



# **UTAH BROADBAND CENTER CONNECTING UTAH**

## **VERNAL CITY DIGITAL ACCESS PLAN**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<b>VISION</b>	<b>Create a digitally inclusive community where everyone has equitable access to digital technologies, empowering them to thrive in a connected world.</b>
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<b>KEY BARRIERS</b>	<b>Affordable Access</b>	<b>Digital Literacy</b>
	Cost for an individual to subscribe to internet service and for a device to access	The ability to effectively navigate, evaluate, and utilize digital technologies and online resources.

<b>COVERED POPULATIONS</b>	<b>Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area</b>	<b>Individuals who live in covered households</b>	<b>Aging Individuals (60 and above)</b>	<b>Individuals with disabilities</b>

<b>GOALS</b>	<b>Universal Connectivity</b>	<b>Affordable Access</b>	<b>Digital Literacy and Skills Development</b>	<b>Entrepreneurship and Innovation</b>

<b>KEY STRATEGIES</b>	<b>Build Smart City Gap Analysis and Implementation Plan</b>	<b>Promote the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)</b>	<b>Create Resource that Outlines Digital Literacy and Skills Development Programs Available in the Community</b>	<b>Continue to Foster Local Environment that Promotes Entrepreneurship and Innovation</b>



# 1 COMMUNITY OR ORGANIZATION PROFILE

## 1.1 GENERAL COMMUNITY OR ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Vernal is a city located in northeastern Utah. It serves as the county seat of Uintah County and is situated in a picturesque area known as the Uintah Basin.

**Geography:** Vernal is nestled in the heart of the Uintah Basin, surrounded by beautiful natural landscapes. It is situated along the banks of the scenic Green River and is close to several national parks, including Dinosaur National Monument, Ashley National Forest, and Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area.

**Population:** As of September 2021, Vernal had an estimated population of around 10,241 people. Among this population, 12.5% are aged 65 or over, indicating a significant portion of the community that falls into the aging population category. The covered household population in Vernal accounts for 17.9% of the total population, signifying the portion of individuals who primarily reside in households that are considered low-income or poverty level. In terms of education levels, the data reveals that 81.6% of the covered population in Vernal has at least a high school education, highlighting a relatively high educational attainment level within the community. Additionally, 17.8% of the covered population holds a bachelor's degree, while 3.2% have obtained a graduate or professional degree, demonstrating a notable segment of the population with higher educational qualifications.

**Economy:** Historically, Vernal's economy has been closely tied to the oil, gas, and mining industries due to the presence of abundant natural resources in the area. The city has experienced booms and busts due to fluctuations in these industries. In recent years, efforts have been made to diversify the local economy by promoting tourism and outdoor recreation.

**Tourism and Recreation:** Vernal is a popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers. The region's rugged and picturesque landscapes offer opportunities for hiking, camping, fishing, boating, and wildlife viewing. Dinosaur National Monument, located nearby, is a major draw for tourists, with its dinosaur fossils, scenic drives, and hiking trails.

**Education:** Vernal is served by the Uintah School District, which includes several elementary, middle, and high schools. The Uintah Basin Applied Technology College (UBTech) and Utah State University Uintah Basin Campus provide higher education options for residents.

**Healthcare:** Ashley Regional Medical Center and Uintah Basin Healthcare provide medical services to the community and surrounding areas.

**Community Events:** Vernal hosts various events and festivals throughout the year. These events showcase local culture, heritage, and provide entertainment for residents and visitors.



Transportation: Vernal is primarily accessed by road transportation. U.S. Route 40 runs through the city, connecting it to other parts of Utah and neighboring states. The Vernal Regional Airports offers commercial air service and primarily serves general aviation.

Overall, Vernal is a community that offers a unique blend of natural beauty, outdoor recreation, and a rich history tied to the region’s natural resources. It attracts visitors with its stunning landscapes, dinosaur fossils, and opportunities for outdoor adventures.

