BENTON INSTITUTE for BROADBAND & SOCIETY

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ILLINOIS EXTENSION

Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND
JB Pritzker, Governor

ACCELERATE:
A COMMUNITY BROADBAND PLANNING PROGRAM

by Bill Coleman, Community Technology Advisors

A collaboration with Blandin Foundation
and the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society

June 2022

Leadership Education

Information Gathering

Opportunity Analysis and Next Steps

Report to the Community

# Accelerate Illinois

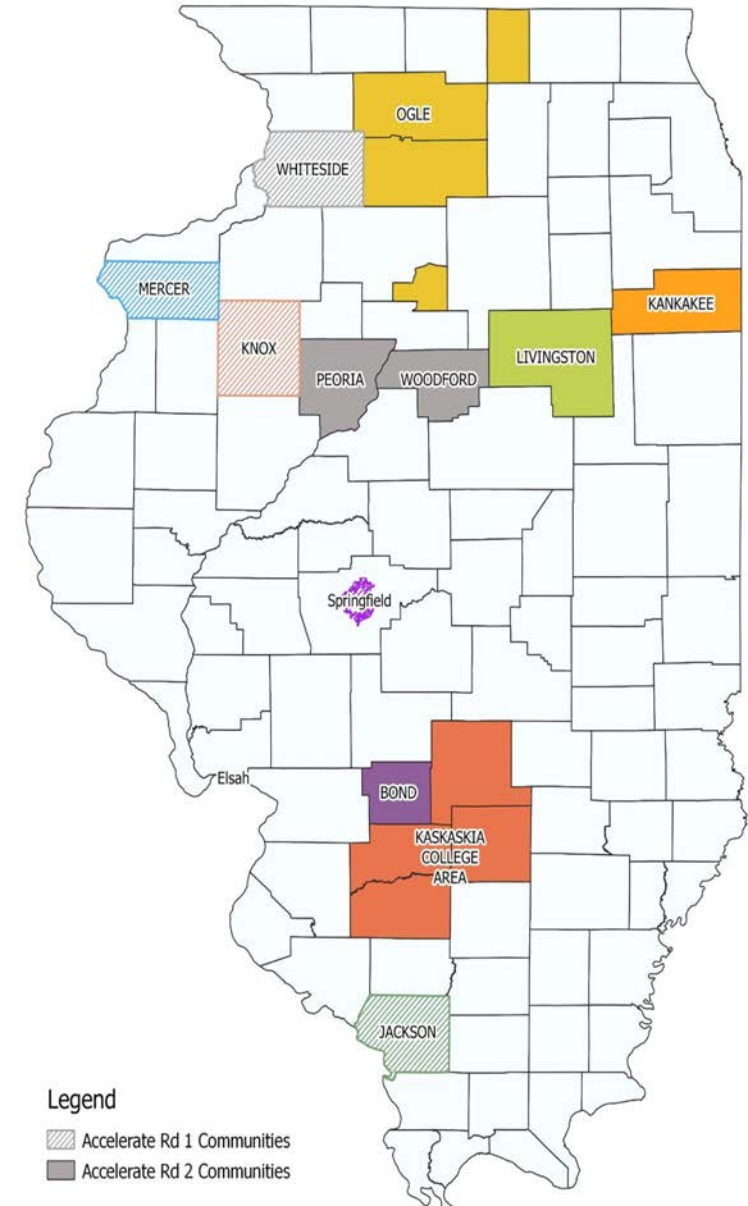Two **14-week cohorts**, Feb – May 2022 and May – Aug 2022

**Designed to help local governments determine how to use federal/state funding.**

*Accelerate* is a community engagement initiative focused on helping community leaders develop broadband plans to address their unique local needs

The Approach:

- No funding | 'Notice of Collaboration Opportunity'
- 30+ hrs of expert consultation and facilitation
- Vision statement
- Community survey &. mapping analysis
- Provider interviews
- Strategic plan
- Target capital dollars to support broadband infrastructure implementation.



