NROC
Nebraska Regional Officials Council

Bridging Nebraska's Digital Divide

Digital Inclusion & Needs Assessment, Broadband Mapping, and the Toolboxes Available to You

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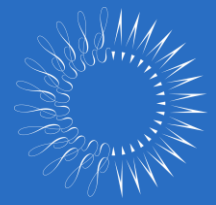
Anna Read

Pew Charitable



THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

Bridging Nebraska's Digital Divide

March 21, 2022

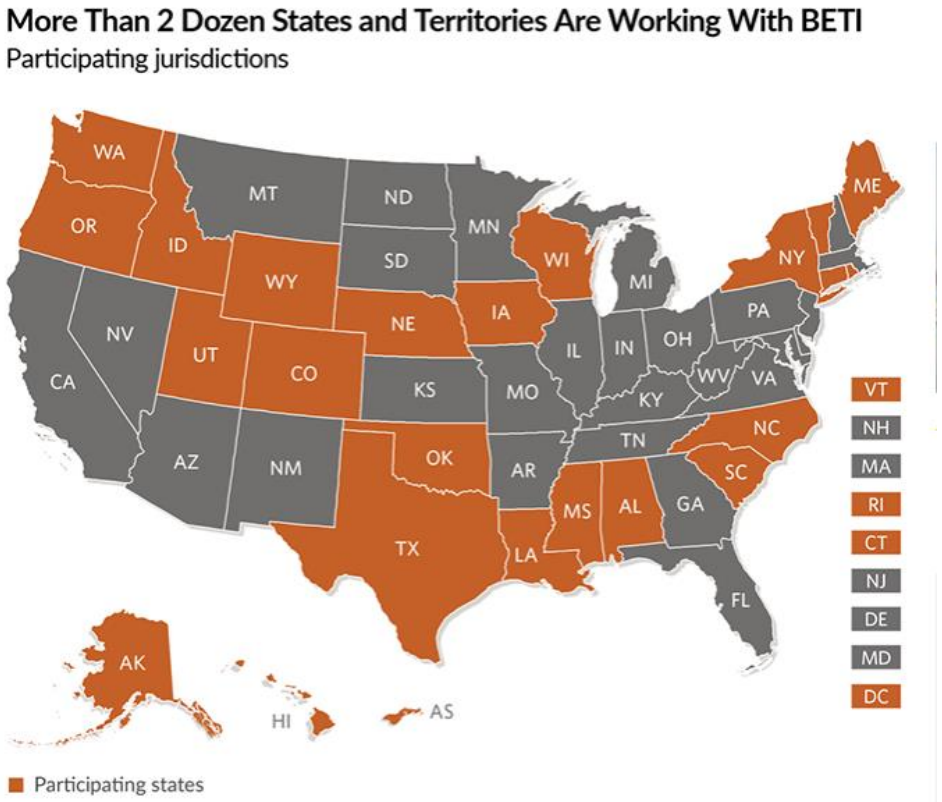
About Pew

Established in 1948, The Pew Charitable Trusts is a global nongovernmental organization that seeks to improve public policy, inform the public, and invigorate civic life.

The Pew Charitable Trusts' broadband access initiative works with state and federal lawmakers, researchers, and other partners to accelerate the nation's progress to universal, affordable high-speed internet service.

Broadband Education and Training Initiative

- Provide states with resources and support to meet program goals
- Expand state-focused research
- Build awareness about state broadband programs
- Collaborate with federal partners

