

# Hampton Roads Community Action Program Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

## 1 Executive Summary

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*Requirement: The region should provide a clear and concise summary of the Digital Opportunity Plan. The Executive Summary should restate the purpose and summarize the key points of the Digital Opportunity Plan.*

The Hampton Roads Community Action Program (HRCAP), a non-profit community action agency with decades of experience creating unique partnerships to solve unusual problems, offers the following Regional Digital Opportunity Plan for southeastern Virginia, including the cities of Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach, as well as Isle of Wight County. The purpose of this plan is to improve access to digital resources for all Hampton Roads Virginians. HRCAP will increase digital access for underserved and at-risk populations residing in communities with limited connectivity to broadband services. For more than 50+ years, the agency has served, senior citizens, veterans, the disabled, and other marginalized groups, with programs and services that have improved their lives through programs that have assisted with education, employment, housing, health and other needs. Our goal, through this Regional Plan, is to ensure that all of these populations, and all residents of the region has access to safe, reliable and affordable internet.

While HRCAP recognizes the vital importance of infrastructure projects in bringing broadband level internet to the homes of all Virginians, a majority of our plan is focused on affordability, education awareness, and wireless connectivity. For most of our services area, fiber is underground but only accessible to government facilities and contractors and not

residential neighborhoods. The primary barrier to internet access is both a lack of knowledge and a lack of funding on the part of the residents. This doesn't mean that there are not physical gaps in the availability of services, there are, especially in the more rural areas of Chesapeake, Suffolk and Isle of Wight County, just that more most of Hampton Roads it is poverty and ignorance that creates the greatest barriers.

To overcome these barriers HRCAP proposes an outreach effort that will inform residents of the digital resources available to them through both private and public sector organizations. HRCAP also proposes to conduct digital literacy education activities that will teach participants how to use computers, tablets, phones and upgrade home routers along with browsing the internet safely and effectively. Finally, in the interest of creating equity for low-income residents, HRCAP proposes to create new subsidies that will allow more families to access digital resources with fewer restrictions that allow more frequent access to new equipment and faster speeds when available. Additional funding would ensure that residents have access to quality training, reliable equipment, and faster internet connections, giving them better opportunities to access the resources they need to find employment, participate in educational and recreational activities, and access financial services and health care whenever needed regardless of location.

## 2 Introduction and Vision for Digital Opportunity

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*Plan requirement: A stated regional vision for digital equity.*

The regional vision for digital equity is that all residents living in Hampton Roads are provided education and given access to affordable in-home and/or wireless broadband connectivity services. Hampton Roads Community Action Program (HRCAP) will deliver services that align with this vision by creating tasks associated with this Regional Digital Opportunity Plan (RDOP) for the southeastern region of Virginia. This region contains highly urbanized areas such as the cities of Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach as well as some rural areas in parts of Chesapeake, Suffolk and Isle of Wight County. Due to strong military presence in the region, much of the infrastructure is underground and not accessible to the public. Wireless infrastructure recently has been put in place, but subsidies are not available. The vision is that subsidy would fill this void along with network providers installing more towers, so that more than 100,000 households could be added. The vision also includes serving more than 100,000 households with wireless service. This will include education services, wireless routers, cellular tablets, hotspots, and other internet services in order to meet the growing needs of the community.

The barriers in this region, for many of the populations targeted by the RDOP process, are related to costs, awareness and skill. Many low-income and other at-risk residents cannot afford full access to digital resources. Others are unaware of the services available or of the discounted services they may be eligible to receive. Still others may lack knowledge and skills needed to effectively utilize digital resources. If they access services via smart phone they may still need training to have full digital literacy, such as using basic Office programs such as Word and Excel or using a computer to navigate online.

For HRCAP then, the primary definition of Digital Opportunity involves more than the physical infrastructure necessary to access digital resources, but the financial and educational capacity to make best use of the resources that are available. Our plan is to fill the knowledge gap as well as overcome the financial and technological barriers to full participation.

