

SOUTH DAKOTA BROADBAND RESOURCE GUIDE



A RESOURCE GUIDE BY HEIDI KOLBECK-URLACHER,
CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS



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RURAL AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA BROADBAND RESOURCE GUIDE

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South Dakota Broadband Resource Guide

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I. INTRODUCTION

Broadband access is essential in allowing rural communities to thrive. It ensures schools and health care services can function effectively, allows businesses to expand and remain competitive, and enables farm and ranch owners to take advantage of emerging technologies.

Yet, an estimated 42 million Americans do not have broadband access, many of them in rural areas.¹ In 2019, South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said that in half of the state’s rural counties, a quarter of residents don’t have adequate internet access, and in some counties that number is as high as 50%.² As of 2021, state officials estimated 135,000 people—or one in six South Dakotans—do not have adequate broadband access.³

The economic impact of reliable broadband access is significant. It is associated with increased job and population growth, higher home values, lower unemployment rates, and higher rates of new business formation.⁴ Rural areas, which are disproportionately likely to lack broadband access, may be missing out on these valuable benefits.⁵

In late 2021, we surveyed South Dakotans to learn more about their broadband experiences. We wanted to hear directly from residents about what broadband is like in their communities, how they are using the internet to meet the needs of their daily lives, and how they rate their own digital literacy skills.

1 Busby, John, et al. “BroadbandNow Estimates Availability for all 50 States; Confirms that More than 42 Million Americans Do Not Have Access to Broadband.” BroadbandNow, May 5, 2021, broadbandnow.com/research/fcc-broadband-overreporting-by-state. Accessed March 2022.

2 “Broadband in South Dakota.” South Dakota Governor’s Office of Economic Development, May 2019, sdgoed.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/State-Broadband-Plan.pdf. Accessed March 2022.

3 “Connecting South Dakota.” South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, governor.sd.gov/priorities/broadband.aspx. Accessed March 2022.

4 Campbell, Sophia, et al. “The benefits and costs of broadband expansion.” Brookings, Nov. 9, 2021, brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2021/08/18/the-benefits-and-costs-of-broadband-expansion. Accessed March 2022.

5 Ibid.



Our 2021 survey indicated many rural areas in South Dakota are lacking adequate broadband access. This results in many challenges, including blocking farmers and ranchers from taking advantage of new, emerging technologies. | Photo by Wyatt Fraas

The responses indicated that many South Dakotans are still experiencing challenges with broadband access. For example, when asked if their current broadband meets their needs, only 33% of survey respondents said yes.

This resource guide is intended to provide communities with information about the current state of broadband in South Dakota, uplift the voices and experiences of residents facing challenges related to access, and share resources and tools that will empower leaders to address broadband challenges in their communities.

First, we will take a look at the current state of broadband access in South Dakota. Then, we’ll share the results of our survey, highlighting the needs expressed by respondents and letting them share experiences in their own words. Lastly, we will focus on steps communities can take to improve equitable access to broadband service, as well as increase the critical digital literacy skills needed by residents to participate in today’s digital world.

Broadband provides numerous economic and social benefits to South Dakotans, and investments in this critical infrastructure will help ensure rural communities continue to be great places to live and work.

II. BROADBAND IN SOUTH DAKOTA

As of May 2022, South Dakota ranked 22nd in the nation for internet coverage, speed, and availability, and 35th in access to 100 Mbps broadband.⁶

An estimated one in six state residents lack adequate broadband.⁷ In addition, the American Jobs Plan from the White House says:

- 13% of South Dakotans live in areas where, by one definition, there is no broadband infrastructure providing minimally acceptable speeds.
- 48% of residents live in areas where there is only one internet provider.
- 15% of South Dakota households have no internet subscription.⁸

Improving these statistics is critical to ensuring the state, and in particular rural communities, can keep pace with the expectations of the modern world.

In addition to being crucial for business development, education, and health care, broadband access is often a major consideration for people looking to relocate. South Dakota is experiencing an influx of newcomers, many of whom depend on reliable internet for work. In 2021, the United Van Lines Annual National Movers Study ranked South Dakota as the No. 2 state for inbound migration, noting a nationwide trend of Americans moving to lower-density areas to be closer to family.⁹

High-speed broadband access allows communities to be attractive, viable options for people looking to relocate or return to rural South Dakota.

To gain a deeper perspective on the present state of broadband access in South Dakota and the needs of residents, the next two sections will look at current coverage, including both the speed and type

6 “South Dakota Internet Coverage and Availability in 2022.” BroadbandNow, broadbandnow.com/South-Dakota. Accessed May 2022.

7 “Connecting South Dakota.” South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, governor.sd.gov/priorities/broadband.aspx. Accessed March 2022.

8 “American Jobs Plan, The Need for Action in South Dakota.” The White House, whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AJP-State-Fact-Sheet-SD.pdf. Accessed March 2022.

9 “Annual 2021 United Van Lines National Movers Study.” United Van Lines, Jan. 3, 2022, unitedvanlines.com/newsroom/movers-study-2021. Accessed March 2022.

of broadband available, then feedback provided by respondents of our survey.

A. BROADBAND COVERAGE MAPS

Broadband internet is defined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as an internet connection with minimum speeds of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. However, as internet use has evolved to include more complex tasks, bandwidth requirements have increased. In July 2021, the U.S. Government Accountability Office stated that the FCC’s current minimum benchmark speeds are likely too slow to meet many small business needs and recommended the FCC analyze the benchmark.¹⁰

The South Dakota Governor’s Office of Economic Development (GOED), has set a higher benchmark for its definition of high-speed internet. GOED’s ConnectSD broadband grant program prioritizes funding broadband infrastructure projects that will serve areas without access to terrestrial broadband speeds of 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload.