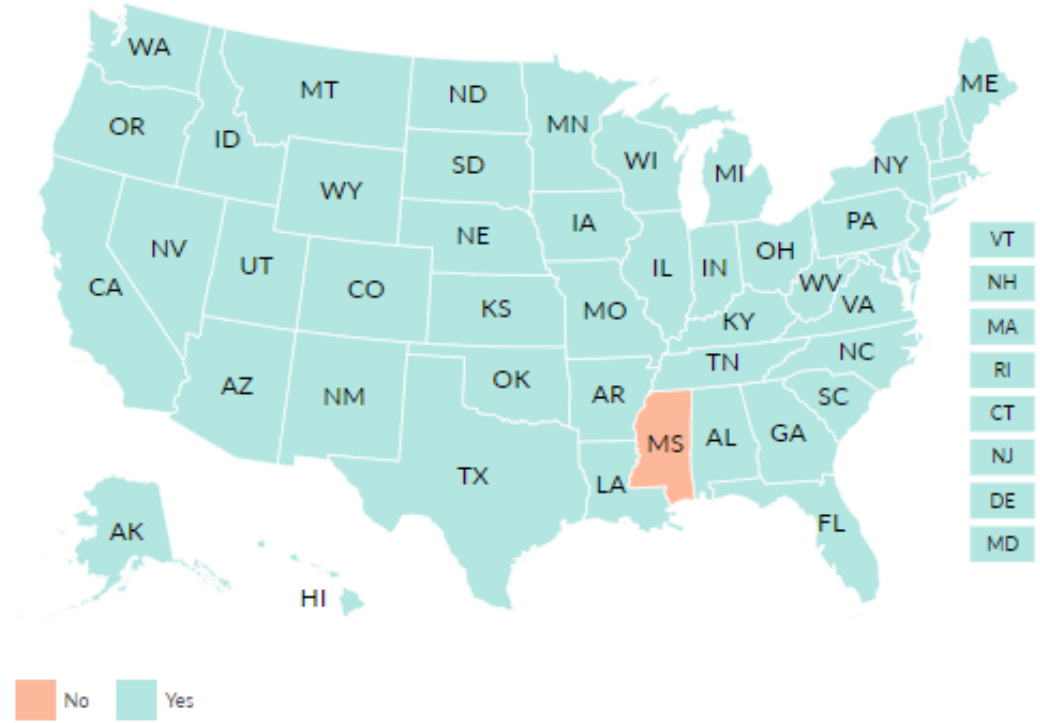


State Broadband Programs

How Has Your State Designed Its Broadband Program?

Office | **Agency** | Task force | Fund

A 50-state overview of efforts to expand high-speed, reliable internet access



Reference

[Which States Have Dedicated Broadband Offices, Task Forces, Agencies, or Funds?]

Broadband Ready Communities

Overview

Through its many outreach and planning efforts throughout the state, the PSC's Wisconsin Broadband Office encourages broadband development and deployment by certifying local communities as being Broadband Forward!.

Created by 2015 Wisconsin Act 278, Broadband Forward! is a voluntary program for local units of government (city, village, town, or county) to signal that the political subdivision has taken steps to reduce obstacles to broadband infrastructure investment.

Model Ordinance

The PSC has created a model ordinance that satisfies the minimum requirements under Wis. Stat. § 196.504 to assist communities in this effort.

- Model Ordinance (PDF)
- Model Ordinance (Word)

Per Wis. Stat. § 196.504(9)(b), if a political subdivision seeking Broadband Forward! certification enacts an ordinance that differs from the model ordinance (other than non-substantive stylistic differences), the political subdivision shall provide the Commission with a written statement that describes the ordinance and how the ordinance differs from the model ordinance.

Overview

Through its many outreach and planning efforts throughout the state, the PSC's Wisconsin Broadband Office encourages coordination and partnership between telecommuting stakeholders by certifying local communities as being Telecommuter Forward!.

Created by 2017 Wisconsin Act 342, Telecommuter Forward! is a voluntary program for local units of government (city, village, town, or county) to signal that the political subdivision supports and commits to promote the availability of telecommuting options.

Model Resolution

The PSC has created a model resolution that satisfies the minimum requirements under Wis. Stat. § 196.5045 to assist communities in this effort.