Accelerate Broadband Infrastructure Planning Program

# A Few *Accelerate IL* Rd 2 Outcomes

**Survey Findings — Helpful Qualitative & Quantitative Data**

- Ogle County found many residents in their rural communities had 1 option and it was $150 for basic service
  - Got data on cellular-only households. One Boone County respondent: *"We do not have access to any broadband other than through cellular companies.  We had to switch to a different provider during the pandemic when we had to start working from home because we needed more data to do everything. It's very expensive."*

**New Infrastructure Solutions — Middle-Mile Network Expansion**

- Bond County, rural community a little over 50 miles NE of St. Louis. Learned community was perfectly positioned to leverage existing broadband backhaul infrastructure running along the highway. Looking to expand Middle-Mile to connect 9 townships and 3 public school districts.

**Organized Mission Statement & Strategy**

- All 6 cohort teams completed presentations containing survey data, mission & vision statements, and key strategies

**Better Positioned for Further Consultation**

- Through their education, information gathering, and planning efforts, the teams have built a strong foundation for community empowerment. If the next step is to seek out further consultation, "strong, educated teams can be much smarter and targeted, getting higher value from feasibility or other studies because of participation in this program." — Lead *Accelerate Illinois* Consultant Bill Coleman.



**Whiteside County commits $3 million for broadband internet**

The Whiteside County Board approved a $3 million commitment to the internet Co-op  (kwqc/Sand Prairie)

By Hernan Gutierrez

Published: Sep. 20, 2022 at 11:15 PM CDT

WHITESIDE CO., Ill (KWQC) - The Whiteside County board unanimously approved a multi-million dollar plan to expand fiber optic

# Whiteside County "Connect Whiteside" Broadband Infrastructure Initiative

CONNECT WHITESIDE ENVISIONS AN EQUITABLE DEPLOYMENT AND USE OF ROBUST, AFFORDABLE BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE THAT IMPROVES THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND COMPETITIVENESS OF EVERY RESIDENT, BUSINESS, AND ORGANIZATION IN WHITESIDE COUNTY.

GARY CAMARANO

WHITESIDE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Why This Matters –** Connectivity has had an enormous impact on the economic growth of the United States and the quality of life here. Digital connectivity, especially for Rural America, is the next big thing. Work, health, education, productivity and quality of life.

The contribution to our rural economies and quality of life will be SIGNIFICANT!

# The Process

➢ Accelerate Illinois Broadband Infrastructure Planning Program

➢ Fiber Survey – Community Input

➢ Define the project, inventory resources

➢ Tap into our resources – local, IL DCEO Office of Broadband, Benton Institute

➢ Due Diligence - What are we looking for in a provider?

