

# Building Connections, Starting at Home

## Randolph County Digital Inclusion Plan



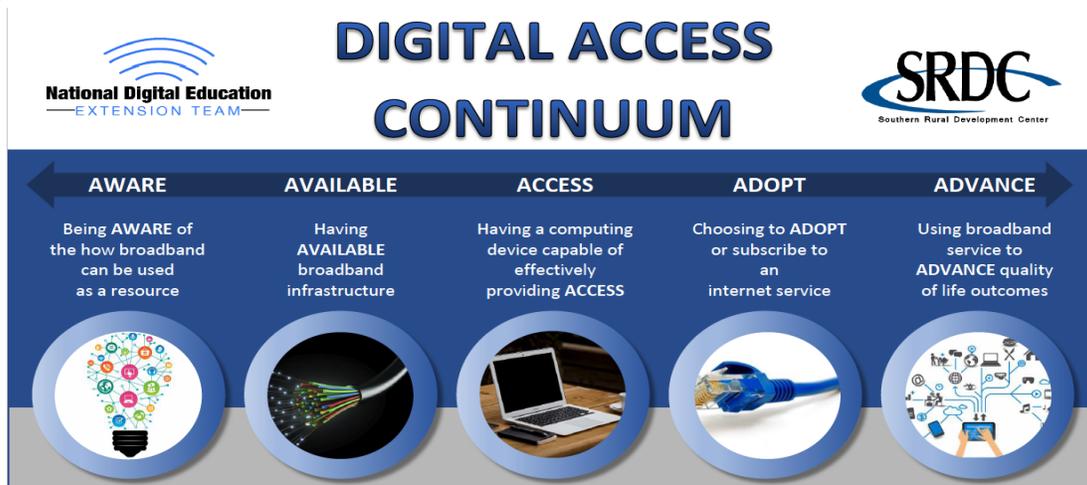
Created by the Randolph County Digital Alliance



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## Framework of assessment:

In an attempt to quantify the current state of digital inclusion and digital divide in Randolph County, this digital inclusion plan uses the **Broadband Spectrum of Engagement** developed by the National Digital Education Extension Team. This framework uses five measurable benchmarks on a continuum; the five benchmarks can be further divided into two levels of engagement.



## Broadband Spectrum of Engagement

**Level 1:** Individuals, households, and communities must have an entry path into broadband. They must be...

1. **Aware** of the potential resources broadband can provide.
2. Have **Available** infrastructure.
3. **Access** to the internet using a computing device.

**Level 2:** The second level focuses on usage and user interaction with broadband through two important elements. Users should...

4. **Adopt** internet use by subscribing to a service.
5. **Advance** life outcomes by using this access to receive education, social services, health care, economic opportunities, social connections, and other essential services.

## Current inventory of resources available at each benchmark along the spectrum:

### 1. Aware:

- I. The Randolph County Digital Alliance is the established task force for broadband accessibility questions, issues, and concerns within the county. Its inception, vision statement, and goals are detailed in this section. The overarching goal of the RCDA is to serve as a point of contact for citizens to gain information and awareness about broadband resources in addition to creating a digital inclusion plan.

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**Collective Vision for Digital Inclusion in Randolph County**

The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the BAND-NC grant program, was the spark needed to launch a countywide effort to focus on digital inclusion in Randolph County. The initial \$5,000 seed grant from BAND-NC was combined with an additional \$5,000 from the N.C. Cooperative Extension -Randolph County Center to purchase 23 Dell Chromebooks. The greatest issue in the digital divide was the lack of devices for children who were forced into remote learning settings due to the pandemic restrictions. The distribution of those devices to the Randolph Public Library, Asheboro/Randolph YMCA, and the Randolph County School System was used to launch the digital inclusion planning process. The group of stakeholders working on the digital inclusion plan became known as the Randolph County Digital Alliance (RCDA). The initial group of community partners working on this initiative were:

N.C. Cooperative Extension - Randolph County Center  
Commissioner Hope Haywood  
Randolph Communications  
Randolph County School System  
Asheboro City Schools  
Randolph County Government IT Department  
Randolph County Partnership for Children  
Asheboro/Randolph County YMCA  
Randolph County Public Library  
Randolph County Economic Development Corporation  
Archdale/Trinity Chamber of Commerce  
Nancy Sharpless, citizen of Randolph County  
Chip Foust, citizen of Randolph County

Other stakeholders will have the opportunity to join the Randolph County Digital Alliance at any time during the implementation of the digital inclusion plan.