### 3 Current State of Digital Opportunity: Barriers and Assets

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*Requirement 1. Identify existing resources, programs, and strategies that promote digital equity for each of the covered populations, whether publicly or privately funded in your region. Assist in coordinating interviews with selected representatives of the identified organizations.*

*Requirement 2: Identification of barriers to digital equity faced by Covered Populations in the region.*

*Requirement 3: Please discuss the demographics of your region including, but not limited to, the representation amongst the covered populations in the region.<sup>1</sup>*

A broadband study conducted as part of the Marshall-Ridley Choice Neighborhood project provided some insight into the needs of local low-income residents concerning access to broadband and other digital services. The Choice Neighborhood Initiative (CNI) is a HUD-funded initiative of the City of Newport News and the Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority that will demolish and rebuild housing in the Marshal Ridley neighborhood of the city. However, this is just one neighborhood within our service area, and a more extensive survey of the needs of residents and the resources available will enable HRCAP and our partners to create a comprehensive regional plan to expand broadband access.

There are several companies, both local and national that provide digital access for Hampton Roads residents. The two largest providers of home internet in the region are Cox Communications and Verizon (providing fiber optic connections through their FIOS network and Verizon High Speed Internet through the 5G network). Other service providers include Spectrum and Xfinity. Wireless cellphone providers include Verizon, T-Mobile, Cox, AT&T, Boost Mobile and Xfinity.

The CNI study states the following regarding the two primary service providers. "Two providers offer wireline broadband in the area. Verizon is generally low-speed, lower cost, and Cox is medium-speed, higher cost, except in the areas served by Verizon FiOS. Slow connections are available at \$25 per month. True broadband costs at least \$64 per month. Actual broadband speeds in the MRCN area are substantially slower—and/or the costs are higher—than provider offerings. Reliability and other service characteristics appear to fit consumer

expectations. Mobile internet is an alternative for a minimum of \$50 per month, even though it does not perform consistently and has data caps. Reasonably fast wireline broadband service—Verizon's fiber-based Fios service—costs at least \$105 a month, and reasonably fast mobile is \$150. Price appears to be the major issue for consumers in the area."

Cox Communication, Verizon and Spectrum are all participants in the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program. The Affordable Connectivity Program helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more. The benefit provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. In addition to reduced cost for internet access, eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price. This program reduces barriers to internet access for low-income and other covered population.

Cox Connect2Compete and ConnectAssist: A low-cost internet plan for families with K-12 students. The qualified offer plan is \$9.95/month, and includes a Wi-Fi modem capable of connecting up to 5 devices at once. This offer is restricted to families participating in a government assistance program with at least one K-12 student. Cox ConnectAssist is a \$30/month plan with up to 100mbps download, free Wi-Fi modem rental, and no data cap for 12 months. Households that participate in an income-based government assistance program are eligible for ConnectAssist.

Based on Digital Opportunity Plan Survey responses gathered in the Hampton Roads region, and discussions hosted by HRCAP, it appears that the greatest barrier to digital equity is affordability. Out of 270 respondents, only 9 did not have any internet access at home, and a third of that number cited affordability as the reason. More than half of survey respondents paid between \$50 and \$100 for non-cellular internet access, and of 258 respondents, 57 percent were unwilling to pay more for better internet service, meaning that they probably do not have access to high speed connections. Twenty-four (24) percent of respondents indicated that they experience disruptions in download/upload speed frequently (more than 2x a week). And while most of survey respondents (81%) had not applied for internet accessibility programs such as the FCC

Affordable Connectivity Program or the FCC Lifeline Program, only one-third were even aware of them.

Awareness and the need for education emerged as important topics during the focus group activities hosted by HRCAP. Many in attendance were concerned about more than affordability and access. They were concerned about online safety, and the risk both to personal data and children exposed to the internet. The consensus was that in addition to making online resources more affordable and available we needed to make users safer by educating them about the dangers of navigating the internet. In addition to increasing awareness about online threats, many also indicated that there was a broader educational need among some population for digital literacy classes, particularly the elderly, who have had less exposure to the digital landscape and the disabled, who may require special equipment to access it. This broad need for educational resources is an important component of HRCAP's Regional Opportunity Plan.

US Census Bureau Data obtained from the 2017 - 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data Profile shows that several of the cities served by HRCAP have a significant level of poverty, with between 15.2 percent (Hampton) and 18.7 percent (Norfolk) of residents living below the federal poverty level. Over 31,000 households in Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, and Portsmouth have a household income below \$15,000. Additionally, the percentage of residents under the age of 18 who live in poverty is much higher for all of the cities HRCAP serves, including 28.9 percent of children in Portsmouth, 28.3 percent of the children in Norfolk, 23.2 percent of the children in Hampton, and 22.2 percent of the children in Newport News. These children will be more heavily impacted by the lack of access to broadband services than the adult population. The shift to virtual learning during the COVID crisis has changed how educational intuitions view the learning process. As schools become more dependent on virtual education, the further behind children without access to these resources will fall.