GOED maintains an interactive broadband map identifying speed, type, and availability. It also indicates where recent broadband infrastructure investments have been made. Find the interactive map at: sdbit.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=ccd16c24bf804c1fa67d50373d100464

See Figure 1 on page 3 for internet providers’ maximum advertised broadband speeds in South Dakota. Note that advertised speeds do not always reflect actual speeds delivered, as carriers are not required to report actual speeds, which can lead to services being overstated.¹¹ As of March 2022, areas in orange, blue, and red do not have providers with maximum advertised speeds meeting the state’s desired download speed of 100 Mbps.¹²

10 “Broadband: FCC Should Analyze Small Business Speed Needs.” U.S. Government Accountability Office, July 8, 2021, gao.gov/products/gao-21-494. Accessed March 2022.

11 “Broadband in South Dakota.” South Dakota Governor’s Office of Economic Development, May 2019, sdgoed.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/State-Broadband-Plan.pdf. Accessed March 2022.

12 “SD Broadband.” South Dakota Bureau of Information & Telecommunications, sdbit.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=ccd16c24bf804c1fa67d50373d100464. Accessed March 2022.

FIGURE 1. INTERNET PROVIDERS' MAXIMUM ADVERTISED BROADBAND SPEEDS IN SOUTH DAKOTA

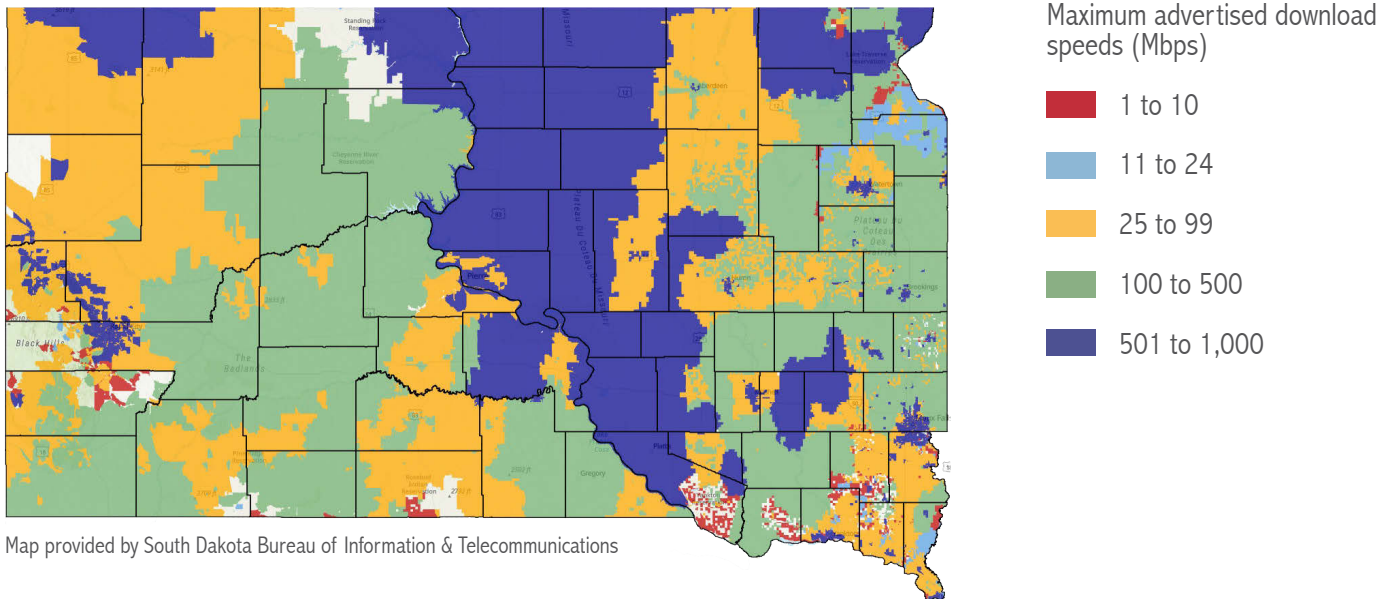
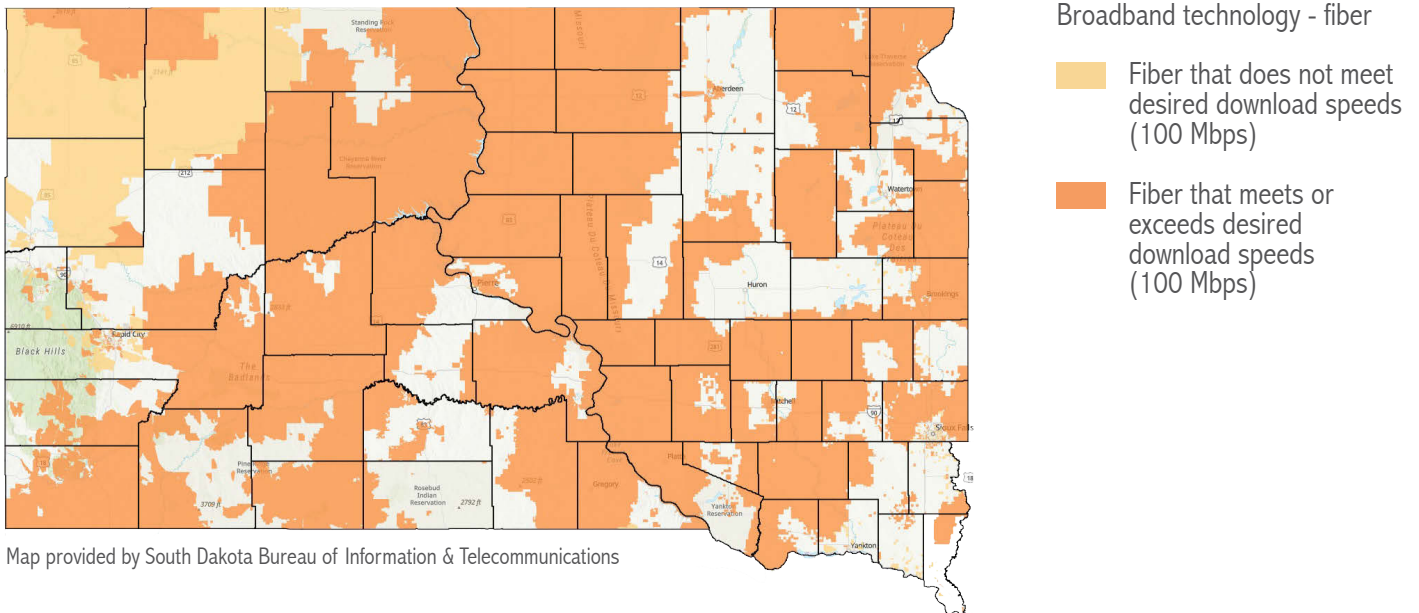


