encourage partner organizations to utilize and participate in Digital Equity Solutions. The BAT's work on developing a design plan for broadband in Okanogan County will serve future projects.

- Key partners of digital equity services in Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation include: Family Health Centers, NCW Library system, Employment Security AmeriCorps Program, WSU Extension and the Economic Alliance.

- There are many projects and programs in development for Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation. Some of these include workforce solutions to help prepare workers for constructing broadband networks, assistance in writing grants and loans for ISPs and broadband companies, and the development of training courses for digital devices to name a few projects and programs.

- In collaboration with the Colville Tribes, Okanogan County will continue to leverage the BAT in order to achieve better planning success that leads to both implementation and construction projects.

Broadband Infrastructure Summary

## I.   **Broadband Base Map Review**

Service Availability:

Data was collected by multiple sources to reflect what is known about broadband services in the Okanogan community. NoaNet and WSU Extension Broadband Resources have provided a place to display all the data collected in their Okanogan County Broadband and Digital Equity Map.

The following map shows the service availability of ISPs within Okanogan County. The data was provided by the State Broadband Office (SBO). The map is not complete because it is missing many of the smaller private cable companies. The smaller companies mostly exist in the denser population centers. Another source of data that is missing is from the Colville Reservation. The southeastern section of the county, where the Colville Reservation is, does not show many ISPs. From looking at the map, we can see the western part of the county is primarily served by CenturyLink. The rural areas on the Eastern side are served primarily by Hughes Net via satellite.

The local service providers missing from the map include: Community Net, Highland Internet Services, LocalTel, Methownet, NCI Datacom, Noel, PC Telecom, Starlink, StarTouch Microwave Communications, Teleport and Will Connect.

Service Availability provided by State Broadband Office
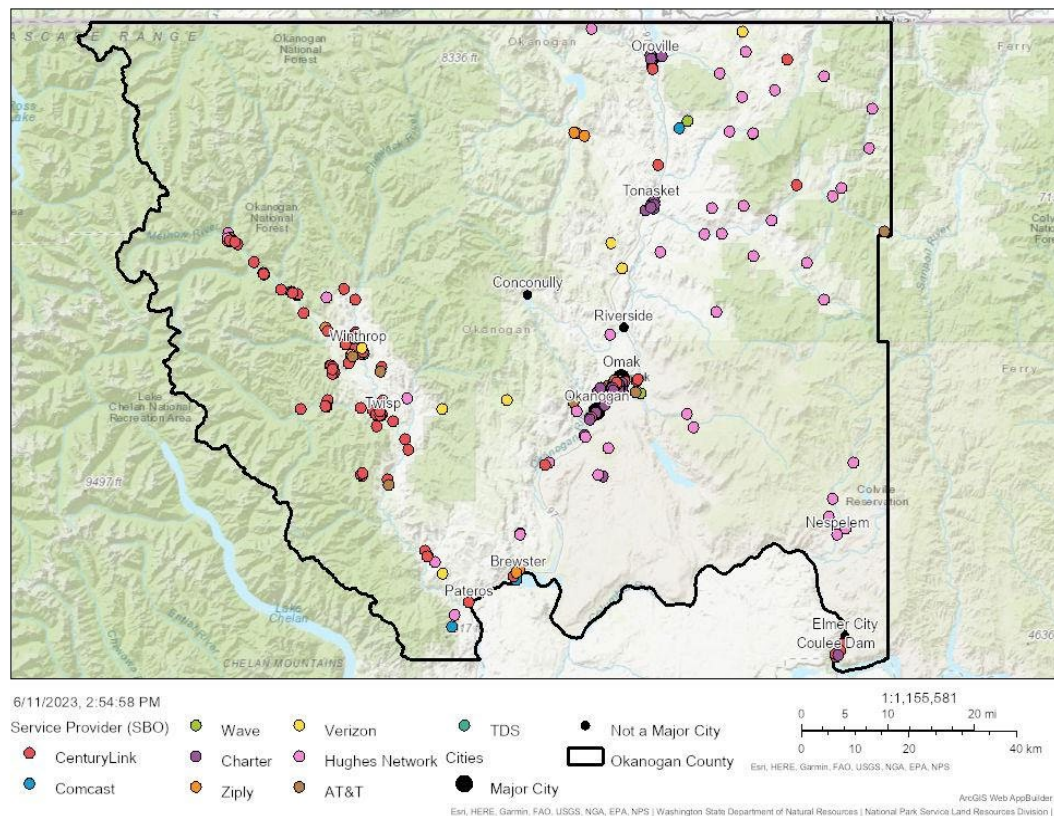
Speed Tests:

The speed tests provided by the SBO and Ookla accurately represent the low speeds throughout Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation. The map appears to be missing much of the data on speed tests. However, when geographic layers are added (i.e., National Forest Boundaries, State and Federal Agency Land boundaries, and State and National Park boundaries) the complexity of the geography should show that speed tests have been completed in the areas of population density. As you can see from looking at both maps, there are only a few areas that meet the 100Mbps down/20Mbps up threshold. These areas include: Okanogan, Omak, Tonasket, Oroville, Pateros, and Coulee Dam. While a few customers are able to hit those speeds, the majority do not. The speeds also go down during high-traffic hours.