According to data from the 2016 - 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Data Profile for the Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC Metro Area there are 207,174 civilian veterans residing in the Hampton Roads region. Additionally, there are 369,447 residents over the age of 60, 659,773 minority residents, and 219,409 residents with a disability. Additional, 10.6 percent of all people and 7.7 percent of all families live below the federal poverty level. This means that out of a total population of 1,768,956, over 185,000 live in poverty.

## 4 Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

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*Requirement 1: Distribute the survey to your clients and in partnership with local and regional organizations to members of the covered populations. Please provide an overview of your survey distribution efforts in your region, as well as the organizations you collaborated with to distribute the survey. Discuss the extent to which the region distributed the survey across the region, including the level of engagement among covered populations and across the geographic span of the region.*

*Requirement 2: Coordinate and host focus groups with your clientele and representatives of local and regional organizations that work with the covered population.*

*Requirement 3: Coordinate interviews with representatives from A digital opportunity needs assessment, including a comprehensive assessment of the baseline from which the region is working and the region's identification of the barriers to digital opportunity faced generally and by each of the covered populations in the region.*

HRCAP works with a variety of partners across our service area to provide programs and support to low-income and other at-risk populations residing within our service area. These partnerships include municipal agencies from five cities including Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk and Portsmouth. Local school systems work with our Head Start program to provide comprehensive preschool education and supportive services to children under the age of five, and their families. The agency also works with local Human and Social Services Departments, Housing Authorities and other agencies. Other public sector partnerships include state and federal agencies that provide funding and support to a variety of HRCAP programs. Additionally, the agency engages with other non-profit organizations and for profit businesses that support our efforts to promote self-sufficiency and create conditions that reduce the impact of poverty on the clients that we serve.

HRCAP's Regional Digital Opportunity Plan is a product of community feedback, and work done with our partners and local residents that have assisted us in creating a plan that will increase access, improve quality and provide the skills and knowledge residents need to safely



navigate the digital realm. Through these efforts, HRCAP has identified the resources that exist in the region, the gaps in service, and other associated issues that impact the use of the internet.

HRCAP participated in the Digital Opportunity Plan statewide survey by encouraging clients, staff and other residents to participate. Posts were made on the agency social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter (now X), and Instagram. Email campaigns were also created using Constant Contact. These were sent to over 1,500 email addresses in the agency database. Agency staff were also encouraged to complete the survey. Over 260 Hampton Roads residents responded to the survey.

HRCAP also planned three community discussions/ focus groups to discover opinions regarding broadband access and regional digital resources. On July 14<sup>th</sup>, at a regularly scheduled meeting of the HRCAP Whole Family Approach Community Coalition, a group of organizations that provides guidance and support to staff engaged in providing comprehensive services to families enrolled in HRCAP's Two Generation/Whole Family Program, a planned discussion focused on the following questions regarding issues related to broadband and the digital divide:

1. How can technology and internet access assist in connecting youth and families to the services they need?
2. What does affordable internet access mean to you and your customers?
3. What barriers do you think are keeping customers from accessing the internet?
4. What kind of support or programs would help customers connect and get the most benefit from internet access and technology?

Coalition partners include Credle Consulting LLC, Hampton City Public Schools Title 1 Office, United Way of the Virginia Peninsula, United Way of South Hampton Roads, C. Waldo Scott Center for HOPE, Boys and Girls Club, Hampton Department of Youth and Young Adults,

Hampton Department of Human Services, Virginia Peninsula Food Bank, Bon Secours, Alternatives, Inc. Hampton Youth Commission, Peninsula Agency on Aging, Virginia Peninsula Community College, Newport News Department of Human Services, Peninsula YMCA, Hampton Department of Human Services, Hampton Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Virginia Beach Community Development Corporation, Innovage, Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority, JenCare, Virginia Beach Department of Human Services, Connect With A Wish, Hampton/Newport News Community Services Board, Veterans Employment Center, Urban League of Hampton Roads, Hampton Healthy Families, Grove Collaborative Services, Stand Up for Kids, New Vision Youth Services, Inc., Huntington YMCA, Seton Youth Services, New Horizon Regional Education Center, Riverside Health Systems, and Benevolent Family Services.