## **1.2 VERNAL CITY BROADBAND PROFILE**

Broadband is widely available in Vernal City, ensuring high-speed internet access for its residents and enabling the seamless exchange of data, information, and digital services. The following aspects provide an overview of the general broadband profile:

1. **Availability:** Broadband services are available to 100% of the population in Vernal City. This indicates that every household and business within the city's coverage area has access to broadband connectivity.
2. **Speed and Performance:** The broadband services offered in Vernal City provide a range of speeds and performance levels. The available speeds range from 25/3 Mbps, which is accessible in all locations, to gigabit speeds available in certain areas. This ensures that residents and businesses can choose a broadband plan that meets their specific speed requirements.
3. **Technologies:** Vernal City benefits from a diverse range of broadband technologies, including fixed wireless, cable, fiber, and satellite options. These technologies provide various options for residents to connect to high-speed internet, allowing them to choose the most suitable technology based on their location and needs.
4. **Affordability:** While the cost of internet service packages in Vernal City aligns with average costs in the state, it presents a challenge for some covered households who face financial constraints and find it difficult to subscribe to a broadband plan due to affordability issues.
5. **Usage and Adoption:** Vernal City demonstrates a high level of digital adoption and usage, with approximately 91.3% of households equipped with computers, indicating widespread access to essential hardware for utilizing digital technologies. Moreover, 83.2% of households have a broadband internet subscription, showcasing a significant portion of the population actively engaging with online services. However, there remains a need to address digital skills gaps among some individuals, as they lack the necessary competencies to fully participate online.

*Sources: FCC National Broadband Map, United States Census Bureau*



## 2 DIGITAL ACCESS VISION AND GOAL(S)

### 2.1 VISION

Our vision is to create a community where digital access is widely available. We believe that access to the internet and digital technologies is not only a fundamental right but also a powerful tool for social and economic empowerment.

In this vision, every individual, regardless of their geographic location, economic status, or social background, has information available for all digital access resources available in the community. No one is left behind or disadvantaged due to the digital divide.

We envision a future where:

1. **Universal Connectivity:** Every person has access to reliable and high-speed internet connections through innovative technologies and infrastructure investments.
2. **Affordable Access:** Low-income individuals and families are aware of programs available to access subsidized or discounted internet services.
3. **Digital Literacy:** Digital literacy programs offered in the community are compiled and included as a public resource to inform individuals of opportunities that are available to educate and empower them to use digital technologies effectively and confidently. This will allow people of all ages and backgrounds to obtain the necessary skills to navigate the digital landscape, engage in online activities, and harness the potential of the internet for personal and professional development.
4. **Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Access to digital tools and technologies fosters entrepreneurship and innovation. Startups and small businesses thrive, creating economic opportunities, job growth, and driving the local economy.

This vision for digital access is grounded in the belief that a connected and digitally empowered society can bridge gaps, drive social progress, enhance education and healthcare, enable economic opportunities, and empower individuals to reach their full potential. It requires collaborative efforts from governments, private sector entities, civil society organizations, and communities to work together to overcome barriers and ensure that digital access is a reality for all.



## 2.2 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### 1. Goal: Universal Connectivity

- Objective 1: Explore smart city applications that can expand connectivity options and reduce the digital divide.
- Objective 2: Develop a plan in downtown areas that highlights smart city initiatives to enhance infrastructure investments and deployment of innovative technologies to improve access to high-speed internet.

### 2. Goal: Affordable Access

- Objective 1: Promote the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program that encourages covered households to participate in subsidized and discounted internet services.
- Objective 2: Advocate for subsidies and financial assistance programs to ensure affordability for low-income individuals and families.

### 3. Goal: Digital Literacy and Skills Development

- Objective 1: Collaborate with educational institutions, other government entities, non-profit entities, and private sector partners to organize and develop a resource that is widely promoted, frequently updated, and outlines the digital literacy programs offered in the community.
- Objective 2: Foster partnerships with local communities and organizations to establish accessible digital learning hubs and facilitate knowledge-sharing initiatives.

### 4. Goal: Entrepreneurship and Innovation

- Objective 1: Foster an environment that supports the growth of startups and small businesses through access to digital tools, resources, and mentorship programs.
- Objective 2: Promote collaboration and networking opportunities for entrepreneurs, investors, and industry experts to exchange ideas and spur innovation.

## Current State of Digital Access

### 2.3 DIGITAL INCLUSION ASSETS

#### 2.3.1 Affordable High-Speed Internet Assets

Program Name	Description
<b>Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)</b>	ACP seeks to bridge the digital divide by offering discounted internet plans and subsidies to low-income individuals and families, making internet access more accessible and affordable. By partnering with local internet service providers and leveraging funding opportunities, the program aims to connect underserved areas and provide equal opportunities for residents.
<b>Partnering Organizations and/or Programs</b>	ACP is a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) benefit program. Strata Networks is a participating provider that offers this benefit to eligible households.
<b>Covered Population(s) Served</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Individuals who live in covered households</li></ul>