Speed Tests provided by State Broadband Office
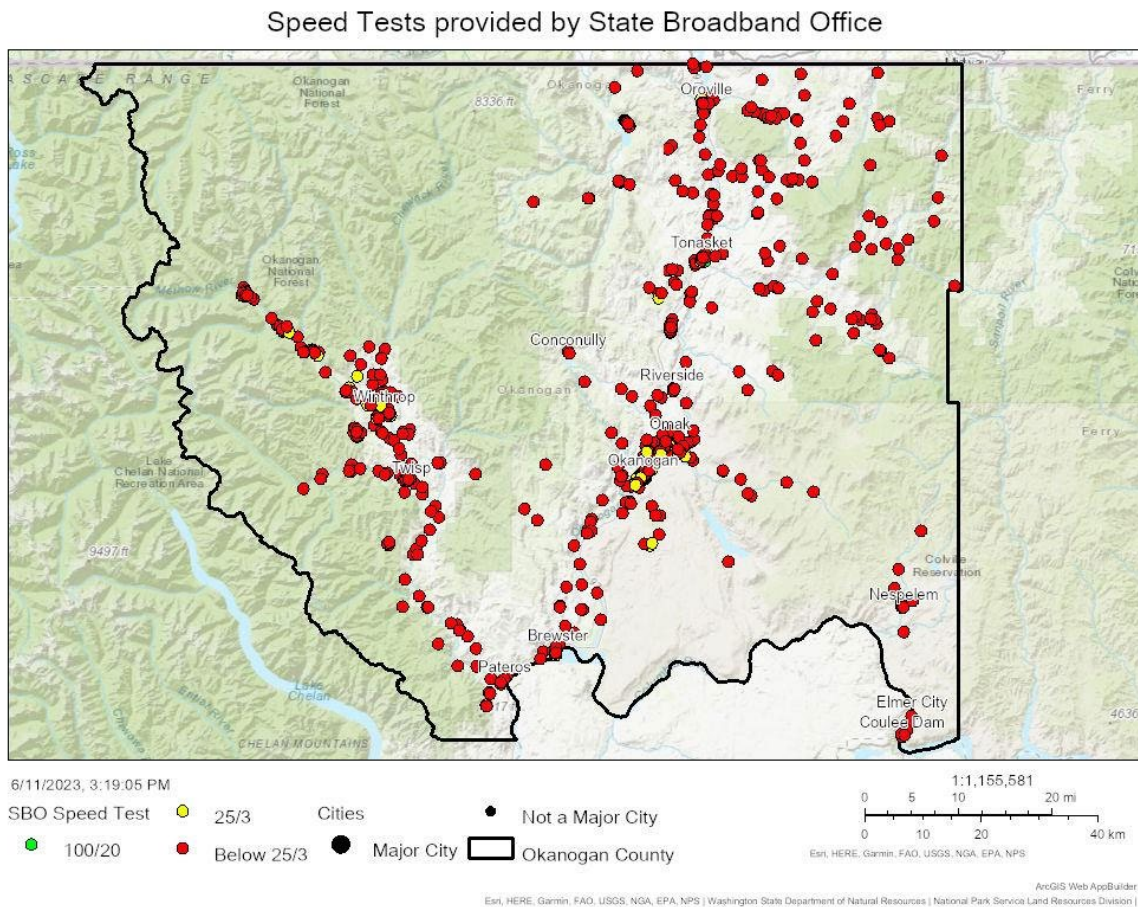
Speed Tests provided by Ookla
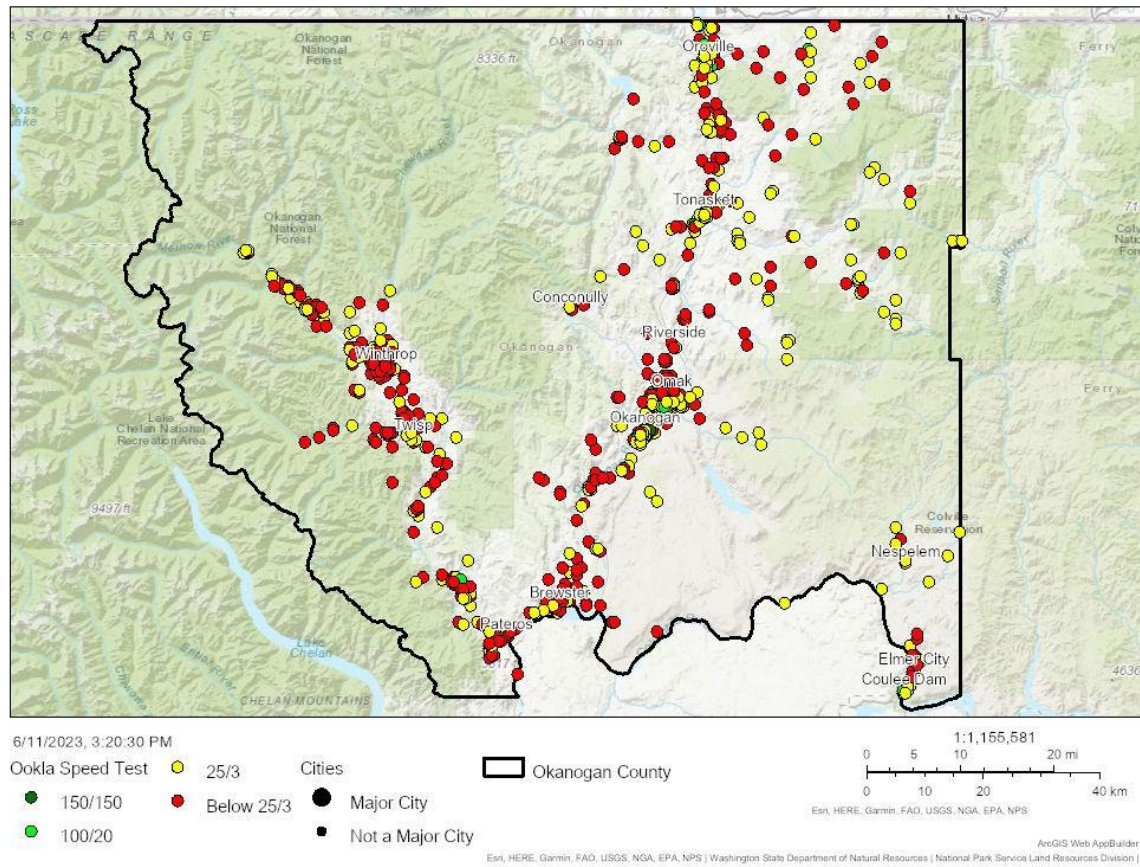
Data provided by Ookla and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) shows the median download speeds of sections of Okanogan County. The one area that has above 25 Mbps down/3Mbps up is the area near the city of Okanogan. The Ookla Median Download Speed for the city of Okanogan is 33.84Mbps and Upload Speed is 8.75Mbps. Based on the information provided, the majority of the county is unserved and the area near the city of Okanogan would be considered underserved.

Median Download Speed provided by NTIA
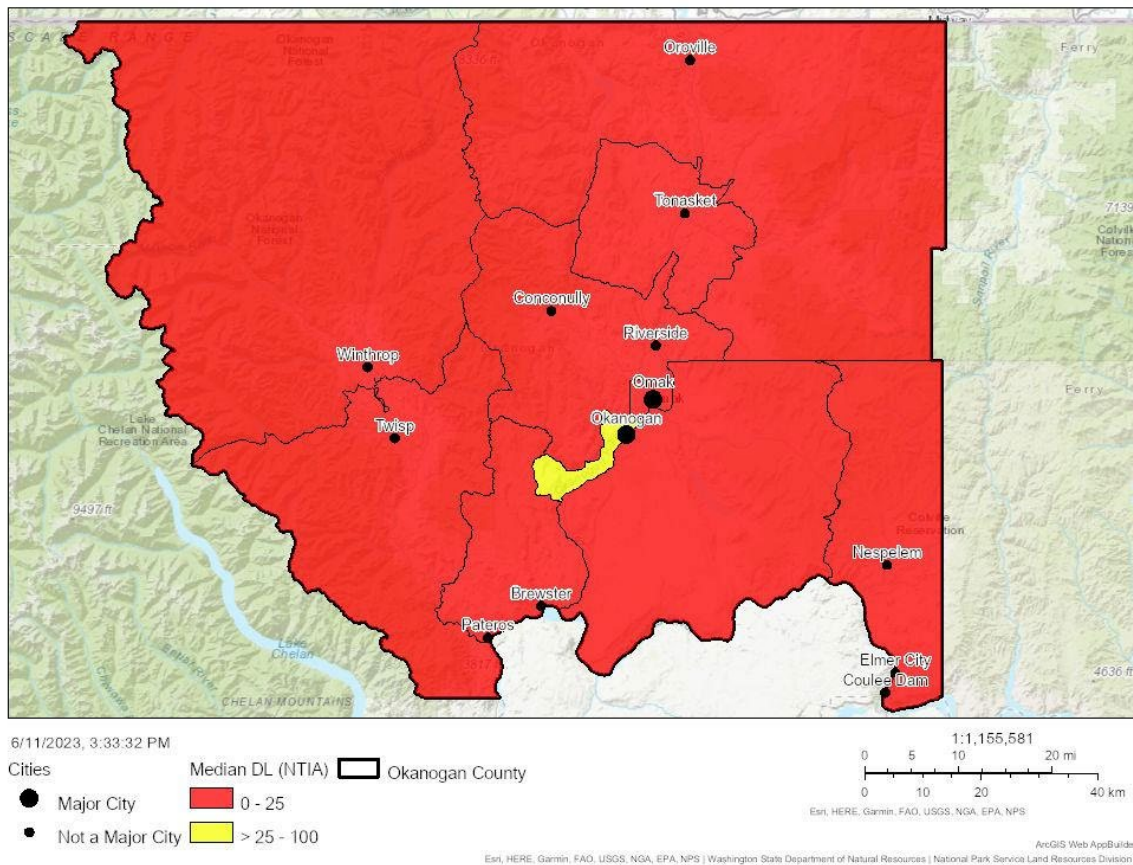
Missing Layers:

Currently, there are missing layers that are significant to the community. The layers missing include work source or employment agencies and some community/senior centers. There is also concern that the Census tract data may be misleading, in that pockets of the population might skew the general results for a particular tract. More effort needs to be put into ensuring that the layers accurately reflect the various populations in the area.

II.   Local Broadband Asset Inventory

Organizations Currently Serving the Community with Broadband Assets:

Organization Name	Asset Inventory
Methownet	Broadband or Telecommunications Networks, Dark Fiber, Conduit, Existing Duct Systems, Towers, Tall Buildings, Streetlights
TwispWorks	Broadband or Telecommunications Networks
Public Utility District No. 1 of Okanogan County	Broadband or Telecommunications Networks, Dark Fiber, Public Rights of Way, including roads and bridges, Electric Utility Poles, end user meter location data, and existing easements
Okanogan County Electric Cooperative, Inc. (OCEC)	Existing poles with electric distribution infrastructure

Okanogan PUD District No. 1 Infrastructure
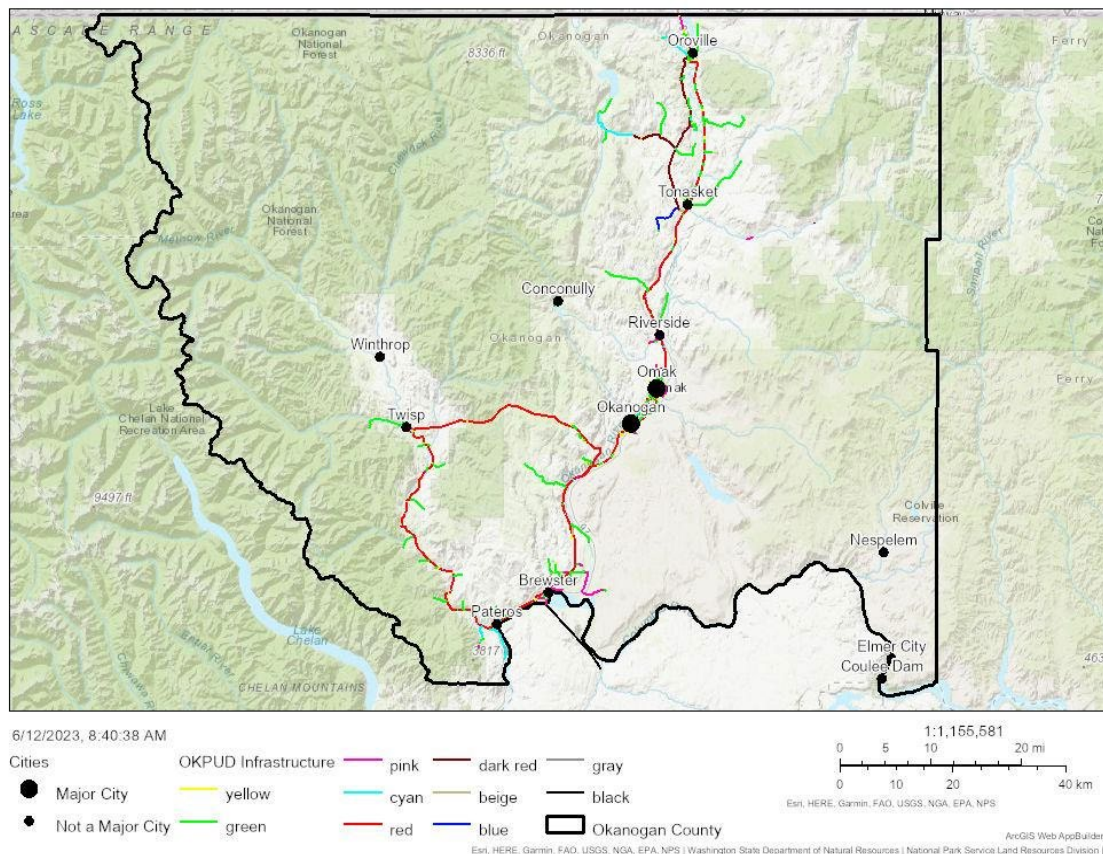
Upcoming Projects that may Allow for Conduit/Fiber/Infrastructure Placement:

- Ziply Fiber is in partnership with Washington state and NTIA to install fiber within the city limits/Census Designated Place boundaries of Loomis, Tonasket and Brewster.
- Methownet is working with the OCEC and internet to constantly improve and expand their network area in the Methow Valley.
- The Colville Tribe is adding wireless and FTTH infrastructure throughout the Omak and Elmer City areas.

Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) Being well Served:

Community Anchor Institution	Are you satisfied with your current service?
Okanogan Conservation District	Yes
MGH Equipment LLC	Yes
City of Pateros	Yes
City of Omak	Yes
Methow Valley School District	Yes
City of Okanogan	Yes
City of Tonasket	Yes
Pateros Treehouse Early Education Organization	Yes
Okanogan County Dispute Resolution Center	Yes
Green Okanogan	Yes
Town of Winthrop	Yes
Omak School District	Yes
NCW Libraries Pateros Branch	Yes
Okanogan County Economic Alliance	Yes
Winthrop Public Library	Yes

ISPs Currently Serving the Community (Potential Partners for Upcoming Work):

Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet) - As a public-non-profit entity, NoaNet supports communities statewide with grant application development, has a huge open-access footprint that can be leveraged to minimize backbone network costs, and a statewide network operations center and engineering staff that can manage networks once they're built.

"We're happy to support your local efforts in any way you would find useful to your goals."
       -NoaNet

Ziply Fiber - Ziply Fiber participates in the Ok Co CCT BAT and has volunteered to be involved with events in the county.

Charter Communications - Charter Communications is interested in participating in the State of Washington's Broadband Teams to assess opportunities to help close the digital divide in Washington. They welcome opportunities to engage and connect additional unserved homes and businesses in Okanogan County and on the Colville Reservation.

