



PRESS RELEASE

Beaver County Celebrates Digital Inclusion Week by Announcing Digital Navigator Program, Affordable Connectivity Programs

BEAVER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, For Release on Oct. 3, 2022 – In observance of Digital Inclusion Week, October 3-7, Beaver County is proud to join with hundreds of organizations nationally that are working to raise awareness of solutions that address home Internet access and create computer assistance and support programs.

The Connect Beaver County initiative is leveraging nearly \$20 million of the County's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to bring high-speed Internet to communities across the County that need it most. Digital Inclusion Week serves as a reminder that high-speed broadband Internet access alone doesn't help those without the proper technology and training.

"As we work to bring broadband to every resident across Beaver County, we recognize that access to the Internet depends on more than just having a service provider," said Lance Grable, director of Beaver County's Office of Planning and Redevelopment. "That's why digital equity and inclusion are core components of the Connect Beaver County initiative and front-of-mind given how vital access was to our residents during the COVID-19 pandemic."

According to a 2021 countywide survey, 1,930 households in Beaver County are without broadband Internet access. One in four residents needs to travel to other locations to access Wi-Fi, such as coffee shops or libraries.

The countywide survey also found that more than 35% of residents now work full-time from home, with another 22% working from home "often", and 16% reporting working from home "occasionally". Work/Business ranked as the most important feature of the Internet (2.4 avg. rank). Other top reasons residents cited as important for high-speed Internet connection were education (3.4), communication with others (3.8), shopping/gathering product information (3.8), entertainment (4.3), internet browsing (4.5), healthcare (4.5), and other/banking or personal finance (7.4).

DIGITAL NAVIGATOR PROGRAM

One way Beaver County is increasing digital inclusion is through the Digital Navigator Program. The program seeks to help residents gain the skills and confidence necessary to benefit from the many resources and opportunities the Internet provides.

"There are a number of roadblocks our citizens may encounter when reaching for the Internet," said Grable. "It's important we continue to get creative in addressing these challenges."

Beaver County has engaged local nonprofit Tech2Elevate to execute a program tailored to the needs of residents. Trained staff members will be paired with members of the public who request assistance with using a computer, understanding how to follow safe practices online, learning popular software, navigating online websites, filling out forms, and much more.

The County has been consulting with numerous stakeholders to identify candidate Digital Navigator locations (such as libraries and municipal centers) and understand the needs of residents. Locations across the County will be announced when the Digital Navigator program launches in 2023.

"We know that many residents continue to struggle with using printers and scanners, filling out forms online, avoiding scams or keeping information safe, and so much more," said Marcos Digliodo, President of Tech2Elevate. "The Digital Navigator will be able to answer questions and walk residents through processes they need to learn to become confident."



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OTHER DIGITAL INCLUSION RESOURCES

There are numerous programs available to Beaver County residents to assist with costs associated with Internet service, as well as purchasing a computer or similar device.

The federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) offers \$30 toward a monthly Internet bill for those who qualify. A list of affordability programs will be available on the Connect Beaver County website at the start of Digital Inclusion Week.

Learn more about the Digital Navigator Program and more at www.ConnectBeaverCounty.com.

Digital Inclusion Week (DIW) is an annual online event designed to highlight individual communities' work on digital inclusion. DIW aims to raise awareness of solutions addressing home Internet access, personal devices, and local technology training and support programs. For more information, visit www.DigitalInclusion.org.

About the Connect Beaver County Broadband Program

Beaver County Office of Planning & Redevelopment is advancing the Connect Beaver County Broadband Program to deliver high-speed Internet to communities across the county that need it most. Through the Program, broadband service access will be provided in 24 municipalities across the county in areas that are unserved or underserved. This initiative will use nearly \$20 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and aims to be completed by December 2024. The program includes five key actions to close the digital divide: new broadband service; a Digital Navigator Program; Connect County-Owned Towers via Fiber; Broadband Utility Connection Fund; and Continued Digital Equity and Data Collection Analyses.

About the Beaver County Planning Commission

The mission of the Beaver County Planning Commission is to provide strategic, coordinated, and objective guidance and oversight to the growth, planning, and development activities of Beaver County. The goal of the Commission is to ensure that Beaver County's future is characterized by a healthy environment, economy, and society achieved through proactive planning, citizen representation, effective communication, and professional services.

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