

PRESS RELEASE

Beaver County Supports Digital Inclusion Week with Affordability Resources for Residents

BEAVER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, Oct. 2, 2023 – Beaver County, along with hundreds of communities and organizations nationwide, is celebrating Digital Inclusion Week 2023 (Oct. 2-6) by prioritizing equitable home Internet access through computer training and support programs. The Connect Beaver County Broadband Program is working to close the digital divide and address roadblocks citizens may face when accessing the Internet and computer devices.

“We recognize that having access to an Internet connection is only the first step to ensure all residents can fully participate in our digital economy,” said Lance Grable, director of Beaver County’s Office of Planning and Redevelopment. “The Connect Beaver County Broadband Program also invested in a digital navigator program to better understand how we can leverage county resources to help aid residents with their digital proficiency.”

Beaver County residents face several obstacles and barriers to digital inclusion, including issues with transportation and mobility, limited access to affordable Internet and computing devices, and a need for more awareness regarding digital inclusion services. Beaver County’s Connect Beaver County broadband initiatives identified these challenges that impact residents beyond infrastructure alone.

Digital navigators are available to help users become familiar with available technology and learn how to access information and opportunities through the Internet. The Beaver County Digital Coach program, also known as the Digital Coach, helps Beaver County residents who need access to the Internet and the necessary skills to use it effectively. The program aims to bridge the gap for those left behind in the digital age, providing support with tasks such as email services, telehealth, job application portals, and basic computing software.

The efforts throughout 2022-2023 to develop a digital navigator program have worked for the County to understand its many partners who provide digital access and support, identify where more capacity is needed, and establish a path forward to help connect residents to the skills and technical support they need. In partnership with Tech2Elevate, Digital Coach Programs aim to provide a physical and accessible community space to conduct digital literacy training, one-on-one assistance, and a lending library for devices to enhance access to high-speed Internet for the community.

Examples of Beaver County's efforts to increase digital inclusion:

- In June, the Beaver County Office of Planning and Redevelopment announced that Verizon had been selected to deploy high-speed fiber-optic broadband service to eligible locations lacking connection.
- Two Early Action Projects with Internet service providers Armstrong and Windstream are underway. Residents are expected to receive new service options as early as 2024.
- Tech2Elevate has received funding for three AmeriCorps fellows who started in September and have begun offering digital coaching through tech2elevate.org. The County and its partners continue to seek long-term funding sources for its digital navigator program.



BROADBAND PROGRAM

- The County developed an Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) tutorial video and a PDF to help guide residents through the ACP enrollment process. The ACP offers eligible households \$30 toward their monthly Internet bill and up to \$100 on the purchase of a computer or Internet-enabled device.

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

Digital Inclusion Week (DIW) is an annual event highlighting communities' work elevating digital inclusion efforts. DIW seeks 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.

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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 that need it most. Through the Program, broadband service access will be provided in 24 municipalities across the county in unserved or underserved areas. This initiative will use 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, connecting county-owned Towers via Fiber, a 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.