"Charter is proud to be recognized by Newsweek as one of America's Most Trusted Companies 2023 and proud that its Spectrum Internet has been consecutively ranked as one of the best internet providers by US News & World Report – earning the highest rating among the Best Internet Service Providers for Rural Areas."
       -Charter Communications

Public Utility District No. 1 of Okanogan County - The Okanogan PUD is a charter member of the Ok Co CCT BAT. The PUD is a wholesale provider for multiple rural ISP resellers.

Methownet - Methownet currently participates in the Ok Co CCT BAT and will continue to be engaged in Okanogan County.

PCTelecom, **CommunityNET LLC**, **Highland Internet Communications,** and **Will Connect, LLC** are all interested in participating in the Ok Co CCT BAT and looking for ways to address broadband needs in the Okanogan community.

Organizations Providing Data for the Community Broadband Map and Details on Current Speeds/Pricing:

Name of Organization	Notes on Internet Speeds / Pricing Options
Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet)	NoaNet offers high-capacity wholesale broadband and OTT services anywhere our network touches.
Ziply Fiber	DSL services $50/mo., Fiber 200/200 Mbps $40/mo., 1/1 Gbps $60/mo., 2+ Gbps plans available; Business Enterprise and Wholesale services
Charter Communications	Current service packages include: Spectrum Internet (300/10) for $79.99 per month, Spectrum Internet Ultra (500/20) for $99.99 per month, Spectrum Internet Gig (1/35) for $119.99 per month, and Spectrum One which offers 300/10-speed internet and unlimited mobile lines for $49.99/mo. In addition, promotional packages may be offered. In addition, as outlined below, we have affordable offers available to qualified households.
Public Utility District No.1 of Okanogan County	Wholesale rates for the following: Carrier/Large Business - rates vary depending on the services leased (10 Mbps up to 100 Gbps) Small Business fiber - 100/100 for $65/mo. *** SOON to offer Small Business fiber - 1G/1G for $65/mo. Residential fiber - 100/100 for $35/mo. *** SOON to offer Residential fiber - 1G/1G for $35/mo. Residential wireless - 3/1 for $18/mo. Residential wireless - 7/2 for $25/mo. Residential wireless - 12/3 for $32/mo. Residential wireless - 20/5 for $39/mo.
PCTelecom	3 MB $45 / 7 MB $55 / 20 MB $75 / 5 MB $85
CommunityNET LLC	Has 4 speeds for wireless service: $45.00 3 Mbps download/1mbps upload, $53.00 for 7 Mbps down and 2 Mbps up, $61.00 for 12 Mbps down and 3 up $75.00 for 20 Mbps download and 5 Mbps upload. We also offer Fiber to the home and business prices may vary

Highland Internet Communications	3 MB/$43.49, 7 MB/$51.49, 12 MB/$68.49, and 20 MB/$83.49, we also offer fiber
Will Connect, LLC	3, 7, 12, 20, 100 Mbps wireless/fiber service. Costing $40, $50, $65, $75, $100 per month.
Methownet	Fiber Optic and Wireless service availability and installation costs vary per location. Wireless monthly service plans on Methownet.com Network (North Valley) $49 for 5 Mbps download, 2 Mbps upload. $59 for 7 Mbps download, 3 Mbps upload. $79 for 10 Mbps download, 3 Mbps upload. $109 for 25 Mbps download, 5 Mbps upload. Not all service plans are available at all locations. Wireless monthly service plans on Okanogan PUD Network (Twisp and South Valley) $49 for 3 Mbps download, 1 Mbps upload. $59 for 7 Mbps download, 2 Mbps upload. $79 for 12 Mbps download, 6 Mbps upload or 12 Mbps download, 3 Mbps upload $99 for 20 Mbps download, 10 Mbps upload or 20 Mbps download, 5 Mbps upload. Not all service plans are available at all locations.

## III. Broadband Infrastructure Needs Assessment

Community Anchor Institutions that Need Improved Services or Where Cost of Services is too High:

Community Anchor Institution	Are you satisfied with your current service?	Comments
Boys & Girls Club	No	
City of Oroville	Somewhat	
Mazama Community Club	No	Too expensive for slow service.
Okanogan Chamber of Commerce	Somewhat	
North Valley Mechanical, Inc	Somewhat	
Columbia River Bioregional Education Project (aka Columbiana)	Somewhat	Sometimes it is not available. Wi-Fi calling is spotty.
North Cascades Law Group	Somewhat	
Carlton Complex Long-Term Recovery (dba Okanogan Co. LTRG)	Somewhat	
North Valley Hospital	Somewhat	Need a backup connection, redundant path out of the Okanogan Valley.
City of Okanogan	Somewhat	
Loup Loup Ski Education Foundation	Somewhat	
Okanogan Search and Rescue	Somewhat	
Tonasket Farmers Market	No	Public service exists but cannot use it.

Areas Lacking Broadband:

There are many rural areas lacking access to broadband. The national, state, and tribal forests occupy half of the county landmass and people do live in those areas; they are just less populated. Many of our service areas are in areas surrounded by the forests. All of the dense population centers exist along the highways that run through the county. Access to broadband is much easier to acquire if you live near the highways. The more rural residents live, the harder it is to acquire broadband services. In some areas, there are as few as two customers per mile. The majority have access to some form of broadband but the speeds do not reach the thresholds of 25/3 or 100/20. The Colville Reservation is one of the areas that lack broadband services. On the western side of the county, services to reach 100/20 speeds cannot be found but 25/3 is more attainable. On the eastern side of the county, some communities are able to reach the 100/20 threshold but the majority are still unable to reach 25/3.