#### 2.3.2 Useful Device Assets

Program Name	Description
<b>Computer Lab</b>	The computer lab at Uintah County Library is a dedicated space where library patrons can access computers, internet, and various digital resources. The computer lab is designed to provide a supportive environment for individuals who may not have access to computers or the internet at home, allowing them to engage in educational, informational, and recreational activities.
<b>Partnering Organizations and/or Programs</b>	Uintah County Library
<b>Covered Population(s) Served</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area</li><li>Individuals who live in covered households.</li></ul>





Program Name	Description
<b>Co-Working Space</b>	<p>The InnovationHUB is a dynamic community space designed to foster innovation, collaboration, and entrepreneurship. It serves as a hub for creative thinkers, entrepreneurs, and technology enthusiasts to connect, collaborate, and transform their ideas into reality. The HUB provides a supportive environment where individuals and organizations can access resources, workshops, mentorship, and networking opportunities to drive innovation and economic growth in the community.</p>
<b>Partnering Organizations and/or Programs</b>	
Vernal City InnovationHUB	
<b>Covered Population(s) Served</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area</li> </ul>

Program Name	Description
<b>Computer Lab</b>	<p>The Golden Age Center offers a computer lab specifically tailored to the needs and interests of senior citizens. The computer lab provides a welcoming and accessible space where older adults can engage with technology, access digital resources, and enhance their digital literacy skills. It aims to empower seniors to stay connected, learn new skills, and participate in the digital age.</p>
<b>Partnering Organizations and/or Programs</b>	
Golden Age Center	
<b>Covered Population(s) Served</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aging individuals (60 and above)</li> <li>• Individuals with disabilities</li> </ul>

### 2.3.3 Skill-Building Tool Assets

Program Name	Description
Custom Fit Training	Custom Fit provides technical training and classes to enhance computer skills, to provide continuing education and safety certifications, leadership and management, and programs developed through industry and employer requests.
Partnering Organizations and/or Programs	
UBTech	
Covered Population(s) Served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area</li> <li>• Individuals who live in covered households</li> </ul>


Program Name	Description
<b>Career and Education Assistance</b>	Department of Workforce Services helps individuals take the next step in their education, training or career! They can provide career counseling and funding for education costs. They also have an online learning center that includes training for basic computer skills.
Partnering Organizations and/or Programs	
Utah Department of Workforce Services	
Covered Population(s) Served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area</li> <li>• Individuals who live in covered households</li> </ul>

## 2.4 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### 2.4.1 Digital Equity Barriers

In Vernal, Utah, several needs and barriers can prevent access to digital technology and digital access. These can include:

1. **Affordability:** The cost of internet services and necessary equipment, such as computers or smartphones, can be a barrier for individuals and families with limited financial resources.
2. **Digital Literacy and Skills:** Many individuals in Vernal may lack the necessary digital literacy skills to effectively use digital technologies and access online resources. This



can include navigating the internet, using online platforms, and understanding digital security and privacy.

3. **Access to Devices:** Limited access to devices, such as computers, laptops, or smartphones, can prevent individuals from accessing the internet and digital services. This barrier is particularly significant for low-income households or individuals who cannot afford to purchase or upgrade their devices.
4. **Age and Demographic Factors:** Older adults, individuals with disabilities, and marginalized communities may face additional barriers to digital access due to a lack of familiarity with technology, physical limitations, or language barriers.
5. **Digital Divide Awareness:** Limited awareness or understanding of the digital divide and its implications may prevent individuals from seeking solutions or advocating for improved access. Lack of awareness can further perpetuate the disparities in digital access.

Addressing these needs and barriers requires comprehensive strategies and initiatives that focus on affordability, digital literacy training, device accessibility, and targeted support. Collaboration between government entities, internet service providers, community organizations, and educational institutions is essential to overcome these barriers and ensure equitable digital access for all residents.



## 3 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

### 3.1 PLANNED ACTIVITIES

- Develop Smart City Gap Analysis of Downtown Areas
  - Develop Implementation Plan for Smart City Initiatives in Downtown Areas
- Create Resource of Digital Literacy and Skills Development Programs Available in the Community
  - Promote Resource and Educate Community to increase participation in Digital Literacy and Skills Development Programs

### 3.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Implementation Strategies for Digital Access Plan Goals:

- **Goal: Universal Connectivity**
  - Objective 1: Explore smart city applications that can expand connectivity options and reduce the digital divide:
    - Conduct an assessments to identify smart city technologies and applications that can improve connectivity, such as public Wi-Fi networks, smart infrastructure, and wireless broadband solutions.
  - Objective 2: Develop a plan in downtown areas that highlights smart city initiatives to enhance infrastructure investments and deployment of innovative technologies to improve access to high-speed internet:
    - Create a comprehensive plan that outlines strategies for deploying high-speed internet infrastructure in downtown areas.
    - Seek funding opportunities and partnerships to support the implementation of the plan, including grants, public-private partnerships, and infrastructure investments.
- **Goal: Affordable Access**
  - Objective 1: Promote the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program that encourages covered households to participate in subsidized and discounted internet services:
    - Raise awareness about the program through community outreach, digital campaigns, and collaboration with local organizations, schools, and libraries.