The guiding principles of the Randolph County Digital Alliance are captured in the Vision and Mission Statements.

**Vision Statement**

In Randolph County, every household and business will have the opportunity to earn, learn, and be well by accessing needed digital resources.

**Mission Statement**

The Randolph County Digital Alliance will work with organizations to eliminate the digital divide by helping improve access, adoption, and utilization of digital resources.

**Values**

The Randolph County Digital Alliance is inclusive of all residents regardless of socioeconomic status and seeks equity of access for traditionally underserved or unserved populations whether rural or urban.

**General guiding principles adopted from the NC Broadband Office:**

Broadband Access will be at 98% by 2025

- Develop the map of broadband availability in partnership with county IT GIS
- Work with providers to achieve coverage goals

Broadband Adoption will be...

- 80% or greater by 2025 in all racial groups in the county
- 100% of households with school-aged children will have a broadband connection at home.
- Promote affordability options for broadband connections

Broadband Utilization: Training in three categories will be held.

- Digital skills needed for work or seeking work.
- Digital skills needed for learning new skills or occupational certifications.
- Digital skills needed to access wellness resources including telehealth resources

- II. In order to launch the Randolph County Digital Inclusion plan, the RCDA hired a Digital Ambassador in September of 2021. The RCDA Ambassador has three primary objectives:
1. Promote the plan and build awareness of the Randolph County Digital Alliance
  2. Solicit participation in the NC Broadband Survey with the goal of creating the best broadband coverage map in North Carolina
  3. Promote the FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit program (now the Affordable Connectivity Program) to underserved communities

Since September 2021, the Digital Ambassador has designed promotional materials, including postcards, fliers, and church bulletin inserts, for distribution to promote awareness of the NC Broadband Survey and the Emergency Broadband Benefit program and campaigned for high-speed internet service in Randolph County at county commissioner meetings, community organization meetings, and local outreach events. Presently, she is managing the launch of a direct mail campaign to increase survey participant numbers. Since hiring the Digital Ambassador, there has been a moderate increase in the NC Broadband Survey results, and before the Emergency Broadband Benefit ended, there was an increase of 2404 people who began utilizing this resource.

**2. Available:**

1) Mobile broadband- Most mobile phone carriers provide service to Randolph County. However, there are areas in the county where cell coverage is not available. During the pandemic, lack of cell coverage and lack of broadband coverage created an unresolved digital divide for some students during remote learning days.

2) Fixed broadband providers and resources:

- MCNC/NCREN fiber trunk (I-73 route)
- Randolph Communications
- Spectrum

- Century Link
- Ready Telecom
- NorthState North Asheboro and Randleman area
- Carolina AirLink

3) According to the NC Broadband survey, 58.62% of people in Randolph county without internet do not have it at their homes or businesses because it is not available. This percentage will continue to rise because providers like AT&T are no longer connecting new customers to their DSL network. DSL is often the only broadband technology available in some areas of the county. Without this service, ss dated as the technology is, people are left without any internet connection.

4) A survey done by the Randolph County School System found that 9% of the 4,740 students who participated in the survey had no internet access at their home. This is 2,952 students total if the percentage is representative.

### **3. Access:**

#### 1) Public Wi-Fi or public access points

- Randolph County Public Library branches: Asheboro Public Library; Archdale Public Library; Franklinville Public Library; Liberty Public Library; Ramseur Public Library; Randleman Public Library; Seagrove Public Library
- Liberty Town Hall, 239 S. Fayetteville St. (Randolph Communications)
- Seagrove Town Hall, 798 N.C. Highway 705 (Randolph Communications)
- Westmoore Family Restaurant, 2172 S. N.C. Highway 705 (Randolph Communications)
- NC Student Connect 10 sites
- 39 outdoor access points Asheboro City Schools campuses
- McDonald's and other restaurants
- Church Parking lots
- Hotels
- [Asheboro City Schools Park and Learn locations](#)
- YMCA has public broadband
- [Randolph County School System Park and Learn Locations](#)