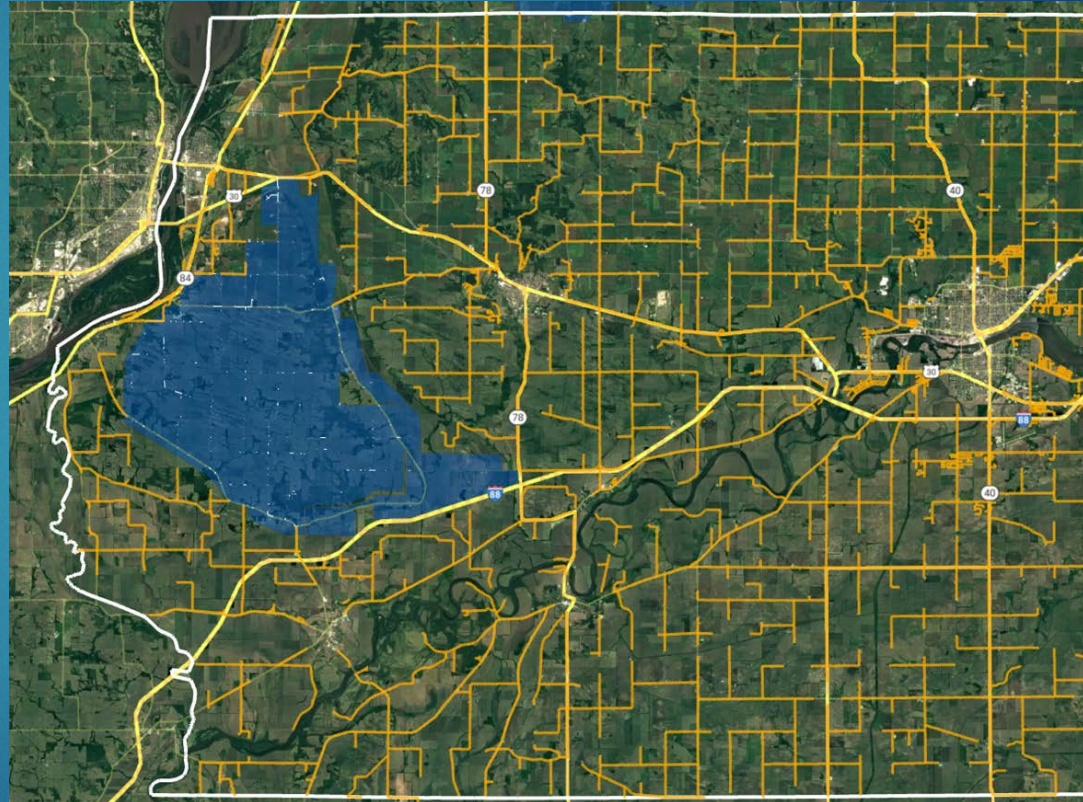➢ ISP Provider Interviews

➢ **Decision Time!**

# The Scope of Work for Connect Whiteside

**100% broadband fiber access for Whiteside County's unserved and underserved areas.**

Jo Carroll Energy's current grant awarded areas in blue (Connect IL Rd. 2 & USDA-RUS ReConnect).

The orange lines represent ~970 miles of 'Preliminary' mainline fiber routes that would potentially pass nearly 8k rural Whiteside County homes, businesses and farms.

Leverage our limited assets to achieve 100% access

# Whiteside County commits $3 million for broadband internet

WHITESIDE CO., Ill (September 20, 2022 KWQC) - The Whiteside County board unanimously approved a multi-million dollar plan to expand fiber optic internet on Tuesday.

The board approved a $3 million commitment to internet provider Sand Prairie and their plan to provide broadband internet access to 100% of underserved and unserved parts of the county.

Currently, 21,000 people live in the unincorporated parts of Whiteside County which fall under those categories. According to officials, the project will cost about $70 million.
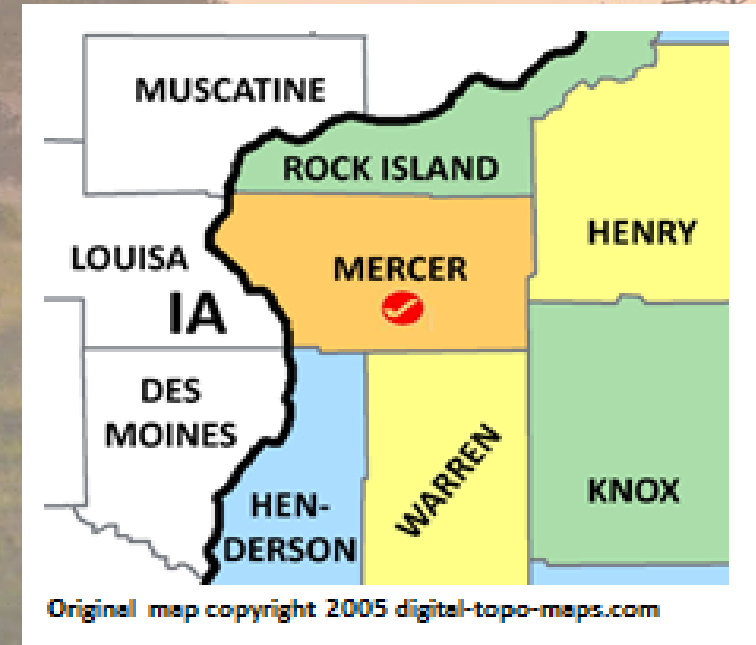
All of this is part of a grant proposal dedicated to expanding internet access to rural communities.