The conversation that followed revealed that most of those in attendance did not have significant issues in using, accessing and affording internet service, other than the occasional outage and the general high price of internet services (this was more of a complaint than a barrier). There was a consensus on the need to provide internet access to low-income and other at-risk populations, including the elderly, minority groups, veterans, individuals with disabilities, rural residents and incarcerated/recently released individuals. Internet access is vital to modern life in education, employment and even healthcare, and no one should be denied basic access to these services. Other issues emerging from the conversation included safety and the individual's capacity to utilize the digital resources available. News of some massive data breach at a major corporation, bank and even government institutions are reported on a regular basis. How safe is the data that we share online? Most of the participants in the meeting considered this and

important issue with regards to internet access as the risk of data misappropriation, identity theft and other scams seems high. How do we protect ourselves and our personal data?

The issue of digital literacy, the capacity of individuals to correctly utilize the digital resources at their disposal, was also considered an important topic. While a majority (83%) of Hampton Roads region survey respondents have both home internet and cellphone service, and 82 percent use a laptop computer to access the internet, there are likely many residents with limited options, who usually access the internet via phone and cellular service. They may be familiar with using phone-based web browsers, but lack skills when using online tools with a computer, and may not have ever used other software such as Word, Excel or PowerPoint. This lack of digital literacy can be a barrier to further education or employment. So, as much as basic access is needed to fill the digital divide, so is education and training, to ensure that people have the skills to effectively utilize these resources.

HRCAP planned two other discussion groups, one at the Jordan-Newby Anchor Branch Library in Norfolk, VA at 5:30 PM on July 19<sup>th</sup>, and the second at 11:30 AM at the Downing Gross Cultural Arts Center in Newport News on July 20<sup>th</sup>. The event on the 19<sup>th</sup> was abruptly cancelled when the library closed early due to inclement weather. The event on the 20<sup>th</sup> was attended by four people. This discussion focused on many of the same issues as the previous one, affordability and access for low income people, concern over internet security as it related to both the protection of personal data and shielding children from online predators and inappropriate materials, and the knowledge gap that might exist for people who are unfamiliar with computers, smart phones or the internet.

## 5 Implementation

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*Requirement 1: An implementation strategy that is holistic and addresses the barriers to participation in the digital world, including affordability, devices, digital skills, technical support, and digital navigation. The strategy should (a) establish measurable goals, objectives, and proposed core activities to address the needs of covered populations, (b) set out measures ensuring the plan's sustainability and effectiveness across region communities, and (c) adopt mechanisms to ensure that the plan is regularly evaluated and updated;*

*Requirement 2: An explanation of how the implementation strategy addresses gaps in existing region, local, and private efforts to address the barriers identified*

*Requirement 3: A description of how the region intends to accomplish the implementation strategy described above by engaging or partnering with:*

- a. Workforce agencies such as region workforce agencies and region/local workforce boards and workforce organizations;*
- b. labor organizations and community-based organizations; and*
- c. Institutions of higher learning, including but not limited to four-year colleges and universities, community colleges, education and training providers, and educational service Agencies;*

*Requirement 4: A timeline for implementation of the plan;*

*Requirement 5: A description of how the region plans to collaborate with key stakeholders in the region and a list of organizations with which the Administering Entity for the region collaborated in developing the Plan.*

The primary focus of the HRCAP Digital Opportunity Plan is to ensure all residents within our service area have access to reliable, safe and affordable internet service. While a focus on infrastructure remains important, especially for the rural areas of western Hampton Roads, given the infrastructure available in most of the region, efforts might be focused on improving affordability, increasing awareness and providing educational opportunities that will assist individuals within the target population in accessing and utilizing digital resources. The HRCAP Plan addresses issues related to affordability, devices, digital skills, technical support, and digital navigation.

Although many of the residents have access to affordable internet services, some families and individuals within our region fall through the digital divide. Programs such as the FCC's

Affordable Connectivity Program provides a discount to many households in the community. Yet, for example, only 32 percent of eligible households in Virginia Congressional District One and 48 percent of eligible households in District Two utilize this program. Other programs such as the Cox Connect2Compete and ConnectAssist fill some of these gaps, but a need to increase awareness of the resources available is vital to our efforts to improve access. If funding is available, HRCAP would launch a multimedia marketing campaign to increase awareness of these programs and others available to local residents.

Of course, for some low-income, elderly families, veterans, the disabled and other populations, even these discounted rates can be too expensive. An additional subsidy may be necessary to ensure that all residents within the community have access to broadband and other digital services. This could reduce or eliminate the costs of internet access for eligible participants.