- Provide assistance and guidance to eligible households in accessing and enrolling in the Affordable Connectivity Program.
  - Objective 2: Advocate for subsidies and financial assistance programs to ensure affordability for low-income individuals and families:
    - Engage with local, state, and federal policymakers to advocate for policies and funding to support affordable internet access programs.
- **Goal: Digital Literacy and Skills Development**
  - Objective 1: Collaborate with educational institutions, other government entities, non-profit entities, and private sector partners to organize and develop a resource that is widely promoted, frequently updated, and outlines the digital literacy programs offered in the community:
    - Create a centralized online platform or directory that provides information on available digital literacy programs, including classes, workshops, and training opportunities.
    - Establish partnerships with local organizations and educational institutions to ensure regular updates and promotion of the digital literacy resource.
  - Objective 2: Foster partnerships with local communities and organizations to establish accessible digital learning hubs and facilitate knowledge-sharing initiatives:
    - Identify community spaces, libraries, or existing centers that can serve as digital learning hubs where individuals can access technology resources and receive training.
- **Goal: Entrepreneurship and Innovation**
  - Objective 1: Foster an environment that supports the growth of startups and small businesses through access to digital tools, resources, and mentorship programs:
    - Partner with local business organizations and the innovationHUB to provide resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities for entrepreneurs and startups.
    - Organize workshops, seminars, and training sessions focused on digital entrepreneurship, e-commerce, and online marketing.
  - Objective 2: Promote collaboration and networking opportunities for entrepreneurs, investors, and industry experts to exchange ideas and spur innovation:



- Organize entrepreneurship events, pitch competitions, and innovation summits to bring together entrepreneurs, investors, and experts in various industries.
- Facilitate networking platforms, online forums, and mentorship programs that connect entrepreneurs with experienced professionals and potential investors.

These implementation strategies provide a framework for realizing the goals of the Digital Access Plan by addressing universal connectivity, affordable access, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship and innovation. By focusing on these objectives and collaborating with various stakeholders, the plan aims to bridge the digital divide, empower individuals and businesses, and create a thriving digital ecosystem

### **3.2.1 Stakeholder Engagement Process**

During the implementation of the Digital Access Plan, planned engagement efforts can be crucial for gathering input, building partnerships, and fostering community involvement. Here are the planned engagement strategies:


#### **1. Stakeholder Consultations:**

- Conduct meetings, workshops, or focus groups with key stakeholders, including community members, local businesses, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and government officials.
- Seek their input on resources available, digital access challenges, priorities, and potential solutions.
- Incorporate their feedback into the Digital Literacy and Skills Resource and the planning and decision-making processes.

#### **2. Public Awareness Campaigns:**

- Launch public awareness campaigns to inform the community about the Digital Access Plan and its objectives including the resource of the Digital Literacy and Skills Development Resource that will be made available.
- Use various communications channels, such as local media, social media platforms, community events, and newsletters, to disseminate information.
- Highlight the Digital Literacy and Skills Development Programs that are available in the community, the benefits of digital access, address concerns, and encourage community participation.

#### **3. Partnerships with Local Organizations:**

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- Continue to foster relationships with local non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and businesses that align with the goals of the Digital Access Plan.
  - Collaborate on joint initiatives, share resources, and leverage each other's expertise to expand Digital Access.
  - Engage these organizations in outreach activities.

#### **4. Digital Inclusion Task Force or Committee**

- Establish task forces or committees comprising representatives from various sectors, including government, community organizations, businesses, and academia.
- Task them with overseeing the implementation of the Digital Access Plan and ensuring diverse perspectives are considered.
- Engage these groups in regular meetings, where progress updates are shared, challenges are addressed, and collective decisions are made.

#### **5. Feedback Mechanisms:**

- Actively seek and respond to feedback to demonstrate transparency and accountability in the implementation process.
- Use feedback to refine strategies, address challenges, and make necessary adjustments to the Digital Access Plan.


These engagement efforts foster collaboration, ownership, and inclusivity, ensuring that the Digital Access Plan reflects the needs and aspirations of the community it serves. Regular communication, partnerships, and feedback channels create a sense of shared responsibility and enable continuous improvement throughout the implementation process.