- Model Resolution

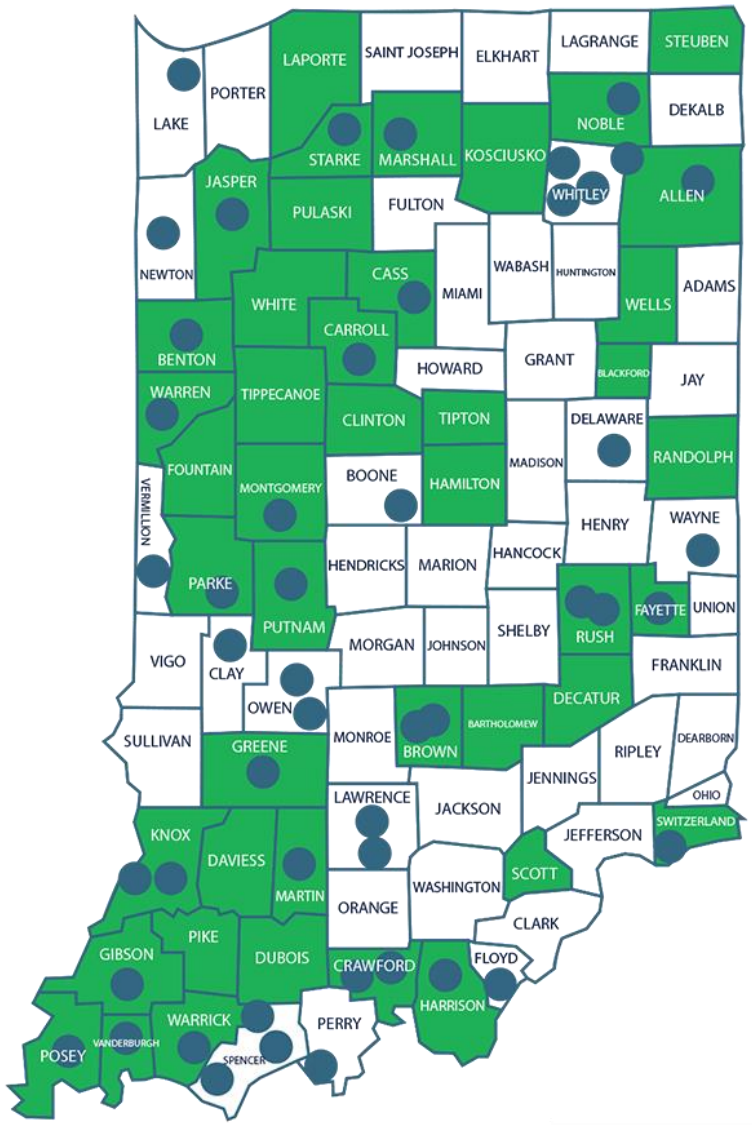
Broadband Ready

The Broadband Ready Communities Program was created as a tool to encourage broadband development throughout Indiana by serving as an information resource and certifying local communities as being broadband ready. The program was established by IC 5-28-28.5.

Broadband Ready Communities (BBRC)

The following local units of government have established the necessary procedures to be certified as Broadband Ready Communities: Certified Broadband Ready Communities

Town of Nashville	City of Rushville	Brown County
Town of Richland City	City of Boonville	Parke County
Town of Merrillville	City of Vincennes	Noble County
Town of Santa Claus	City of Cannelton	Benton County
Town of Larwill	City of Muncie	Newton County
Town of English	City of Mitchell	Crawford County
Town of South Whitley	City of Bedford	Fayette County
Town of Churubusco	City of Brazil	Vanderburgh County
Town of Dale	Vermillion County	Knox County
Town of Spencer	Posey County	Floyd County
Greene County	Whitley County	Jasper County
Martin County	Marshall County	Wayne County
Owen County	Starke County	Cass County