#### 2) Wi-Fi mobile hotspot lending programs

- Randolph County Public Library
- Asheboro City Schools- hotspots for any school family without internet access (AT&T or Verizon)
- Randolph County School System-hotspot checkouts for families or staff without internet access (Verizon)

#### 3) Discount/low-cost offer programs:

- FCC Affordable Connectivity Program
- The scholarship program at Y and access to broadband
- [Spectrum Internet Assist Program](#) (for students on free or reduced lunch)

#### 4) Public computer access points

- Randolph County Public Library branches: Asheboro Public Library; Archdale Public Library; Franklinville Public Library; Liberty Public Library; Ramseur Public Library; Randleman Public Library; Seagrove Public Library

- Goodwill Computer Lab
- NC Works for job applications
- Randolph Community College for people enrolled in their courses
- Senior Centers

5) Computer/devices

a) Refurbished devices: The YMCA in Asheboro found a company in California that refurbishes computers at a low cost. NonProfitComputers.com

b) Low-cost devices resource:

- <https://www.pcsforpeople.org/>

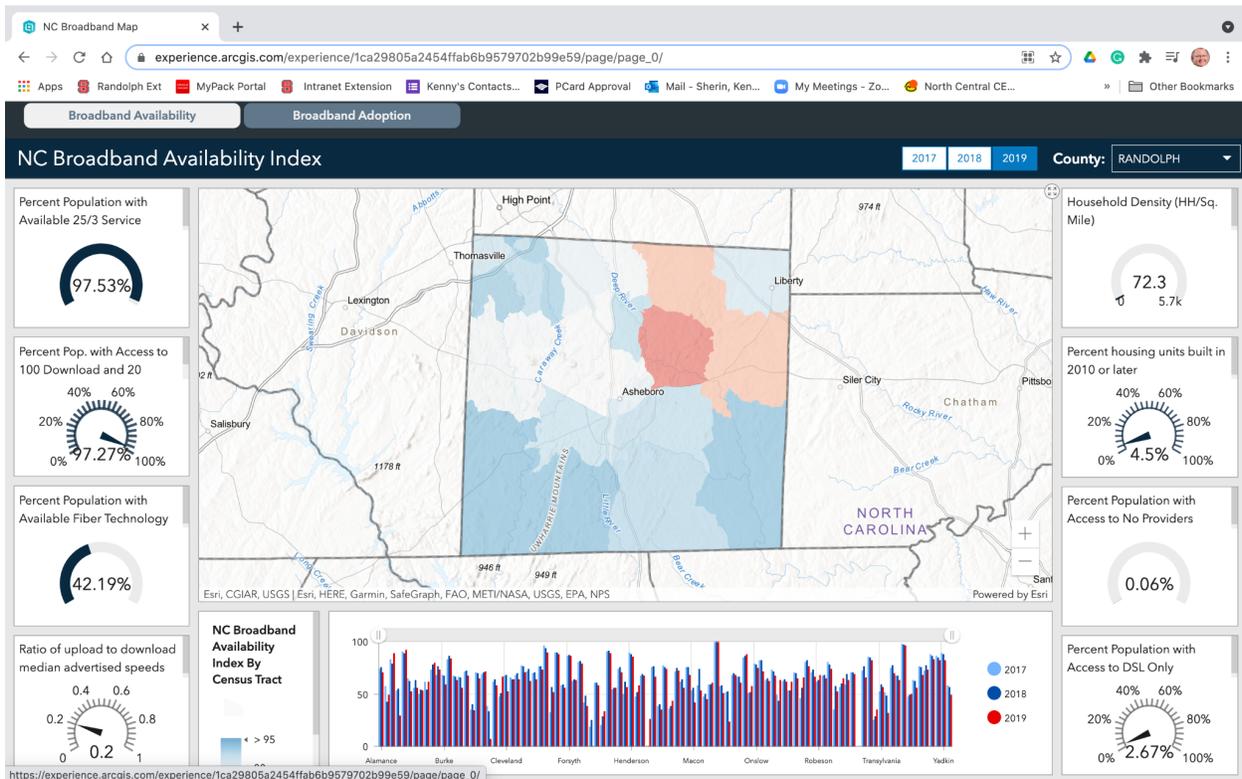
c) K-12:

- Asheboro City Schools Pre-K - 12 are a One to One system. (PreK-2 have iPads, 3-12 grades have Chromebooks)
- Randolph County School System has limited Chromebooks more needed

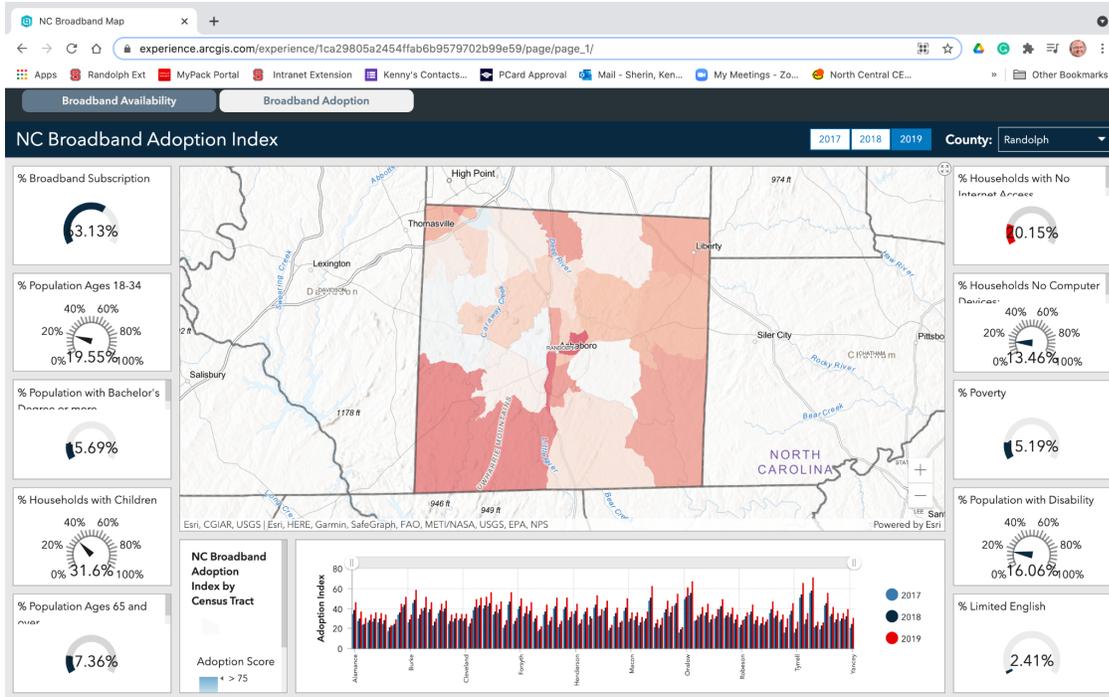
4. Adopt:

Data from the NC Broadband office follows:

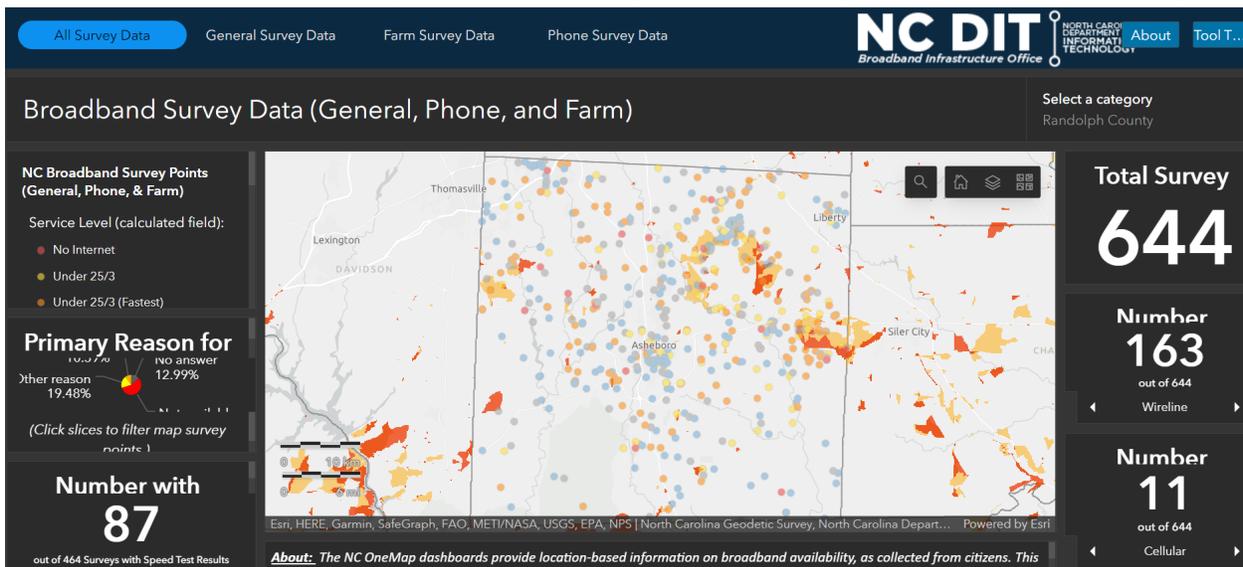
**Broadband Availability Index in Randolph County, NC**