Median Download Speed provided by NTIA
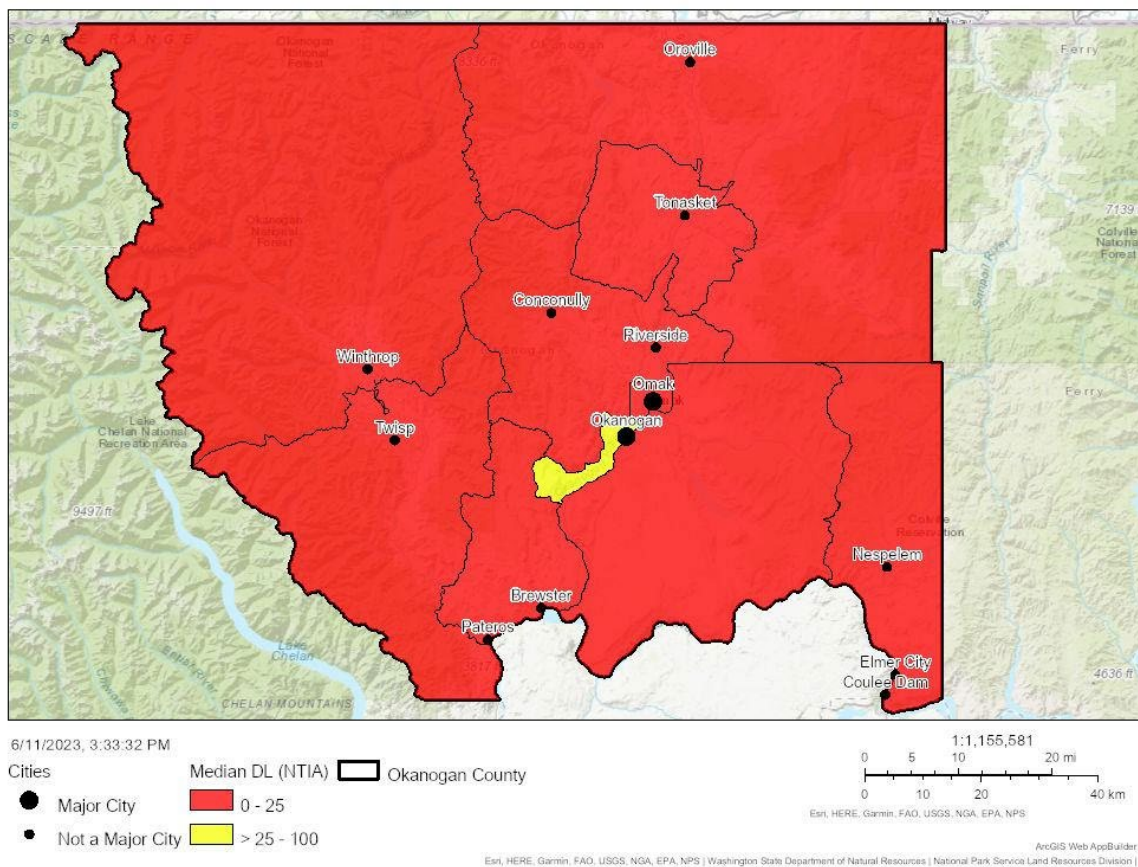
IV. Obstacles and Barriers to Broadband Infrastructure Deployment

Challenges to Broadband Deployment:

The extremely rural population in Okanogan County and on the Colville Reservation and limited funding opportunities present the greatest challenges to the widespread deployment of broadband infrastructure. This is exacerbated by the challenging physical terrain in areas of the county. Below is a list of obstacles and barriers from the ISP Outreach surveys.

- The cost to build broadband infrastructure.
- The geographic barriers including mountains, valleys, rivers, and forests.
- Largest county in the State of Washington but the least populated.
- Biggest challenge is the lack of funding.
- Large national forests prevent the construction of sustainable infrastructure.
- Tribal lands add to this challenge of federal government-owned lands not providing local revenues to local governments.
- Permitting requirements are a challenge because of the long turnaround time for approval from cities, county, Department of Transportation, the Colville Tribe and other permitting agencies/organizations.

Financial Gaps Preventing Infrastructure Investment:

- High cost of construction of fiber networks in low population density areas.
- High cost of "make-ready" work changing out poles to support fiber networks.
- High cost of broadband equipment and upstream bandwidth.
- Some ISPs can't compete with plans offered by competitors.
- Finding funding for service areas has been difficult for many ISPs.
- Tax base is disproportionate to the size of the county because of the large state and federal landowners.
- Organizations do not want to go into debt to invest in growth.
- The return on investment is a challenge because of the costs of construction and risks of extreme weather events.
- Costly because going underground costs more than going aerial, but going underground is needed to avoid weather events.

Supply Chain Gaps:

- The lead time of fiber optic cabling and petroleum-based products, such as conduit and handholes, can be six to twelve months or more. However, to combat this and avoid construction delays, owner furnished materials, rather than contractor supplied materials, is an easy solution to avoid delays.

Policy Barriers:

- Municipal and county permitting takes too long, up to thirty to sixty days for new construction to get approved.
- DOT State permitting within the right-of-way of highways takes too long, up to sixty to ninety days for approval.
- Tribal permitting is difficult to accomplish.
- It is difficult to obtain private easements in many areas.
- Right-of-way is becoming harder to obtain because many areas are filling up with utilities.
- County regulations are too strict on towers, shorter towers, and tower co-locations.

Community Awareness Issues:

- Lack of broadband makes it hard to reach the community.
- In some areas of the county, there are significant language barriers to overcome to reach the community being served.

Geographic and Environmental Issues:

- Mountainous terrain makes it difficult to expand networks to rural areas.
- Foliage affects wireless technology transmissions.
- Projects utilizing federal funds will require Section 106 and other environmental clearances which can take six months or more to obtain.
- There is a limited construction window due to weather.
- There are significant weather events that happen in the county and reservation.

V.   Potential Paths Forward

Planned Expansion Areas:

- Ziply Fiber is in partnership with Washington state and NTIA to bring fiber within the city limits/Census Designated Place boundaries of Loomis, Tonasket & Brewster.
- Methownet is working with the OCEC and PUD to constantly improve and expand their network area in the Methow Valley.
- Colville Tribe is adding wireless and FTTH infrastructure throughout the Omak and Elmer City areas.
- The Ok Co CCT BAT's Feasibility Study has identified over 20 locations that are of primary interest for designing and deploying broadband. These proposed service areas are: Aeneas,

Brewster, Chiliwist, Conconully, Crumbacher, East Omak, Harmony Heights, Keystone, Knob Hill, Loomis-Palmer, Malott, North Omak, Omak Flats, Orchard Grade, Oroville, Pateros, Riverside, S. Pine Creek Rd, Salmon Creek Rd, Synarep, Whitestone, North Okanogan County, Palmer, South Pine Creek.

Possible Funding Sources:

Funding Agency:

Self-funding: By self-funding the development, companies have greater control over the entire process, from planning to implementation. It can set priorities, determine the timeline, and ensure that the infrastructure meets the specific needs of the community. It allows the county to tailor the broadband infrastructure to its unique requirements. It can consider factors like population density, geographical challenges, and existing infrastructure to design a solution that maximizes coverage and performance.

The following is a list of federal and state agencies with recurring broadband funding opportunities. Each of these vary in terms of eligibility, budgets, and matching requirements from year to year.

Funding Agency:
Rural Utilities Service – United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
Programs:
Rural Broadband Loan Program
Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan Program
Community Connect Grant Program
ReConnect Loan & Grant Program
Distance Learning Telemedicine Grant Program
Electric Loan Program

Funding Agency:
NTIA - National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Programs:
TBCP - Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program
BEAD - Broadband Equity, Access & Deployment

Funding Agency:
Department of the Interior - Bureau of Indian Affairs
Programs:
BIA Loan Guarantee Fund,
Misc. BIA Grant Programs (Aid to Tribal Government, Indian Law Enforcement)

Funding Agency:
      FCC
Programs:
      USF- (Federal Universal Service Fund)
      Lifeline/Link-Up, High-Cost, School and Libraries, and Rural Health Care
      Rural Digital Opportunity Fund
      5G Fund for Rural America

Funding Agency:
      DHS
Programs:
      Tribal Homeland Security Grant Program (THSGP)

Funding Agency:
      Okanogan County
Programs:
      ARPA - American Rescue Plan Act - $1 million to be used as a match for broadband projects.