### **3.2.2 Program Evaluation and Assessment**

Program evaluation is crucial to assess the effectiveness of strategies, the overall plan, and the implementation program. Here's an overview of the program evaluation that will be conducted for each strategy, the plan, and the entire implementation program:

#### **1. Strategy Evaluation:**

- Specific evaluation criteria and performance indicators for each strategy will be established.
- Relevant data through surveys, interviews, focus groups, or data analysis to measure the progress and impact of each strategy will be collected.

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- Data to assess whether the intended outcomes have been achieved and identify areas for improvement will be analyzed. The findings, highlighting successes, challenges, and recommendations for refining or adjusting the strategies will be documented and reported.

## **2. Plan Evaluation:**

- The overall Digital Access Plan to assess its alignment with the goals, objectives, and desired outcomes will be evaluated.
- The implementation progress of each strategy, considering the timeline, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement will be reviewed.
- Gaps, challenges, or modifications needed to ensure the plan remains relevant and effective will be identified.

## **3. Implementation Program Evaluation:**

- The overall implementation program's effectiveness in achieving the digital access goals will be assessed.
- The coordination and collaboration among stakeholders involved in the implementation, including government entities, community organizations, and private sector partners will be evaluated.
- Feedback from the community and stakeholders on their perceptions of the program's success, challenges, and areas for improvement will be gathered.

The findings and recommendations from the evaluation will help inform future decision-making, resource allocation, and program adjustments to ensure the continuous improvement of digital access initiatives.

## **3.3 TIMELINE**

An estimated timeline and prioritization of implementation strategies is crucial for effective planning and resource allocation. Here is the general approach that will be taken specific to the context and goals of the digital access plan:

### **1. Assessment and Planning Phase:**

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current state of digital access in Vernal, Utah, including infrastructure, affordability, digital literacy levels, and barriers. Engage stakeholders, including community members, organizations, and government entities, to gather input and prioritize needs. Develop a detailed implementation plan, setting goals, objectives, and strategies to address the identified needs.

Estimated Timeline: 0-3 months





## 2. Infrastructure Development:

- Evaluate the opportunity for Smart City Initiative expansion in downtown areas of Vernal. Collaborate with internet service providers and government entities to secure funding, licenses, and permits for infrastructure development projects. Conduct feasibility studies and engineering evaluations to determine the best approach for infrastructure deployment.

Estimated Timeline: Ongoing, with initial analysis complete within 0-3 months

## 3. Digital Literacy and Skills Training:

- Develop and implement a digital literacy programs resource tailored to the needs of different segments of the population, including seniors, low-income individuals, and marginalized communities. Collaborate with local schools, libraries, and community centers to compile current training opportunities, workshops, and online resources that are available. Continue to foster partnerships with organizations and educational institutions to provide specialized training programs and certifications.

Estimated Timeline: Ongoing, with initial Digital Literacy Program Resource Guide made available 12-24 months

## 4. Affordability and Device Accessibility:

- Promote the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) more widely to increase the adoption rate in the local community

Estimated Timeline: 6-12 months

## 5. Community Engagement and Awareness:

- Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the community about the importance of digital access and the available resources. Engage with local media, community organizations, and educational institutions to raise awareness about digital inclusion initiatives. Establish feedback mechanisms to gather community input and ensure ongoing engagement throughout the implementation process.

Estimated Timeline: Ongoing, with initial campaigns and engagement efforts starting within 3-6 months

It's important to note that the timeline and prioritization of implementation strategies may need to be adjusted based on available resources, stakeholder feedback, and external factors. Regular monitoring and evaluation of progress should inform any necessary adjustments to the timeline and priorities to ensure the successful implementation of the digital access plan.



### 3.4 ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION COST

Estimating the cost of implementing a Digital Access Plan requires considering various factors and components of the plan. While the specific costs will vary, here are some key costs that are being considered:

#### 1. Infrastructure Development:

- Smart City infrastructure expansion and improvement can be a significant cost. It involves deploying new network infrastructure, possibly upgrading existing infrastructure, and extending coverage to underserved areas.
- Costs may include infrastructure design, equipment purchase, installation, permits, and ongoing maintenance.
- Estimating the cost of infrastructure development with the plan will require information obtained from an analysis that is expected to be complete within the next 3 months.