BROADBAND READY COMMUNITY

BROADBAND TASK FORCE

Indiana Broadband

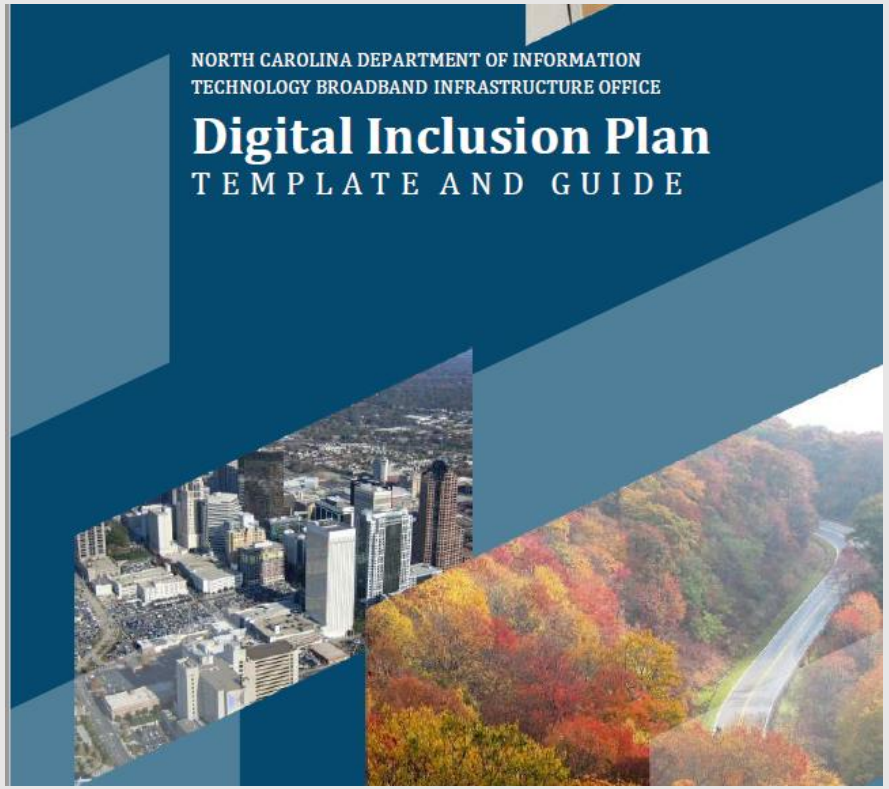
Georgia, Tennessee, and Minnesota

- Georgia Broadband Program Designations
  - Broadband Ready Community Certification (O.C.G.A. §50-40-40) – Certifies communities that have addressed broadband in their local comprehensive plans and adopted a model ordinance
  - Broadband Ready Site Designation (O.C.G.A. §50-40-61) – Designates sites that have download speeds of 1Gbps service that can be used for purposes including education, health care, government, and business

- Tennessee Broadband Ready Communities (Tenn. Code Ann. 4-3-709)
- Minnesota Telecommuter Forward! Certification (Minn. Stat. 116J.9923)

State Digital Equity and Inclusion Efforts

North Carolina



- 2016 “Connecting North Carolina” broadband plans made recommendations for addressing adoption, the homework gap
- North Carolina Digital Equity and Inclusion Collaborative
- BAND-NC grants – mini-grants to North Carolina communities to fund digital inclusion efforts
- ARPA Funding - $50 million for digital literacy efforts, including a statewide awareness campaign

Washington

- Digital Equity Forum – Partnership between Washington State Office of Equity and the Washington State Broadband Office
- Digital Navigator Program – Program of the Washington State Broadband Office and Community Partners
- Broadband Action Teams

Recommendations

- Resource the State Broadband Office to coordinate Digital Equity and Inclusion initiatives across state partners and develop planning grants for locally led efforts
- Work with Commerce to administer pass-through funding to partners who can build the capacity of community-based organizations and develop a workforce of digital navigators
- Require recipients of state infrastructure funding to demonstrate they have made available affordable, low-income service options
- While digital implementation plans get off the ground, resource the Office and partners to expand Drive-in WiFi hotspots
- Support legislative efforts to identify an ongoing state funding mechanism to subsidize affordability programs, devices, and digital literacy training

Wisconsin

"**Accessible**: 97% of Wisconsin homes and businesses will have access to at least one internet service with minimum speeds of 25 megabits per second download and 3 megabits per second upload (25/3 Mbps) by 2025.
Affordable: 75% of households with income below 200% of the federal poverty level have access to fixed, home internet service at a cost of less than $25 per month by 2025. " – State Broadband Plan

- Establish a State Internet Assistance Program.
- Establish a statewide Digital Equity Fund operated by a nonprofit or similar organization with a mission to fund, strengthen and support digital inclusion activities and ideas that lead to all Wisconsin residents having the information capacity needed to fully participate in society.
- Develop and fund a statewide Digital Navigator program to assist under-connected people and solve a wide range of adoption issues. Digital navigators should be embedded in organizations with strong and trusting relationships to the target populations, with the organizational capacity and cultural competency to make an impact.
- Assess broadband adoption and lack of adoption among households not adopting internet based on means, needs, connectivity, and prioritization.

Questions?

Contact: aread@pewtrusts.org

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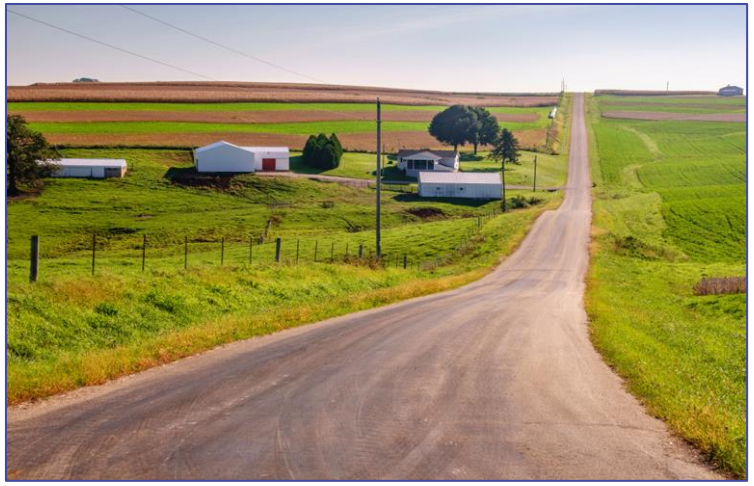
BROADBAND TOOLKIT