FIGURE 2: AVAILABILITY OF FIBER OPTIC BROADBAND IN SOUTH DAKOTA



Fiber optic broadband technology is generally considered the gold standard, offering the fastest speeds and most durable infrastructure. Figure 2, current as of March 2022, reflects the availability of fiber optic broadband in South Dakota. Areas in dark orange are served by a fiber connection that meets or exceeds the state's desired download

speeds of 100 Mbps. Areas in light orange are served by fiber optic broadband that does not meet the desired download speed of 100 Mbps. Unshaded areas are not served by fiber optic broadband.¹³

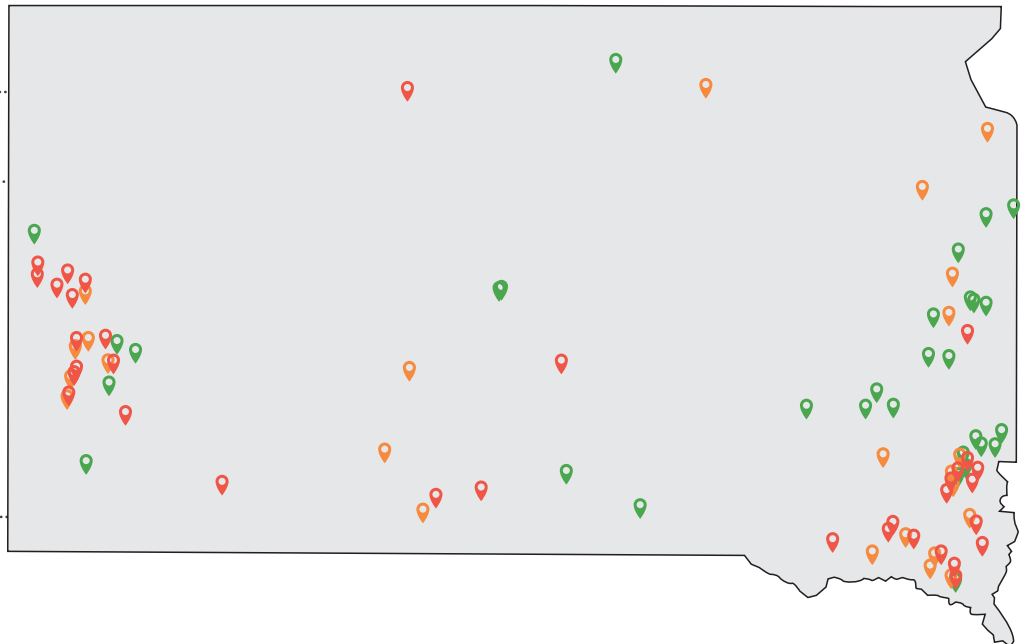
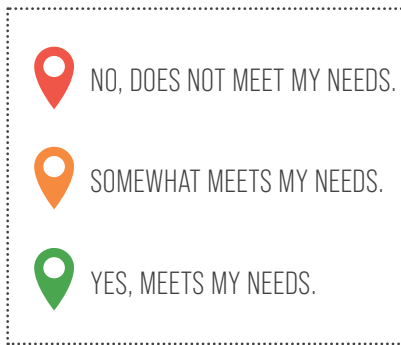
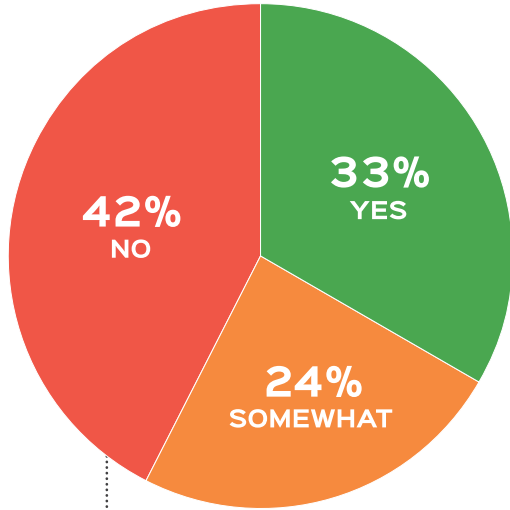
13 Ibid.