THE DECISION

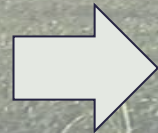# Broadband for Mercer County

**Vision**: Everyone in Mercer County will have access to high performing broadband internet infrastructure and services that enables prosperity today and for the future.

- Mercer County
  - Population 15,600
  - Agricultural - 750 farms (census)
  - MI River along entire west end
  - 45th largest county in Illinois - 560 Square miles



Original map copyright 2005 digital-topo-maps.com

# Broadband for Mercer County

Accelerate Program ➡ Mission & Vision

Comprehensive Strategic Plan

Local ISP infrastructure buildout

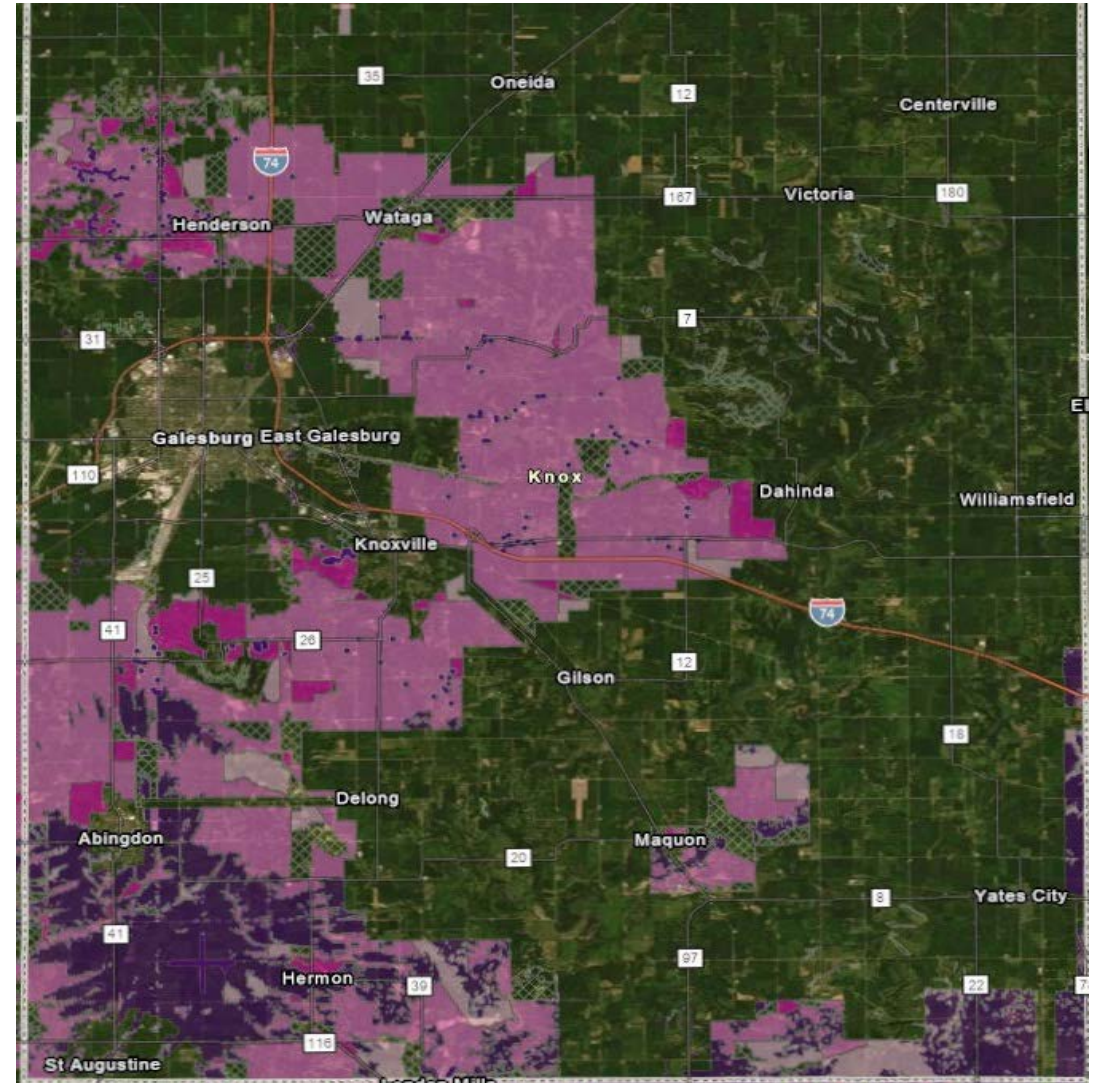Now ➡ Aligning funding resources with infrastructure buildout

