

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Readying rural communities to capture the benefits of digitalization

AT A GLANCE

The Digital Economy Program organized a one-day workshop for stakeholders across Idaho to discuss ways to improve digital access in rural areas and prepare for expanding broadband statewide.

The Situation

Broadband expansion in Idaho is receiving federal and state funding, which will provide internet access to previously unserved and underserved areas. The expansion will benefit rural communities both socially and economically. To ensure that everyone benefits equitably, and that the unique needs of Idaho's rural communities are met, state agencies have provided valuable resources and tools. However, it is essential that individuals and community leaders are informed about the state and federal programs supporting broadband expansion and the criteria for accessing them. This information will enable them to take action to access these resources and funding. Additionally, partnerships and collaborations with local businesses, organizations and government agencies are necessary to ensure that the benefits of broadband expansion are distributed effectively, and that Idahoans are digitally prepared to participate in our growing digital economy.

Our Response

The Digital Economy Program (DEP) acknowledged the importance of informing community leaders about the state and federal programs that support broadband expansion, as well as the criteria needed to access



University of Idaho Extension and state partners delivering workshop content to participants in Sun Valley, Idaho.

them. The Digital Economy Program also recognizes the importance of a coalition of statewide entities invested in ensuring that rural communities have access to the tools and resources necessary to prepare communities and individuals for the expansion of broadband in Idaho.

In April 2023, the Digital Economy Program hosted a one-day workshop in partnership with the Idaho Department of Commerce's State Broadband Office, the Idaho Commission for Libraries, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. The Ready to Capture the Benefits of Digitalization workshop invited stakeholders from Idaho's rural communities to access tools and resources intended to address digital access as part of

local economic development. 69 participants attended from 36 agencies throughout Idaho to discuss the five elements of digital inclusion outlined by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, obstacles to broadband access and adoption, and forming local broadband action teams to address local needs.

Program Outcomes

Of the 69 who attended the workshop, 31 attendees completed the follow-up survey and indicated the information shared met audience needs (15 strongly agreed, 15 agreed and one respondent was neutral). Workshop participants found the information and presentation valuable, citing the opportunity to network with regional stakeholders and learn about statewide digital access resources as highlights of the day. Several attendees said they'd like to see the workshop brought to locations in the northern and eastern parts of the state to make it more accessible to those who cannot travel.

During the six-hour workshop, rural community stakeholders had the opportunity to hear from broadband and digital equity funding agencies, network with internet service providers and state agencies providing access to underserved communities and begin conversations that will spark local action.

Participants were provided with a list of [resources](#) and invited to use the Digital Economy Program staff as a connection point for continuing their work on digital access and furthering connections they made during the workshop.

The Future

Idaho's rural communities will have access to millions of dollars in grant funding over the next several months, intended to address the expansion of broadband infrastructure and digital access in the state of Idaho. Rural communities having participated in local digital access organizing will have a marked advantage in constructing competitive applications for available funding to meet the needs of their citizens. University of Idaho Extension's Digital Economy Program is dedicated to enhancing digital access for Idahoans through various learning opportunities. These include basic digital skills, remote work retraining, and assistance for entrepreneurs and business owners to expand their sales through online platforms. For more information, please visit www.uidaho.edu/digital-economy.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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