March 21, 2022

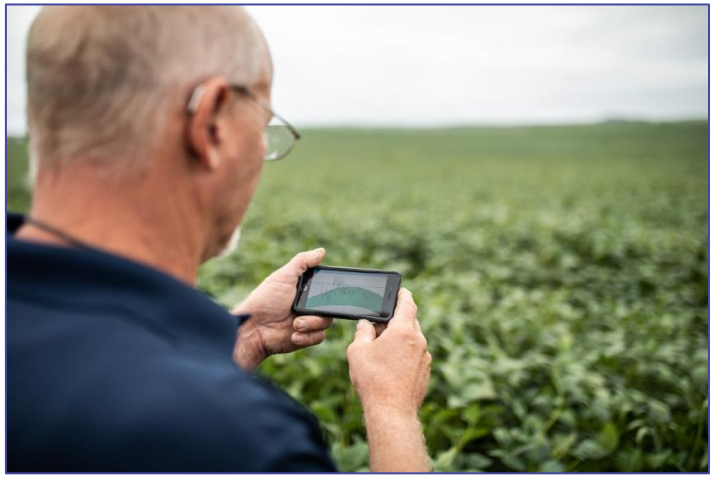
Background

- What is the Digital Divide in Nebraska?
- Universal Service
  - NUSF has been providing ratepayer support for broadband infrastructure since late 1990s
- Why do some rural areas of the state have better broadband?



Today

- Never a better time to build broadband infrastructure quickly
- Funding available
- Accountability systems have been improved
- Laws and regulations have been changed



Broadband Toolkit

- Funding
- Competitive Gadgets

Funding

- Broadband Bridge Program
  - 2021 program
  - 2022 program
    - Revisions

More Funding

- ARPA
  - State
  - County & City

Still More Funding

- Nebraska Universal Service Fund

Competitive Gadgets

- Bridge Program
- NUSF
  - LB994 Reverse Auctions (Friesen, 2018)
  - LB338 Rural-Based Plans (Bostelman, 2021)
- Boundary Changes

Contact Information

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Oliver Borchers-Williams and Michael Dwiggins

Lead for Nebraska Broadband Fellows

BROADBAND ACTION TEAMS

Mobilizing & Empowering Communities to Improve Broadband Connectivity

Oliver Borchers-Williams
Michael Dwiggins
SENDD

March 21, 2022

LEAD FOR NEBRASKA
START WHERE YOU LIVE
SENDD

Convene

- Gather local stakeholders
- Identify consumer and business uses
- Determine areas of need

Coordinate

- Collect data & testimonials
- Develop public-private partnerships
- Secure funding for expansion

Connect

- Leverage existing and new connectivity
- Tap into affordability programs
- Attract residents and businesses

CONVENE

- Broadband Action Teams are **local, community-focused stakeholder groups** united by the goal of better broadband access in their communities.
- BATs should include various stakeholders from a defined area to ensure that all factors can be taken into consideration.
- The goals of BATs should be small and measurable to ensure steady and impactful progress.
- BATs are an integral part of broadband expansion and can ensure that tangible change is achieved.