B. SOUTH DAKOTA BROADBAND SURVEY

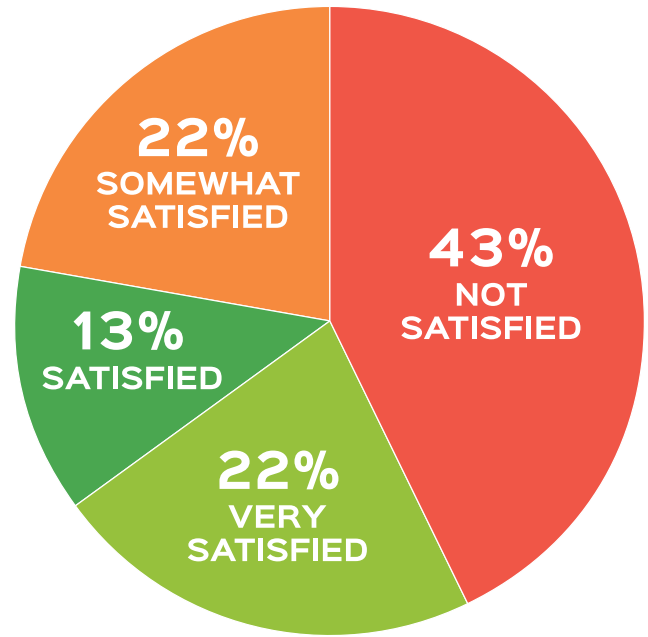
In late 2021, Center for Rural Affairs conducted a survey of 100 South Dakotans to learn more about their experiences with broadband access, usage, and digital literacy. This outreach allowed us to hear firsthand from residents and gain a better understanding of the challenges many still face and the needs they have.

1. BROADBAND ACCESS AND USAGE

DOES YOUR CURRENT BROADBAND MEET YOUR NEEDS?



ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH YOUR BROADBAND ACCESS AND USAGE?

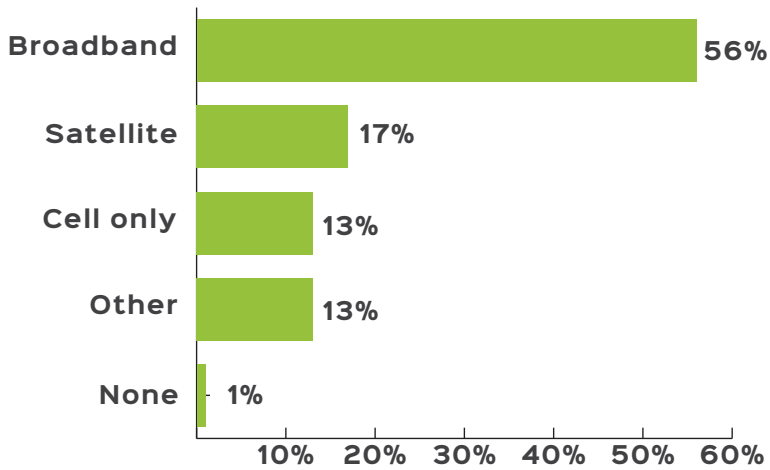


THE TOP THREE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR RESPONDENTS WERE:



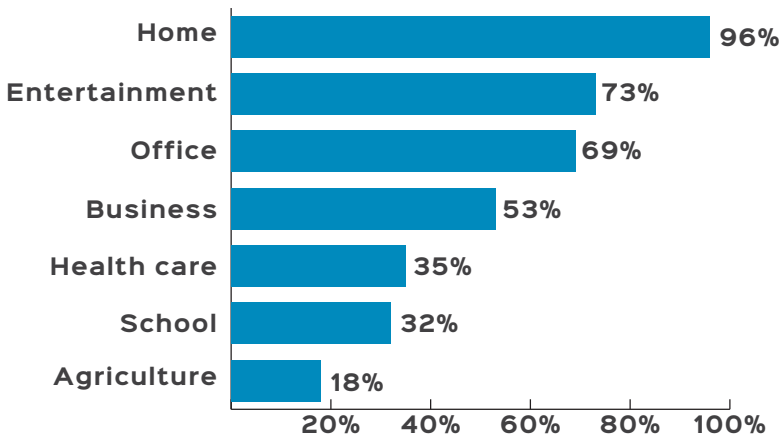
- 1 FASTER INTERNET SPEEDS
- 2 LOWER COST OF INTERNET SERVICE
- 3 MORE RELIABLE INTERNET SERVICE

WHAT TYPE OF INTERNET DO YOU HAVE?



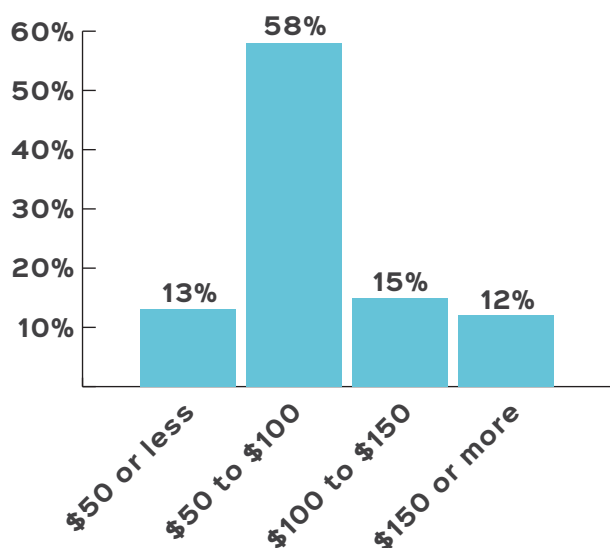
25% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY USE THEIR CELL PHONES FOR THEIR PRIMARY INTERNET SOURCE

WHAT DO YOU USE THE INTERNET FOR?



NEARLY 70% OF RESPONDENTS USE THEIR BROADBAND FOR OFFICE USE, AND MORE THAN HALF USE IT FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES. A THIRD OF RESPONDENTS USE THEIR BROADBAND CONNECTION FOR HEALTH CARE.

COST OF INTERNET PER MONTH



MORE THAN 30% OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAID THEIR CURRENT INTERNET DID NOT MEET THEIR NEEDS PAY FROM \$100 TO MORE THAN \$150 FOR THEIR INTERNET SERVICE.