Funding Agency:
      EDA Public Works
Programs:
      Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs including CARES Act Funding

Funding Agency:
      Washington State
Programs:
      Washington State Dept. of Commerce - CERB Rural Broadband Program
      Washington State Public Works Board - various funds of loans and grants for unserved WA communities

Local Leadership:

The OK Co CCT BAT accomplished a successful launch in 2019 and has continued to meet monthly to continue its work on promoting local broadband access and digital equity and identifying current gaps in infrastructure and service. As a result of its continued collaboration with the Colville Confederated Tribes staff and the County commissioners, Okanogan County now has the potential to become a state leader in local economic growth, community revitalization, and stability. Okanogan County will continue to leverage the BAT in order to achieve better planning success that leads to both implementation and construction projects. There is a dire need for broadband in Okanogan County.

The leadership team members of the Ok Co CCT BAT include:

- Local Team Leader: Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Okanogan County Economic Alliance

- Team Secretary: Kellie Conn, WSU Okanogan County Extension
- Data Collector: Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Okanogan County Economic Alliance; Kayla Wells-Yoakum, WSU Okanogan County Extension
- Community Outreach Team: Kellie Conn and Kayla Wells-Yoakum, WSU Okanogan County Extension and Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Okanogan County Economic Alliance.
- Infrastructure Team: John McDonald, OK PUD; Tiffany Circle, CCT; Greg Mendonca, OCEC; James Lightfoot, ACRS; Fred Feit, Tilson Technology
- Digital Equity Team: Main Committee members- Okanogan County PUD, Okanogan County Economic Alliance, WSU Okanogan County Extension, and OCEC.

Workforce Solutions:

The Ok Co CCT BAT has an existing licensed engineering firm under contract and will continue to utilize their experience and expertise for pursuing funding opportunities and post grant engineering services. The BAT and consultant have already initiated conversations with multiple construction contractors and material supplies on a local and national scale. Both the contractors and suppliers have the necessary personnel and inventory to meet any build out timelines required by the funding agencies.

Possible workforce solutions could involve scheduling meetings with local ISPs, Anchor Institutions, Infrastructure owners, Worksource, Tribal TERO, and Community Colleges to identify gaps in the workforce at this time. Another solution could include identifying potential customized training programs and or apprenticeship programs to meet the needs of the industry within the county.

Policy Solutions:

To accelerate infrastructure deployment within Washington State, several policy solutions can be considered:
- Streamlined Permitting Processes: Simplifying and expediting the permitting processes can significantly speed up infrastructure deployment. Implementing clear guidelines, reducing bureaucratic red tape, and establishing dedicated teams or online platforms for permitting can help reduce delays and costs for infrastructure projects.
- Public Infrastructure Projects: Integrating broadband infrastructure into public infrastructure projects, such as transportation or utility projects, can optimize resources and reduce costs. Coordinating the planning and deployment of multiple infrastructure types can lead to more efficient and cost-effective outcomes.
- Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Encouraging public-private partnerships can leverage private sector expertise and resources to accelerate infrastructure deployment. By collaborating with internet service providers (ISPs), the state can benefit from their market knowledge, technical capabilities, and funding to expand coverage more rapidly.
- Dig Once Policies: Implementing dig once policies require coordination between government agencies to ensure that infrastructure, such as broadband conduits, is installed during other

public works projects, such as road construction. This approach reduces costs and disruptions by avoiding the need for separate construction projects.

- Easement and Right-of-Way Access: Simplifying access to easements and right-of-way for broadband infrastructure deployment can expedite the process. Clear guidelines and standardized agreements between infrastructure developers and property owners can facilitate negotiations and reduce barriers to entry.
- Incentives for ISPs: Offering incentives to ISPs to invest in underserved areas can help bridge the digital divide. This can include tax breaks, grants, or other financial incentives to encourage ISPs to extend their coverage and provide affordable broadband services in areas that might be financially challenging for them.
- Digital Inclusion Programs: Implementing digital inclusion programs can address the accessibility and affordability barriers to broadband adoption. Such programs can include subsidized internet plans for low-income households, digital literacy training, and support for community-based initiatives that promote digital inclusion.

Upcoming Municipal Projects & Conduit Placement:

By leveraging broadband projects in Tonasket, Brewster, Loomis, Methow Valley, Omak, Nespelem, and Elmer City, local governments, municipalities, and service providers can capitalize on these upcoming construction activities, minimize costs, and expedite the deployment of conduit or fiber infrastructure. It will require close coordination among various stakeholders involved in construction, telecommunications, and urban planning to ensure effective implementation.

Digital Equity Summary

I.   Demographic Base Map Review

Digital Equity Characteristics:

Public Data Does/Does Not Accurately Reflect the Local Population Characteristics:

Public data does accurately reflect our local population characteristics. The NOANET and WSU Broadband Extension map uses the latest U.S. census data.

Areas that Appear to Lack Digital Equity Resources:

There is definitely a need for digital equity services in Okanogan County and on the Colville Reservation. Most ISPs do not have digital equity services to help with adoption, providing devices, or

skills training. Most of the digital equity services are provided by anchor institutions. Due to the rural nature of the county, it is hard to reach most of the people that live outside of the dense population centers. The Eastern part of the county appears to be "less connected" to the internet, devices, and services when compared to the Western part of the county. The Eastern part of the county, which includes the Colville Reservation, is poorer than the rest of the county. There is a higher unemployment rate, there are fewer people using the internet, and fewer people that own a computer. The Colville Reservation is also impacted by these same statistics.

Covered Populations that are Prevalent in the Community:

Covered Populations of Okanogan County	Population
Populations whose income is under 150% of the federal poverty level	13,179
Aging Individuals (65 and older)	9,131
Veterans	3,295
Individuals with disabilities	7,180
Populations with vision difficulty	1,351
Population with hearing difficulty	3,013
Hispanic Or Latino	8,745
Black or African American alone	83
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	3,739
Asian Alone	223
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders alone	46
Language other than English at home	7,054
Children and youth in foster care	157

Local Layers Added to the Basemap more Accurately Reflect the Community:

Local layers added to the Basemap that help more accurately reflect the Okanogan and Colville Reservation community:

- Anchor Institutions: Public Schools, Universities, Libraries, Hospitals, Fire Stations, Law Enforcement
- Digital Equity Service Providers
- Community Meeting Spaces
- WA DNR Managed Land Parcels
- Forest Administrative Boundaries
- NPS - Land Resources Boundary
- Demographic Layers: Median Income, Percent No Internet, Percent No Computer, Unemployment Rate, Percent at or below 100, 150, and 200% of the Poverty Line, Percent of Population Disabled, Percent of Population Minority, Social Vulnerability

II. Digital Equity Asset Inventory

Organizations Currently Serving our Community with Digital Equity Services, and what the Services are:

Organization Name	Current Digital Equity Asset Inventory
Okanogan County Transit Authority dba TranGO	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.
Okanogan School District	Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.
Okanogan Behavioral HealthCare, Inc.	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.
Tonasket Food Bank	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.
Town of Twisp Public Works	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).
City of Pateros	Public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).
Methownet	Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment.

Room One	Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, public computer workspaces, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment.
Okanogan County Child Development	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Mobile hotspot or device lending programs.
The Floyd Company Technology	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Programs to provide affordable devices.
Community Health Network of Washington	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment, Digital Navigator Program.
Family Health Centers	Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information, Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Mobile hotspot or device lending programs, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment, Programs to provide affordable devices, Digital Navigator Program.
Winthrop Municipal Court	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, public computer workspaces, Mobile hotspot, or device lending programs.
Omak School District	Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Mobile hotspot or device lending programs.
The COVE	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.