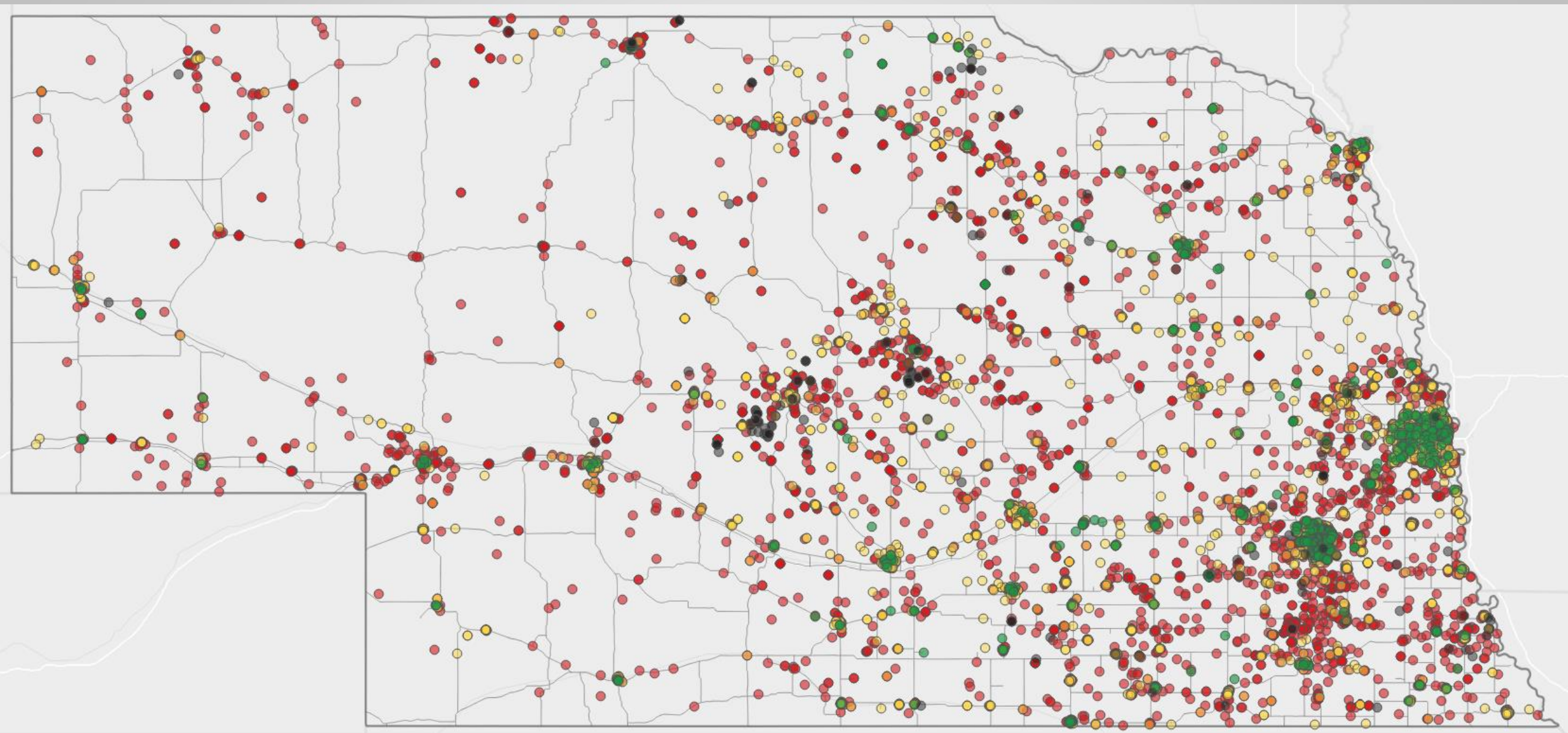
CONVENE

- Elected officials
- Business owners
- Economic developers
- Educators
- Healthcare professionals
- Community leaders
- Churches and congregations
- Local social media groups
- School organizations
- Cooperatives

CONVENE: KEY QUESTIONS

- How do residents use broadband?
- How might broadband connectivity benefit an area?

- What is the current landscape of service?
- What resources are available to support connectivity?



February 2022

LEAD FOR NEBRASKA
START WHERE YOU LIVE

SENDD

COORDINATE: KEY QUESTIONS

- What speeds do residents need? Receive?
- Are residents satisfied with current options?

- How can BAT parties contribute to provider-driven applications?
  - Counties: rights-of-way, parcel data
  - Customers: speed tests, testimonials, survey responses
  - Power districts: meter data

LEAD FOR NEBRASKA
START WHERE YOU LIVE

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CONNECT

Communities

- Businesses: point-of-sale systems, social media, e-commerce
- Schools: remote learning, “homework gap”
- Healthcare: telehealth services, redundancy for rural hospitals

Residents

- More & better options for connectivity
- *Affordable Connectivity Program*
  - Underenrolled: 36k households in NE
  - Trusted community partners are effective promoters

QUESTIONS?

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