Vermillion, South Dakota, is one of many locations with limited broadband providers. Digital literacy skills are needed to successfully navigate and maximize our evolving digital world. | Photo by Rhea Landholm

2. DIGITAL LITERACY

The Center’s broadband survey asked respondents to rank their experience with a range of skills related to digital literacy. Digital literacy is defined as “the skills associated with using technology to enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information; and developing digital citizenship and the responsible use of technology.”¹⁴ These are the critical skills people need to successfully navigate and maximize the digital tools available to them, many of which have become necessary to function in the world today.

A majority of survey respondents ranked themselves as expert or comfortable with these digital skills:

- Using email
- Using Google or Word documents
- Setting up computer equipment
- Keeping their information safe and secure
- Using online banking

14 “Chapter 72 - Museum and Library Services, Subchapter 1 - General Provisions, §9101. General definitions.” Office of the Law Revisions Counsel, United States Code, Dec. 22, 2010, uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title20/chapter72&edition=prelim. Accessed March 2022.

- Using digital apps or platforms for school
- Using social media
- Doing video conferencing
- Shopping online

Highest-ranked skills respondents said they would like to learn were:

- Website or blog construction and management
- Troubleshooting issues with their computer/software
- Doing virtual health care visits

Of respondents who said they use or would like to use digital technology in agriculture, 27% rated themselves as expert or comfortable using the technology.

- Increasing rural broadband access could achieve an estimated 3% increase in farm profits across the U.S.¹⁵

15 Marré, Alexander. “Community Scope, Bringing Broadband to Rural America,” Vol. 8, Issue 1. Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, 2020, richmondfed.org/-/media/richmondfedorg/publications/community_development/community_scope/2020/community_scope_2020_no1.pdf. Accessed March 2022.

C. SOUTH DAKOTANS SPEAK ON RURAL BROADBAND ACCESS

1. SURVEY QUOTES

“My internet through the underground phone line is fine when it works but has outages periodically. I get cell service only from my internet WiFi so it only works close to my house and relies on the internet service. I have to pay for a landline for safety reasons, since I don’t want to be without any way to call 911.”

-RESPONDENT NEAR HERMOSA, SD

“Both our WiFi and cell service is very unreliable and slow.”

-RESPONDENT NEAR WHITEWOOD, SD

“We’ve got fiber optic running 2 miles from our community. We are 8 miles from Sturgis and 12 from Deadwood. I called the internet provider and they told me it’s too expensive to run fiber optic to our community.”

-RESPONDENT NEAR STURGIS, SD

“We live 5 miles from town, and we still don’t have any broadband internet access. Hard to work from home with internet that’s not stable or high speed.”

-RESPONDENT NEAR DAVIS, SD

“We are finally getting a second provider in our community.”

-RESPONDENT IN VERMILLION, SD

“We need high speed so we can use it for a home-based business.”

-RESPONDENT NEAR OKATON, SD

“I need to be able to stream video like urban dwellers can.”

-RESPONDENT NEAR IRENE, SD

“The internet access in the community is one provider. We know everyone at the company by name we have called with issues so often. You can expect a minimum of two times a day the internet will not work. They say our internet is a much faster speed than it tests.”

-RESPONDENT FROM RURAL MOODY COUNTY, SD

2. SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEWS



**Doug Riediger,
Wakonda, SD**

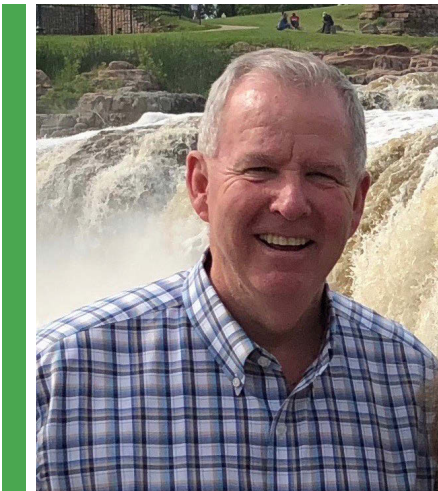
“

We live between Beresford, Vermillion, and Yankton and are 17 miles from any town. Our cell broadcasts our internet and the signal is not good. We've tried other options and they are not good quality either and cost prohibitive. Our lack of broadband is a major problem. We run out of data and our speed slows down so that we have severe buffering issues. We can't get our work done. We have children in high school and a daughter in college who is taking over the farm. They have to drive to town to the library to use the internet. We have a family member who works for Google and wanted to move back here but she can't because she needs reliable internet 24/7. I raise cattle and crops and do marketing. We rely on remote cameras and remote switches for many farm operations, such as lights, heaters, pens, and feeders. I also have to complete paperwork for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and U.S. Department

of Agriculture (USDA) and I can't get it done at home. I have to download all my emails when I'm in town so I can read them later. I need speeds that can support school and my business.

People living in rural areas aren't using the internet to play video games, this is our life.

”



**Robert Lowrey,
Hill City, SD**

“

I'm the chairman of the Hill City Economic Development Corporation. Being in the Black Hills, we have a very busy tourist season, but our local cell phone and internet service can't accommodate the traffic. **In talking to businesses up and down Main Street, lack of broadband and cell service is absolutely the number one issue.** When developers

look to come here the very first question we are asked is, 'What can you do about internet and cell service?' We have a saw mill a mile out of town that closed down last year and we've been working to find a business to put in, but when they ask about internet we can only say we're working on it and we want to have it fixed. It's going to be really difficult to attract a business that relies in any way on the internet and almost every business does these days.

”





**Richard Muller,
Westreville, SD**

“ I’m a retired professor at the University of South Dakota Beacom School of Business. I built my house in the country 45 years ago and had to fight to get a phone line at that point. From 2017 to 2019, I taught online but had to go somewhere else to get enough bandwidth

to teach my classes. I’ve got satellite internet now and have enough bandwidth for Zoom, but not enough for streaming beyond that. There is fiber optic a half mile from my house but I don’t have access.