# Knox County's rural areas urgently need better broadband service.

- All colored areas on this Illinois Broadband map either have no internet service or are underserved at less than 25Mb download/3 Mb upload speeds.

- Broadband Survey also shows that service is slow, spotty and expensive in many other parts of the County as well.

Accelerate Illinois Steering Team Vision Statement:

"Our vision is for every household to be connected to reliable, high-speed, affordable internet to make Knox County a great place to live, work and raise a family."
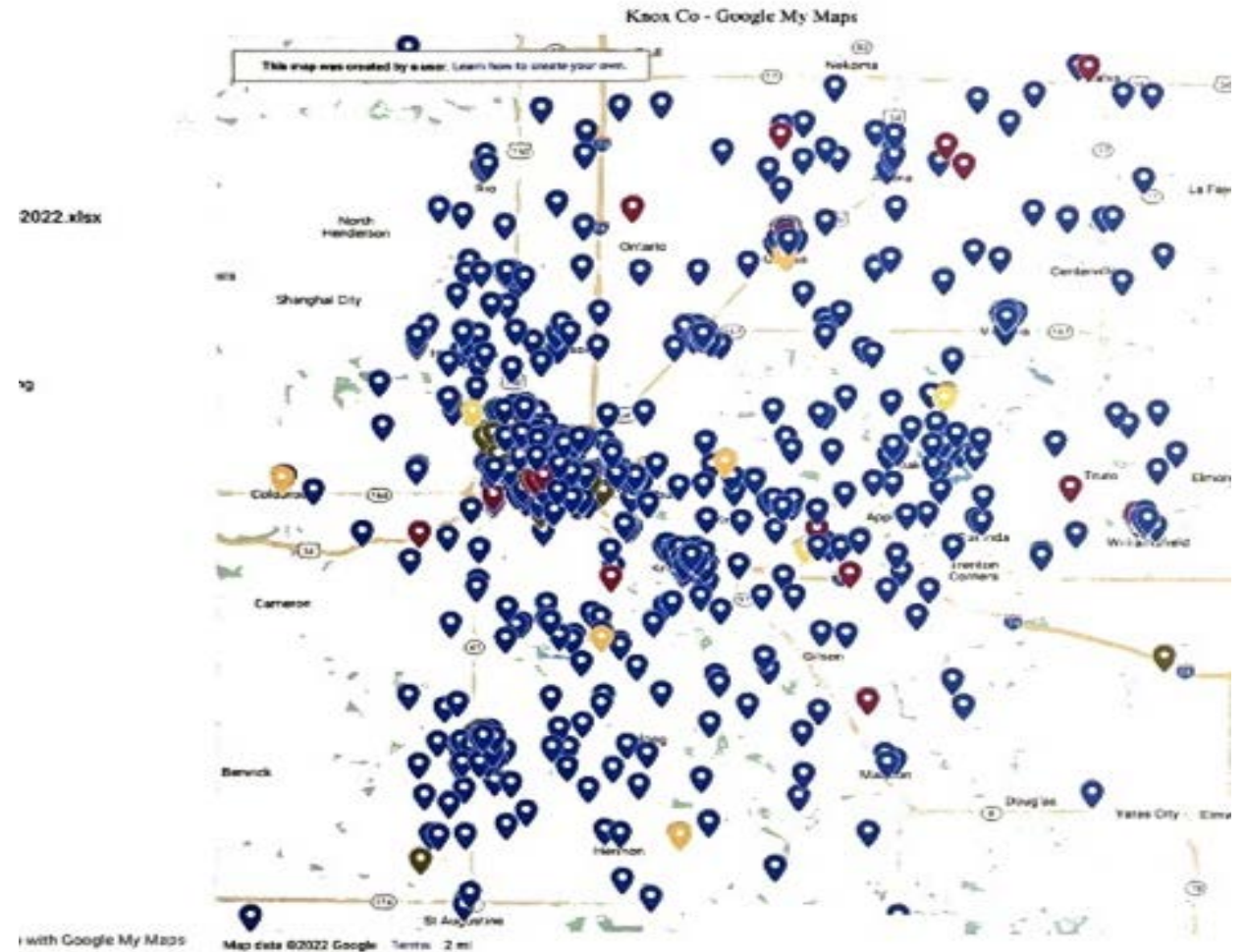
# Main Actions to Date