## Broadband Adoption Index in Randolph County, NC



## NC Broadband Survey Data for Randolph County, NC (Retrieved June 29, 2022)



### 5. Advance:

- 1) Digital literacy/skills opportunities
  - a) Organizations specializing in digital literacy training
    - Randolph County Public Library- classes and one-on-one help support. Now using GoToMeeting for one-on-one sessions
  - b) Workshops (None noted currently)
  - c) Courses
    - Goodwill Asheboro <https://edu.gcfglobal.org/>

- Randolph Community College offers computer classes and some computer classes in Spanish
- 2) Individual support
- a) Digital navigators
    - Randolph County Public Library
    - NC Works (Help with clients applying for jobs or filling out applications)
  - b) Tech support
    - Randolph County Public Library

## **County Needs Inventory as Identified by the RCDA:**

Using the above inventory of resources available, the RCDA has identified the gaps in broadband resources in Randolph county and created a needs inventory which is listed below.

1. Broadband availability (See Above Maps)
2. Broadband subscription (See Above Maps)
3. Broadband affordability  
Resource: Affordable Connectivity Program, <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>
4. Computers/devices:
  - At the beginning of the pandemic and even today, students in Randolph county rely on mobile phones for basic internet activities but often need a computer (desktop or laptop) to complete schoolwork. According to a survey done by the Randolph County School System, 43% of the 4,740 students who participated had no device at home to complete schoolwork. That is 6,682 students total if the percentage is representative.
  - Refurbished Computers to meet the needs of underserved

### 5. Digital literacy/skills

The Randolph County Library has brought the NorthStar Digital Literacy Training to their Library as a resource. They offer some classes and individual help. Additional resources are needed.

- Basic understanding of operating a computer when the need arises
- Digital Citizenship
- Cybersafety
- Digital Privacy
- Relevant workforce skills and an increase in depth of knowledge
- How businesses can better leverage digital channels
- Computer classes in Spanish/Urdu
- Delivery of training utilizing short clips on digital safety

## **Specific Goals Timeline:**

In order to advance along the Broadband Spectrum of Engagement, the RCDA has created specific goals for digital inclusion. These goals and timeline are listed below.

### **1. Immediate future (within the next 6 months to 1 year):**

- Create a comprehensive map of broadband coverage in Randolph County.
  - 5000 Randolph county participants in the NC Broadband Survey.

- Create a strong social media presence for the RCDA. There needs to be a platform for people to share their stories and broadband connectivity issues to promote awareness of the need for better broadband infrastructure.
- Find more partners for the RCDA, both concerned individuals and businesses
  - Organizations of interest:
    - George Washington Carver Enrichment
    - Randleman City Planning Department
    - North State Communications

**2. Short-term (within the next 2 to 5 years or sooner):**

- Create a Digital Literacy Skills Coordinator position at Cooperative Extension to train individuals to serve as digital literacy skills liaisons.
- Work with existing providers to add to existing infrastructure with funding from the state and federal government.

**3. Long-term (ongoing goals - completed within the next 5 to 10 years, hopefully sooner):**

- Collaborate within the county government to learn what can the county do to facilitate infrastructure for non-traditional broadband service.
  - Pursue potential contacts, like individuals and businesses, who would be willing to provide non-traditional broadband service
- Increase transparency of broadband development funds and infrastructure in the county