”

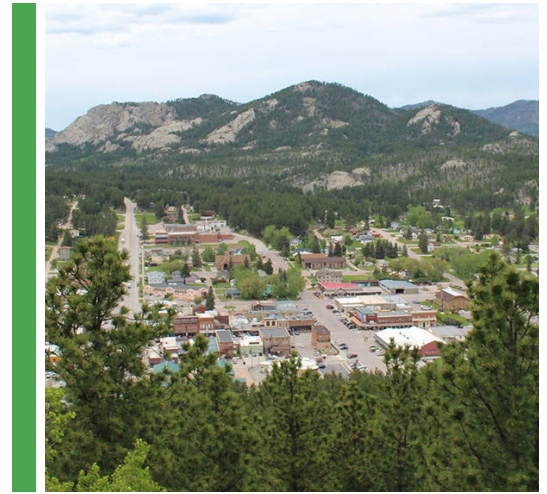


**David Plume,
Manderson, SD**

“ I live 5 miles outside of Manderson, SD. I have broadband access but my computer speeds are so slow that I have to use the mobile data on my phone instead. My eyesight isn’t what it used to be so looking at a small screen is very difficult for me. I can’t download most things

and have to print from my phone. My family runs a retail store in Manderson and I do work for them from home. I am also involved in agriculture and work as a consultant. My lack of broadband access is very frustrating. We only have one broadband provider in the area and they lowered my bill because they acknowledged they can’t improve my connection.

”



**Jeff,
Custer, SD**

“ We’ve lived in cities all of our lives and moving to Custer has led us to understand some of the challenges rural people face. We have to use cell data for everything. There is fiber optic half a mile away at the end of our driveway.

I’ve called the local internet provider and they said to call every spring for the next seven years and we’ll eventually get it built to you. I need internet access for many things. I have a child who lives overseas and I need to communicate with them. I live an hour from a large health care provider and can’t do telehealth without a connection. I have security cameras for safety and for our animals—we need bandwidth to run those.

”



III. COMMUNITY RESOURCES

As South Dakotans look for answers, communities have several resources at their disposal. Engaging with residents through outreach will allow community leaders to identify the types of needs in their community and tailor their approaches. Challenges with broadband can be related to factors including lack of infrastructure, coverage gaps, affordability, and lack of the necessary digital skills to utilize technology. Through engagement and collaboration, leaders can take steps to help ensure needs are heard and addressed.

A. IDENTIFYING AND COMMUNICATING ABOUT BROADBAND COVERAGE GAPS

Accurately identifying where broadband gaps exist is a challenge in rural areas. Even neighbors living on the same road may find that their broadband access differs. The FCC maintains data on broadband availability through its Form 477 census block maps. However, the FCC has acknowledged these maps likely overstate broadband coverage and the metrics become less accurate in places where census blocks are larger, such as rural areas.¹⁶

Because of this discrepancy, input from residents who self-report their lack of access or poor quality service is critical in identifying the true needs of all residents. In fact, many states have developed crowdsourcing initiatives to gather more accurate local data.

The following is a list of actions which can be taken to help identify gaps in broadband coverage and communicate that gap with providers or officials.

Encourage residents to:

1. TAKE A BROADBAND SPEED TEST

Identifying actual, rather than reported, internet speed is important to accurately convey broadband needs within a community. Once residents have a clearer picture of their level of connectivity, they can use this information to self-report their

needs through the appropriate channels. Many speed tests are available, including:

- sdncommunications.speedtestcustom.com
- speedtest.net
- fcc.gov/BroadbandData/consumers#speed-test

2. COMMUNICATE WITH LOCAL INTERNET PROVIDERS

Direct outreach and communication with local internet providers is key in helping gain a clear understanding of individual needs within their service areas. Starting a conversation at the local level is always a good first step toward getting needs addressed.

- Identifying which local internet providers service to a specific address can be done through the FCC’s interactive map, found at broadbandmap.fcc.gov.

3. REPORT POOR INTERNET TO THE CONNECTSD INITIATIVE

In February 2022, the State of South Dakota launched a new online citizen portal allowing residents to access numerous state services online. This includes the ability to self-report internet issues to the state broadband program. Residents are asked to complete a speed test prior to submitting their reports.

- Find the ConnectSD Report Poor Internet Form at sd.gov and type “poor internet” in the search bar.

4. REPORT POOR INTERNET TO THE FCC

In 2021, the FCC announced it will begin collecting first-hand accounts on broadband availability and service quality. As part of the effort, the commission developed an online form where people can share their broadband experiences. This crowdsourcing initiative is being done as the FCC works to improve the accuracy of its broadband availability data and census block maps.¹⁷

- Make sure the FCC is aware of the actual needs in your location by reporting your poor internet to the FCC at consumercomplaints.fcc.gov.

16 “2020 Broadband Development Report.” Federal Communications Commission, April 24, 2020, docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-20-50A1.pdf. Accessed March 2022.

17 “FCC Announces New Outreach to Collect Consumer Broadband Availability Experiences.” Federal Communications Commission, March 22, 2021, docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-370978A1.pdf. Accessed March 2022.

B. PROVIDING RESOURCES ON BROADBAND COST ASSISTANCE

The cost of internet service can be prohibitive for many people. According to national data from the Pew Research Center, 45% of non-broadband users say they do not have a subscription because it is too expensive, and 4 in 10 say the cost of a computer is too expensive.¹⁸

In our own survey of South Dakotans, 52% of respondents said lower cost of internet services was in the top three most important broadband issues. Considering that many residents live in areas where there is only one internet provider, some may not have access to a less costly alternative, making an internet subscription out of reach.