#### 2. Digital Literacy and Skills Training:

- The development and implementation of digital literacy programs such as curriculum development, instructional materials, training facilitators, and technology resources are already in place.
- By collaborating with educational institutions, community centers, and organizations and leveraging existing resources the cost is significantly reduced.
- Costs to create a Digital Literacy and Skills Development Resource and campaign that will include information about programs available in the community is estimated to cost \$2,000 - \$5,000.

#### 3. Affordability and Device Accessibility:

- Addressing the affordability barrier involves promoting the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) more widely in the community.
- Costs to promote the ACP program are estimated to cost \$0 - \$2,000.

#### 4. Community Engagement and Awareness:

- Conducting public awareness campaigns, community outreach, and engagement efforts incur costs related to marketing materials, events, media collaborations, and communication channels.
- Establishing feedback mechanisms and conducting community surveys or focus groups may require allocating resources for data collection, analysis, and reporting.



- Costs are expected to be very minimal as current outreach efforts will be used to promote community engagement and awareness. Estimate: \$0 - \$500


#### **5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Program Management:**

- Allocating resources for monitoring and evaluating the implementation progress and impact of the Digital Access Plan is essential for measuring success and identifying areas for improvement.
- Program management costs include staffing, project coordination, stakeholder engagement, and reporting.
- Program management will be completed with existing resources. Estimated cost: \$0

### **3.5 ALIGNMENT**

The Digital Access Plan aligns with local efforts by complementing and supporting existing initiatives and priorities related to digital access, technology adoption, and community development. Here is an overview of how the plan aligns with local efforts:

- 1. Collaboration with Local Stakeholders:** The Digital Access Plan emphasizes collaboration with local stakeholders, including government entities, community organizations, educational institutions, and internet service providers. By aligning with local efforts, the plan ensures that it builds upon existing expertise, resources, and networks within the community.
- 2. Addressing Local Needs and Priorities:** The plan takes into account the specific needs and priorities Vernal, as identified through community assessments, stakeholder engagement, and local data. It aligns with the unique challenges faced by the community in terms of community broadband access, digital literacy, affordability, and device accessibility.
- 3. Integration with Economic Development Goals:** The Digital Access Plan recognizes the role of digital access in fostering economic development and job creation. It aligns with local economic development efforts by promoting the availability of reliable and high-speed internet, which can attract businesses, support entrepreneurship, and enhance digital skills training for the workforce.
- 4. Leveraging Existing Programs and Resources:** The plan aims to leverage existing programs, resources, and infrastructure in Vernal to maximize efficiency and impact. This includes collaborating with local schools, libraries, community centers, and organizations that are already engaged in digital inclusion initiatives. By aligning with these efforts, the plan can leverage and enhance the resources already available within the community.

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5. **Engaging the Community:** The Digital Access Plan emphasizes community engagement and awareness. It aligns with local efforts by involving community members in the planning and implementation process. This ensures that the plan reflects the needs and aspirations of the community and fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among residents.

By aligning with local efforts, the Digital Access Plan can tap into existing resources, knowledge, and partnerships, creating a coordinated and collaborative approach to bridge the digital divide and promote digital inclusion within the community.

### **3.6 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND OTHER SUPPORT REQUIRED**

To effectively implement the Digital Access Plan, the community and organizations involved may require various forms of support and technical assistance. Here is an overview of the types of support and technical assistance that may be needed:

1. **Funding Support:**

- Assistance in identifying and accessing funding sources, including grants, government programs, or private-sector partnerships.
- Guidance in developing grant proposals, budgeting, and financial management to secure necessary resources for plan implementation.

2. **Technical Expertise:**

- Access to technical experts in the field of broadband infrastructure, digital literacy, and technology deployment.
- Assistance in conducting feasibility studies, network design, and technology assessments to determine the most effective strategies for expanding broadband access and improving digital infrastructure.

3. **Capacity Building:**

- Training and professional development programs to enhance the skills and knowledge of stakeholders involved in plan implementation.
- Support in building the capacity of local organizations and community leaders to sustain and scale digital access initiatives.

4. **Partnership Development:**

- Facilitation of collaboration and networking opportunities to foster shared learning, resource-sharing, and joint implementation of initiatives.

5. **Community Engagement:**



- Guidance in developing community engagement strategies and outreach plans to involve and inform community members about the Digital Access Plan.
- Support in conducting surveys, focus groups, or town hall meetings to gather input, address concerns, and ensure community involvement in decision-making.

#### **6. Monitoring and Evaluation:**

- Assistance in designing monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the progress, effectiveness, and impact of the plan's initiatives.
- Support in data collection, analysis, and reporting to measure outcomes and inform adjustments and improvements to the implementation strategies.