Okanogan County Economic Alliance	Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information, Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment, Digital Navigator Program.
North Valley Hospital	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).
Okanogan County Central Services	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).
LifeLine Ambulance, Inc.	Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information, Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals.
NCW Libraries	Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information, Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Mobile hotspot or device lending programs, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment.
Pateros-Brewster Community Resource Center	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Mobile hotspot or device lending programs.
CCT vocational Rehabilitation	Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information,

	public computer workspaces, Programs to provide affordable devices.
Oakville School District	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).
WSU Okanogan County Extension	Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information, Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills.

Upcoming Events or Projects that Could Support Digital Equity Efforts:

These upcoming projects could support digital equity efforts. Broadband infrastructure expansion ensures that underserved areas and marginalized communities gain access to affordable and reliable high-speed internet. It helps bridge the digital divide by providing equal opportunities for education, employment, healthcare, government services, and other essential online resources.

- Ziply Fiber is in partnership with Washington state and NTIA to bring fiber within the city limits/Census Designated Place boundaries of Loomis, Tonasket & Brewster.
- Methownet is working with the OCEC and PUD to constantly improve and expand their network area in the Methow Valley.
- Colville Tribe is adding wireless and FTTH infrastructure through the Omak and Elmer City areas.
- The Ok Co CCT BAT's Feasibility Study has identified over 20 locations that are of primary interest for designing and deploying broadband. These proposed service areas are: Aeneas, Brewster, Chiliwist, Conconully, Crumbacher, East Omak, Harmony Heights, Keystone, Knob Hill, Loomis-Palmer, Malott, North Omak, Omak Flats, Orchard Grade, Oroville, Pateros, Riverside, S. Pine Creek Rd, Salmon Creek Rd, Synarep, Whitestone, North Okanogan County, Palmer, South Pine Creek.

Organizations Currently Supporting Covered Populations but not Engaged in DE Efforts:

List of entities that are not engaged currently but support covered populations:

Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet)
Charter Communications
PCTelecom
CommunityNET LLC

Highland Internet Communications	
Will Connect, LLC	
NCI Datacom	

Community Engagement Resources & Spaces for Classes, Training, or Meetings:

Organization Name	Current Digital Equity Asset Inventory
Okanogan County Transit Authority dba TranGO	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.
Okanogan School District	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.
Okanogan Behavioral HealthCare, Inc.	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.
Tonasket Food Bank	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.
Town of Twisp Public Works	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).
City of Pateros	Public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).
Room One	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, public computer workspaces, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment.
Okanogan County Child Development	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Mobile hotspot or device lending programs.
The Floyd Company Technology	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for

	classes, training, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Programs to provide affordable devices.
Community Health Network of Washington	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment, Digital Navigator Program.
Family Health Centers	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Mobile hotspot or device lending programs, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment, Programs to provide affordable devices, Digital Navigator Program.
Winthrop Municipal Court	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, public computer workspaces, Mobile hotspots or device lending programs.
Omak School District	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Mobile hotspot or device lending programs.
The COVE	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.
Okanogan County Economic Alliance	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment, Digital Navigator Program.
North Valley Hospital	Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).
Okanogan County Central Services	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).

LifeLine Ambulance, Inc.	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals.
NCW Libraries	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Mobile hotspot or device lending programs, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment.
Pateros-Brewster Community Resource Center	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Mobile hotspot or device lending programs.
CCT vocational Rehabilitation	Public computer workspaces, Programs to provide affordable devices.
Oroville School District	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).

III.   Digital Equity Needs Assessment

Regions that face Barriers to Access or Lack Available Digital Equity Services:

There is definitely a need for digital equity services in Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation. Most ISPs do not have digital equity services to help with adoption, providing devices, or skills training. Most of the digital equity services are provided by anchor institutions. Due to the rural nature of the county, it is hard to reach most of the people that live outside of the dense population centers.

Demographics/Populations that face Barriers or Lack Access to Digital Equity Services:

The Eastern part of the county, which includes the Colville Reservation, is poorer than the rest of the county. There is a higher unemployment rate, there are fewer people using the internet, and fewer people that own a computer. The Colville Reservation is also impacted by these same statistics.

Due to the rurality of Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation, all regions do not have the infrastructure in place. The geographic challenges including the mountains, forests, valleys, and rivers make it harder to reach customers. Current options to expand the internet to reach rural residents are not affordable without grant funding. The rurality of the county makes it hard for people to reach health centers. If they had connectivity to the telehealth businesses, they would be able to access these services from home.

There is an aging population within the county that faces challenges embracing digital skills. Language barriers are also preventing people from accessing the internet and performing basic tasks on the internet. As a natural resource and agriculture-based economy, there is a large migrant workforce, many of whom have made Okanogan County their home year round. Over the last several years, these individuals have transitioned from working on the farm/orchard into entrepreneurship and purchasing the orchards. Many of these individuals do not have internet access, or the knowledge to access it if they did.

Sectors (Gov't, Community, Cultural Services) that face Barriers to Access or lack Available Digital Equity Services:

Here are some examples of several sectors that may face barriers to access or lack available digital equity services:

- Government Services: Certain segments of the population, particularly those with limited digital skills or internet access, may face challenges in accessing government services online. This includes services such as online tax filing, benefit applications, voter registration, and accessing government portals for information and resources. A lack of digital equity services can hinder individuals' ability to fully engage with government agencies and participate in civic activities.
- Education: Students from low-income households or underserved areas often lack access to reliable internet connections and necessary devices for remote learning. This hampers their ability to participate fully in online classes, access educational resources, and collaborate with peers. Digital equity services such as subsidized internet plans, loaner devices, and digital literacy training can help address these disparities and ensure equitable access to quality education.
- Healthcare and Telehealth: Limited access to broadband internet can impede individuals' ability to access telehealth services, particularly in rural or remote areas. This can result in disparities in healthcare outcomes and limited access to medical advice, remote consultations, and online health resources. Digital equity services in healthcare could include expanding telehealth infrastructure, providing affordable internet access for patients, and promoting digital literacy for healthcare providers and patients.
- Community and Social Services: Community organizations and social service providers may lack the resources or infrastructure to deliver digital equity services. This can include limited internet connectivity for community centers, libraries, and social service organizations, hindering their ability to offer online resources, training programs, and digital access points for the underserved. Investment in broadband infrastructure, technology resources, and digital literacy programs can enhance their capacity to serve the community equitably.

- Cultural and Arts Services: Access to digital platforms and online cultural resources is important for promoting cultural participation and artistic expression. However, cultural organizations, museums, and libraries may face barriers in delivering digital equity services. This could include limited funding for digitization efforts, inadequate broadband access for hosting online exhibitions, and disparities in access to digital arts education and resources. Digital equity services in this sector can support digitization initiatives, online cultural programming, and digital skills training for artists and cultural organizations.