Communities should ensure residents are aware of programs that help with the cost of internet services.

 Share information with residents about:

1. SOUTH DAKOTA LIFELINE PROGRAM

The South Dakota Lifeline Program offers a monthly discount of \$9.25 on wired or wireless phone or broadband service. Residents of Tribal lands are eligible to save \$34.24 on their monthly service, and the Tribal Link Up program provides a one-time discount for the connection or activation of a new phone. Lifeline, Tribal Lifeline, and Tribal Link Up are administered by Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs), such as phone companies, and applications must be submitted directly to the company.

Lifeline programs have eligibility requirements. To qualify, households must have a family member participating in any of the following programs:

- [Medicaid](https://puc.sd.gov/lifeline)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

18 Perrin, Andrew. "Mobile Technology and Home Broadband 2021." Pew Research Center, June 3, 2021, [pewresearch.org/internet/2021/06/03/mobile-technology-and-home-broadband-2021](https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/06/03/mobile-technology-and-home-broadband-2021). Accessed March 2022.

- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8)
- Have a household income no more than 135% of the federal poverty guidelines
- Participation in Tribal assistance programs such as Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) General Assistance, Head Start, Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

→ For more information about the Lifeline program, visit puc.sd.gov/lifeline. Find Tribal Lifeline and Tribal Link Up programs at puc.sd.gov/lifeline/triballifeline.aspx

→ To find a list of South Dakota companies providing Lifeline, Tribal Lifeline, and Tribal Link Up programs, go to puc.sd.gov/lifeline/telephoneco.aspx

2. THE AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (ACP)

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is a federal initiative providing low-income households with a monthly discount on their internet bills. The program, formerly called the Emergency Broadband Benefit, was launched in 2021 as a tool to make broadband more affordable to all households.

However, many households are missing out. South Dakota ranks last in the nation for enrollment in the ACP. **As of December 2021, an estimated 51,000 South Dakota households qualify for the program but only 3,750 households are enrolled.**¹⁹

The ACP provides:

- A monthly discount of \$30 to qualifying households, and \$75 to households on qualifying Tribal lands.
- Up to \$100 toward the purchase of a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet, as long as recipients contribute \$10 or more toward the purchase.

19 Cooper, Tyler, and Jason Shevik. "Emergency Broadband Benefit Recap: 7.1 Million Households Enrolled, Adoption Varies Significantly by State." BroadbandNow, Dec. 16, 2021, broadbandnow.com/internet/emergency-broadband-benefit-report. Accessed March 2022.

To qualify for the ACP benefit, households must meet one of these criteria:

- Approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch/breakfast program in the 2019-20, 2020-21, or 2021-22 school year;
- Income below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines;
- Participation in assistance programs, such as SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, SSI, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit, or Lifeline;
- Receive a Federal Pell Grant in the current award year;
- Meet eligibility requirements for a broadband provider's existing low-income program;
- Participation in Tribal assistance programs such as BIA General Assistance, Head Start, Tribal TANF, and Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

→ To learn more about or apply for the ACP go to acpbenefit.org.

It is possible to receive both Lifeline and Affordable Connectivity Program benefits. For details, visit fcc.gov/affordable-connectivity-program-consumer-faq.

C. ATTRACTING INVESTMENT IN BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Rural areas are particularly vulnerable to poor broadband access due to the cost of infrastructure buildout. However, investing in South Dakota's broadband infrastructure has become a priority for state government. In 2021 and 2022, the Legislature allocated significant funds toward expanding rural broadband infrastructure.

In 2021, the state appropriated \$75 million in general funds and \$25 million in federal coronavirus relief funds toward rural broadband expansion grants. In 2022, state legislators passed Senate Bill 55, which appropriated \$50 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to broad-

band expansion.²⁰ This money will allow the state to recover and replace some of the general funds appropriated for broadband in 2021. The GOED notes the state intends to use half of these ARPA funds as match dollars required for broadband funding the state will receive through the recently passed federal infrastructure bill.

Rural communities must know a significant amount of money will be available for broadband buildout in the near future, and they should begin planning now to take advantage of these funding opportunities.

Community leaders and advocates can take initiative to help engage in efforts to bring broadband infrastructure development to their communities. By helping identify local broadband needs and bring stakeholders together, communities may be able to accelerate efforts to expand broadband in their communities.

Take initiative by:

1. CREATING A COMMUNITY TASK FORCE

A community broadband task force can engage in efforts to organize, plan, prepare, and seek funding for investments in broadband infrastructure. Questions a broadband task force may seek to address include:

- Who are the providers and potential providers in the community?
- Do local electric co-ops provide service? Could they?
- Who lacks access?
- Where are connectivity gaps?
- What type of technology would suit the needs of the people and the terrain?
- What do users need and want?
- Where can funding come from?
- What are the potential ownership structures and which fit?

²⁰ "Senate Bill 55." South Dakota Legislature, Legislative Research Council, Jan. 11, 2022, sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/23068. Accessed March 2022.

FIGURE 3. THE ISLAND INSTITUTE'S COMMUNITY-DRIVEN BROADBAND PROCESS



Community representatives can contact providers and simply ask what they need to build out their infrastructure in the area. One item an internet service provider may request is a letter of support from stakeholders, including businesses and institutions. Letters of support can bolster applications for funding and may be required in some cases.²¹

The Island Institute, a Maine-based nonprofit, has created a step-by-step guide to help communities in their efforts. The resource details successful

21 Malone, Molly. "Access Granted: Rural Broadband Options, Obstacles, and Solutions." Center for Rural Affairs, January 2022, cfra.org/publications/access-granted. Accessed March 2022.

community-driven efforts as well as provides templates and worksheets for communities to use in their own process. See Figure 3.²²

→ Find The Island Institute's Community-Driven Broadband Guide at islandinstitute.org/priorities/resilient-economies/broadband.