**Accelerate Illinois Steering Team:**

- Community Survey: 1100+ responses

- Community presentation: Galesburg Noon Rotary Club

**Knox County Board**

- Earmarked $2.5 million of ARPA funds for rural high-speed broadband support

- $100,000 grant for local ISP 50-household symmetrical gigabit fiber project in rural Knox County (Wataga and Foxtown areas), completed

- $25,000 grant to expand range and capacity of local fixed wireless provider

# Future Plans

## Accelerate Illinois Steering Team:

- work with ISPs to identify rural expansion plans/opportunities
- work with local agencies to promote the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)
- recommend optimal strategy for use of ARPA funds (e.g., support Connect Illinois applications)

## Knox County Board:

- allocate earmarked ARPA funds to optimally leverage state and federal broadband funding within rural Knox County

# Kaskaskia College/Clinton County Region Accelerate Illinois

George Evans – Kaskaskia College President

*Mission Statement:*

*To provide accessible and affordable high-speed internet and cellular infrastructure that serves and supports the evolving educational, agricultural, healthcare, emergency services and economic needs of the residents in the Kaskaskia College region, while also incorporating and respecting the proud rural commitment to agricultural preservation in the district*

# Clinton County

# What we have learned…

- This is a marathon not a sprint
- Collaboration is a key component
- Data analysis and evidence-based information presentation will be key to success
- Some low hanging fruit in our area, but much bigger task for several of the unserved areas
- Broadband and cellular services must be treated as a basic utility in order for economic growth and communities to expand

**Potential barriers:**

- Little ROI interest from ISP providers in rural areas
- Land and zoning laws and regulations should not be taken for granted
- Volunteer and support for project must be maintained to succeed
- Local and county government must share leadership role

**Positives:**

- Overwhelming community support
- Date collected supports need and provides the evidence that will be required for future grant awards
- Knowledge base has increased for those who have been active in this process

# Moving forward:

Keep going....

The funds are there....

Gain more consistent and solidified support and enhanced ownership

Must be proactive and not reactive

The funds are there....

Continue with awareness campaign

Continue to solicit support from major stakeholders and pursue grant opportunities on state and federal level – **local and county government must take ownership and view broadband as a basic utility similar to electricity, water and sewer. Strong suggestion to create an office of broadband/cellular connectivity to coordinate the needs of towns and townships within Clinton County**

The funds are there.....