It is important to address these barriers and ensure that digital equity services are available across various sectors. Collaborative efforts involving government agencies, community organizations, and private entities can help bridge the digital divide and ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities to access and benefit from digital resources and services.

IV.   Barriers to Digital Equity

Barriers Preventing Access, Adoption and use of the Internet and Devices:

The following is a list of barriers from survey results:

- Lack of digital literacy.
- Can't afford devices.
- No programs to help acquire digital devices for those that need them.
- Lack of programs to teach how to use the internet and devices.
- Presence of a large migrant workforce makes it a challenge to provide online services.
- There is a large tribal community that has historically not been served.

Barriers and Gaps Preventing the Provision of Digital Equity Support Services Throughout the Region:

The following is a list of barriers and gaps from survey results:

- Lack of funding.
- One might have to travel far to find digital equity support services.
- Many rural areas don't have centralized communities or facilities.
- Lack of training providers of digital equity support services.
- Schools and libraries provide many digital equity services, but in low-income areas there is less funding for schools and libraries to provide these services.
- Lack of capacity for organizations and lack of sustainability for digital equity programs.

Community Awareness Issues Inhibiting Digital Equity Resources from being Utilized:

The following is a list of community awareness issues:

- Reaching the community in areas is inhibited by lack of digital services.
- Digital marketing can't reach the community if they do not own digital devices.
- Most people do not own phone landlines, so it is hard to telemarket.
- Not enough advocates that are aware of services because they aren't participating.

Needs, Gaps, or Barriers to Inability to Accurately Assess the Digital Equity Landscape of the Community:

- Lack of participation from people within the county because of a pessimistic outlook.
- Lack of understanding of digital equity as a term and why it is important.

V. Potential Paths Forward

Possible Funding Mechanisms:

Public/Private partnerships to look for local investments into digital equity and sustainability programs. Local funding mechanisms to support digital equity services through trusted community partners i.e., tribal libraries, youth and elder programs, housing authorities, and incarceration programs. Foundations exist to help fund digital equity efforts and identify projects that will help digital equity efforts.

Funding Agency:
   USDA Rural Utility Service (RUS)
Programs:
   Distance Learning Telemedicine Grant Program:
   The Distance Learning Telemedicine Grant Program (DLT) - Is an annual recurring federal grant program that offers financial assistance with both infrastructure and customer premise electronics related to distance learning and telemedicine. The grant will pay for home healthcare devices and laptops. This will help address the lack of digital devices in Okanogan County. Many schools, libraries, and municipalities nationwide utilize this recurring grant program as a means to bridge the digital equity gaps within their communities.

   Below are the details of the grant program:

   - Competitive grant program for the specific purpose of funding equipment for telemedicine and distance learning networks. Loan and combination loans/grants have also been

available in previous years. However, the availability of grant vs. loan dollars has varied over the years. In recent years only the grant program is available.

- This grant program is an annual program. Applications are only accepted once a year with a specific deadline typically 60 days after the Notice of Funds Availability. Announcement of the program is typically sometime in the 1st or 2nd quarter but this also varies from year to year. The loan programs and combination loans/grants are accepted year round.
- The budget varies from year to year. Grant applications can range from $50,000 to $500,000
- Matching requirements are a minimum of 15% of the total budget. Matching can be any eligible grant purpose and met through cash or in-kind support.
- With the DLT program, the higher the matching, the higher the score.

Entities Providing Leadership in the Area:

The following agencies have expressed an interest in providing leadership and partnering with Ok Co CCT BAT for potential paths forward:

- Family Health Centers - Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, public computer workspaces, public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Mobile hotspot or device lending programs, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment, Programs to provide affordable devices, Digital Navigator Program

- NCW Library system - Public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients)

- Colville Tribe - Tribal libraries work in coordination with the University of Washington School of Computer Sciences.

- Washington State University Extension Remote Work Certificate Course - The 9 modules of this 4-week course will help you build skills that make an effective remote worker, whether as an employee, entrepreneur, or freelancer.

Regions/Populations of High Significance for Outreach in our Community:

Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation are significantly rural areas and have several pockets of high unemployment, historical poverty, and an aging population that is growing annually. Focus moving forward will be on these identified areas: our seniors and minorities who continue to struggle in accessing the internet.

Local Organizations Interested in DE Partnerships:

Organization Name	Digital Equity Assets offered by ISPs	Support Digital Equity asset efforts with the following:
Okanogan County Transit Authority dba TranGO	Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings.	Provide meeting space for a public forum.
Okanogan School District	Communications channels (such as the newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.	We could provide information for help with low-cost internet in our newsletter and on our social media pages.
Okanogan Behavioral HealthCare, Inc.	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.	Occasional, limited space for meeting/training.
Tonasket Food Bank	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings.	We would be interested in providing a hot spot for connectivity for our clients. We also could potentially provide space for training opportunities subject to our board's approval.
Town of Twisp Public Works	Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).	The technical training center at the Civic Building.
City of Pateros	Public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients).	A part of the NCW Library system.
Methownet	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment.	Provides information on ACP, technical assistance, best practices, etc.
Room ONE	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings, public computer workspaces, Assistance for Affordable	Meeting space available for classes and informational meetings or focus groups.

	Connectivity Programs enrollment.	
Okanogan County Child Development	Classes and/or trainings to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Mobile hotspot or device lending programs.	Unsure how OCCDA may help but I'll fill out another survey for another business that may be more helpful.
The Floyd Company Technology	Classes and/or training to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, training, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Programs to provide affordable devices.	The Floyd Company Technology provides technology services and support for many individuals and businesses. It is a possibility that we could help in several areas. More information will be needed on the digital equity efforts.
Community Health Network of Washington	Classes and/or trainings to support digital literacy/skills, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment, Digital Navigator Program.	Our goal threefold: provide a digital navigator curriculum to staff already working with community members experience inequitable access to technology, provide smartphones with 1-year pre-bought data plans at no cost to qualifying community members, and provider our Link to Care WA digital literacy support line to all community members in Chelan, Douglas, Grant, and Okanogan Counties free of charge regardless of their insurance/income. The goal is to provide devices, digital literacy support, and work with local stakeholders to inform infrastructure.

Upcoming Programs or Projects that could Support DE Efforts:

The Ok Co CCT BAT will continue to encourage partner organizations to utilize and participate in Digital Equity Solutions. On June 13th, Family Health Centers will host NCW Tech Help to hear about their services to increase digital equity in NCW. They will also be providing training to include Digital Navigation training to community organizations that provide services to disadvantaged populations in Okanogan County. The Ok Co CCT BAT will continue to work with them to provide ongoing training. The BAT will also continue to invite community members, organizations that serve diverse populations, and our local government to the table to promote the importance of digital equity in Okanogan County and the Colville Reservation.

The Ok CO CCT BAT will continue to invite and encourage entities and community members to participate in our BAT to encourage conversations about digital equity so people can be informed about services being offered throughout Okanogan County, the Colville Reservation and our region. We will also continue to have service providers and partner organizations present at the BAT meetings, which are scheduled every 4th Thursday of the month, to share what they are doing in regard to digital literacy, equity, and infrastructure improvements being made in their communities.