22 "Broadband." Island Institute, islandinstitute.org/priorities/resilient-economies/broadband. Accessed March 2022.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE CONNECTSD BROADBAND GRANT PROGRAM

ConnectSD is a broadband infrastructure grants program, a public-private partnership administered by the GOED. Funding for this program is provided through appropriations of both state and federal dollars. Grants are offered through a match program, meaning applicants will provide part of the financial investment for the project and the grant will cover the other portion. Applicants are encouraged to provide 50% of the funding. Priority is given to broadband projects that will serve any location not currently offering broadband speeds at or above 100 mbps download/20 mbps upload.²³

Since its inception in 2019, the ConnectSD program has awarded more than \$70 million in funding for broadband infrastructure development over the course of four grant cycles. State and federal investments in broadband expansion have significantly increased in the past several years, and in 2021, broadband was extended to 13,191 locations, a 229% increase in projects awarded.²⁴ Find reports on awards at sdgoed.com/public-records/connectsd.

→ View the grant application requirements for the ConnectSD program at sdgoed.com/partners/connectsd/.

→ Subscribe to the ConnectSD Listserv to receive updates on the program and notifications of application periods at subscribepage.com/connectsd.

D. ENHANCING DIGITAL LITERACY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Technology is playing a larger role in our lives than ever before, and this trend will increase. Without adequate digital literacy skills, people are unable to search for jobs online; use technology for their jobs or work online; access many financial, government, or other services online; complete purchases online; participate in online education; or access many other needed resources.

23 “South Dakota Senate Bill 34.” Legiscan, South Dakota Legislature, March 29, 2021, legiscan.com/SD/text/SB34/id/2326462. Accessed March 2022.

24 Governor’s Office of Economic Development 2021 Connect South Dakota Stats handout, provided by Mike Waldner, March 2022.

Lack of digital skills can have a significant impact on employment. According to a report by the National Skills Coalition in 2020, one in three workers lack the foundational digital skills necessary for most occupations in the U.S.²⁵ As of June 2021, 15,978 South Dakotans were unemployed, which means an estimated 5,273 of those lacked foundational digital skills required for more than 74% of open jobs.²⁶

Expansion of digital literacy in rural areas is gaining national attention. In February 2022, the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) announced it had received a \$10 million grant from Google.org to create a National Digital Navigator Corps, focused on Tribal and rural communities. The project will use NDIA’s “Digital Navigators” model, which provides one-on-one technology training and community outreach to connect people to the internet, appropriate technological devices, and training.²⁷

 **Create opportunities for residents to learn digital skills by:**

1. USING THE DIGITAL NAVIGATOR MODEL

NDIA’s Digital Navigator Model is easily replicated and is meant to be tailored to the needs of individuals and communities. NDIA provides the framework for free and encourages community organizations such as libraries, schools, or other groups to use and adapt it to fit their needs.

→ Learn more about the Digital Navigator Model and access free resources at: digitalinclusion.org/digital-navigator-model.

25 Bergson-Shilcock, Amanda. “The New Landscape of Digital Literacy.” National Skills Coalition, May 2020, nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/05-20-2020-NSC-New-Landscape-of-Digital-Literacy.pdf. Accessed March 2022.

26 “The digital opportunity gap in South Dakota.” National Digital Inclusion Alliance, National Skills Coalition, July 7, 2021, state-scorecard.digitalinclusion.org/scorecard/by_state/SD. Accessed March 2022.

27 Scorse, Yvette. “NDIA Announces \$10 Million Grant from Google.org to Remove Digital Divide Roadblocks for Rural & Tribal Communities.” National Digital Inclusion Alliance, Feb. 15, 2022, digitalinclusion.org/blog/2022/02/15/ndia-announces-10-million-grant-from-google-org-to-remove-digital-divide-roadblocks-for-rural-tribal-communities. Accessed March 2022.

2. ALERTING LOCAL INTERNET PROVIDERS ABOUT COMMUNITY NEEDS

Internet providers often host community classes to help increase their customers' digital skills, allowing residents to take full advantage of the technology available to them. Communicating with local providers will allow them to tailor trainings to meet specific needs.

3. CREATING OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE SPECIALIZED DIGITAL SKILLS

Although many residents have an understanding of basic digital skills such as email and social media, the opportunity exists to increase more specialized digital skills, such as using accounting software, building websites, and using technology in agriculture. These specialized skills are often what is needed for rural entrepreneurs to start or expand their businesses, or for farmers to become more efficient in their agricultural operations. Consider possible partners that may be able to offer these types of community classes.

E. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Many resources and tools are available to empower community leaders to take steps to improve broadband access in their communities. The following is a list of additional toolkits which may be helpful.

→ **The Digital Inclusion Startup Manual**

Step-by-step guidance for communities wanting to increase digital literacy and use of technology, including direction for hosting digital literacy trainings. startup.digitalinclusion.org/index.html

→ **NDIA Digital Inclusion Coalition Guidebook**

Designed to help communities create and sustain community-led coalitions to increase digital equity. digitalinclusion.org/download/17110

→ **National Skills Coalition Report: The New Landscape of Digital Literacy**

How workers' uneven digital skills affect economic mobility and business competitiveness, and what policymakers can do about it. nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/05-20-2020-NSC-New-Landscape-of-Digital-Literacy.pdf

→ **Digital U.S. Report: Building a Digitally Resilient Workforce: Creating On-Ramps to Opportunity**

Addressing persistent workforce challenges by creating pathways for workers to advance digital skills. digitalus.org/download

About the Center for Rural Affairs

Established in 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to establish strong rural communities, social and economic justice, environmental stewardship, and genuine opportunity for all while engaging people in decisions that affect the quality of their lives and the future of their communities.