#### **7. Policy and Advocacy:**

- Support in navigating policy and regulatory landscapes related to broadband access, digital inclusion, and funding opportunities.
- Assistance in advocating for policy changes and initiatives that promote digital access and address barriers at the local, regional, or national level.


## **4 PLANNING PROCESS REPORT**

The planning team took several steps to determine the current state of digital access in Vernal City. The planning team included the Uin-Tech Committee Members. Members represent the local government, school district, higher education, business, and tech-minded individuals.

### **4.1 COLLABORATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

The coordination and outreach strategy related to the development of the Digital Access Plan involved engaging a wide range of stakeholders, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that the plan reflects the needs and aspirations of the community. Here is a description of the coordination and outreach strategy:

1. **Stakeholder Engagement:** The first step was to identify and engage key stakeholders, including government entities, community organizations, educational institutions, internet service providers, businesses, and residents.
2. **Establishing a Steering Committee:** The next step will be to form a dedicated steering committee comprising representatives from different stakeholder groups that will provide guidance, expertise, and oversight throughout the process. The committee will help coordinate efforts, make informed decisions, and ensure broad participation.
3. **Community Surveys and Needs Assessment:** Conducting community surveys and needs assessments will allow for a comprehensive understanding of the digital access landscape in Vernal. These assessments will collect data on existing infrastructure,



connectivity gaps, digital literacy levels, affordability issues, and specific needs and barriers faced by different population segments.


4. **Collaboration with Existing Initiatives:** Building upon existing local efforts related to digital access, technology adoption, and community development will ensure synergy and avoid duplication. Collaborating with organizations already engaged in digital inclusion initiatives will leverage their expertise, resources, and networks.
5. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launching public awareness campaigns will educate community members about the importance of digital access, the benefits it brings, and the available resources and initiatives. These campaigns will utilize various channels such as social media, local media outlets, community events, and partnerships with schools, libraries, and community centers.
6. **Partnerships and Resource Sharing:** Continuing to foster partnerships with internet service providers, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and government agencies will facilitate resource sharing, leverage expertise, and maximize the impact of the plan. These partnerships can include joint funding applications, collaboration on programs, and sharing best practices.
7. **Feedback Mechanisms and Ongoing Engagement:** Regular communication, updates, and soliciting feedback will ensure that the plan remains responsive to evolving needs and challenges.

By implementing a robust coordination and outreach strategy, the development of the Digital Access Plan in Vernal, Utah will benefit from the collective wisdom, insights, and active participation of stakeholders.

## 4.2 COORDINATION AND ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER DIGITAL INCLUSION EFFORTS

The coordination and alignment with local, county, and regional digital inclusion programs and efforts are crucial for the success of the Digital Access Plan. By collaborating with existing initiatives, formal or informal, the plan can leverage resources, expertise, and established networks. Here is a description of the coordination and alignment strategy:

1. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engaging with the stakeholders involved in the existing programs is essential. This includes reaching out to program coordinators, leaders, and participants to foster collaboration and information sharing. Building relationships and understanding the strengths and challenges of each program will help identify areas of synergy and potential areas for collaboration.
2. **Resource Sharing:** Collaborating on resource sharing can help maximize the impact of the Digital Access Plan. This can include sharing educational materials, training curricula, program evaluation tools, and other resources that can benefit multiple



initiatives. By pooling resources, duplication of efforts can be minimized, and efficiency can be increased.


3. **Joint Funding Opportunities:** Exploring joint funding opportunities can strengthen the financial sustainability of digital inclusion efforts. By coordinating efforts with local, county, and regional programs, it is possible to develop joint funding proposals and leverage resources for collective impact. This can involve partnering on grant applications, seeking public-private partnerships, or accessing regional funding opportunities.
4. **Coordination of Outreach Efforts:** Coordinating outreach efforts ensures that messaging is consistent, complementary, and reaches the target populations effectively. By aligning outreach strategies, different programs can amplify their reach and collectively raise awareness about the importance of digital access and available resources.
5. **Data Sharing and Collaboration:** Sharing data and collaborating on data collection and analysis can provide a comprehensive understanding of the digital inclusion landscape in the region. This collaboration can help identify gaps, measure impact, and inform evidence-based decision-making for all participating programs.
6. **Policy Advocacy:** Coordinating efforts on policy advocacy can amplify the collective voice of local, county, and regional digital inclusion programs. By working together, these programs can advocate for policies and regulations that promote digital access, address barriers, and create an enabling environment for digital inclusion efforts.

By actively coordinating and aligning with local, county, and regional digital inclusion programs and efforts, the Digital Access Plan in Vernal, Utah can benefit from shared resources, expertise, and collaboration, leading to a more comprehensive and impactful approach to bridge the digital divide and foster digital inclusion in the community.

### 4.3 RESEARCH AND DATA FINDINGS

In the development of the Digital Access Plan, several research and data findings were considered to inform the strategies and initiatives. These findings are crucial for understanding the current digital access landscape and identifying specific needs and barriers within the community. Here are some pertinent research and data findings:

1. **Digital Divide:** Collaboration on the digital divide in Vernal City was conducted to understand the disparities in digital access based on factors such as income, rurality, and age. This information helped identify specific populations that are disproportionately affected by the digital divide.

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2. **Digital Literacy Assessment:** Exploration of Digital Literacy and Skill Building programs available in the community was conducted to help identify unrealized opportunities.
  3. **Affordability Analysis:** Research was conducted to identify affordability programs available in the community.
  4. **Community Needs Assessment:** Surveys, focus groups, and community consultations were conducted to gather input and insights directly from community members. This qualitative data helped identify specific needs, concerns, and aspirations related to digital access and informed the development of targeted initiatives.

By considering these research and data findings, the Digital Access Plan can be tailored to address the specific needs and challenges identified within the community. This evidence-based approach ensures that the plan is grounded in a deep understanding of the local context and can effectively target resources and initiatives where they are most needed.





# Appendix A:


## Smart City Initiative / Gap Analysis Summary

This executive summary offers a succinct overview of the extensive gap analysis undertaken for the Vernal City Smart City plan. The analysis aims to pinpoint existing deficiencies and areas necessitating improvement, providing valuable insights to refine our vision and strategy for transforming our environment into a technologically advanced and sustainable hub of innovation.

**1. Vision and Objectives:** The Smart City plan envisions a future where technology harmonizes with Rural life to enhance efficiency, sustainability, and quality of life. The objectives emphasize improved citizen services, resource optimization, and fostering innovation. To create a digitally inclusive community where everyone has equitable access to digital technologies, empowering them to thrive in a connected world.

**2. Key Findings:** Through rigorous examination of the plan, several gaps have emerged:

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The plan's communication of benefits and its long-term impact needs reinforcement to garner widespread support and understanding.
- **Infrastructure Readiness:** The existing technological infrastructure must be upgraded to accommodate advanced solutions such as 5G and edge computing.
- **Data Insights:** A comprehensive data collection framework is necessary to harness the potential of data-driven decision-making effectively.
- **Citizen Involvement:** Improved digital engagement platforms are essential to encourage citizens' active participation in Smart City initiatives.
- **Sustainability Integration:** A holistic approach to renewable energy sources and energy-efficient practices should be woven into the fabric of the plan.
- **Mobility Solutions:** The plan lacks a comprehensive smart mobility system that optimizes traffic flow and public transportation.
- **Regulation and Governance:** The regulatory framework must adapt to the rapid pace of technological advancement and safeguard data privacy and security.
- **Funding Strategy:** Exploring diverse funding sources is imperative to meet the financial demands of comprehensive smart solutions.

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- **Workforce Skills:** A skills gap analysis is needed to upskill the workforce to effectively manage and maintain smart infrastructure.
  - **Cybersecurity Measures:** Enhanced cybersecurity protocols are essential to protect critical systems and sensitive citizen data.
  - **Equity and Inclusivity:** Ensuring equitable access to smart services across all segments of society requires targeted initiatives and outreach.

**3. Recommendations:** To address the identified gaps and enhance Vernal’s Smart City plan’s effectiveness:

- **Communication Strategy:** Develop a comprehensive communication strategy to convey the plan’s benefits and garner stakeholder support.
- **Technology Infrastructure:** Prioritize upgrading technology infrastructure to enable seamless data collection and analytics.
- **Citizen Engagement:** Implement a user-friendly digital engagement platform to empower citizens in Smart City decision-making.
- **Sustainability Focus:** Integrate renewable energy sources and energy-efficient practices into all aspects of the plan.
- **Skills Development:** Conduct a workforce skills assessment and provide necessary training to manage advanced technologies.
- **Equity Initiatives:** Develop programs to ensure equitable access to smart services for all community members.

**4. Conclusion:** The gap analysis has provided a valuable roadmap to enhance the implementation of our Smart City plan. By addressing the identified gaps and integrating recommended measures, we can navigate the path to a more vibrant, connected, and sustainable urban future. This analysis serves as a foundation for refining our strategies, aligning stakeholders, and ensuring the successful realization of our Smart City vision.