In addition to the lack of access to affordable broadband services, device costs can also be a significant barrier for many families in the region. Smart phones, tablets, laptops and other devices required to access broadband services are often priced out of affordability for many of the low-income and at-risk populations that we serve. This could be resolved with a subsidy program that would cover all or part of the cost for the client to obtain the devices necessary to access the internet. These devices could be purchased by the agency and then given or loaned to participants at no or significantly reduced costs.

But having the capacity and technology necessary to access the internet has limited value to clients lacking the Digital Skills required to successfully navigate the online world. Some clients will also need to receive training to use the devices they have and interface with online resources. As part of several workforce development programs, HRCAP has used Northstar

Digital Literacy program to train and test the digital literacy skills of clients. Northstar Digital Literacy defines the basic skills needed to use a computer and the internet in daily life, employment, and higher education. This program and similar workshops may be offered to resident needing additional skills in order to best utilize digital resources.

Another issue that prevent an individual from utilizing digital resources is the lack of Technical Support in the event of a malfunction of devices or infrastructure. A vital component of a working Digital Opportunity plan would be the provision of technical assistance to clients facing this kind of barrier. With the proper funding, HRCAP could coordinate with an IT assistance firm such as Endurance to ensure that clients have access to technical support when something goes wrong with their equipment.

As a community action agency with over 55 years of experience providing vital services to low-income and other at-risk populations within our services area, HRCAP can provide Digital Navigation services that include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills, and application support.

The primary goal of the HRCAP Regional Digital Opportunity Plan is to provide access to high-speed, reliable and safe internet services for selected at-risk populations residing within our service area. Measurable goals related to this project will include the number and percentage of residents without access to digital resources who are able to access them once the plan has been implemented. Other vital measures of program success may include the number of resident with improved connection speeds, the number of residents acquiring digital devices to access the internet, the number of disabled participants who have improved accessibility to the internet, the number of residents with increased awareness of internet options for low-income and other at-risk families, and the number of participants who have improved digital literacy.

Working with our partners, service providers and localities, HRCAP will continue to develop procedures to ensure the plan's continued sustainability and its effectiveness across all regional communities. The agency proposes to create a Connection Coalition that will include all digital equity stakeholders as well as current agency partners and additional organizations/businesses identified by HRCAP. The purpose of this coalition will be to guide the continued development of broadband and digital resources in the many communities that we serve, and to ensure that the project remains sustainable over the long term. An expanded influx of federal funding may serve to get this process initiated across the state, but long-term sustainability may require the generation of additional revenue, in the form of grants and corporate sponsorships. The coalition will need a dedicated fundraising arm to ensure that financial resources are available after the expenditure of initial funding. Under HRCAP's guidance, the coalition will also conduct regular assessments of digital equity and broadband access in communities throughout the Hampton Roads region. These assessments, along with the evaluation of measured outcomes that result from program activities, will inform the coalition of any gaps in coverage that may need to be filled, as well as residents' views of the successes and challenges the program has faced.

The Hampton Roads regional strategy focuses broadly on awareness, education, and affordability, the primary gaps that have been identified during the planning process. Although some issues related to infrastructure and the needs to physically expand services to some more rural areas will also need to be addressed as the plan moves forward, most of these gaps result from a lack of knowledge on the part of residents and a lack of affordability on the part of services. HRCAP has been at the forefront of creating awareness in the communities that we serve since the Medicare Awareness program launched in the 1960's. The agency can design a similar campaign to increase awareness of broadband resources available in these communities.

HRCAP also has a long history of providing more in-depth instruction to agency clients, including on topics related to homebuying and job readiness. Using the NorthStar Digital Literacy curriculum, and possibly others training programs, HRCAP can help residents to bridge the knowledge gap, ensuring that they have the tools to use digital resources and navigate the internet safely and effectively. Finally, the provision on new subsidies for the purchase of services or devices will enable many families currently ineligible for assistance to gain access to the digital resources they need to navigate the modern world.

The creation of a Connection Coalition will empower this program to bring a variety of organizations together to further map out the process for addressing the digital divide. HRCAP has dozens of partnerships with a broad array of institutions, agencies and organizations. HRCAP's CEO Edith White serves on the board of the Hampton Roads Workforce Council, which oversees federally funded workforce development programs for all localities in the Hampton Roads region. The Hampton Roads Workforce Council provides strategic workforce development solutions designed to assist businesses in accessing qualified workers and job seekers in search of suitable job openings and training opportunities to bolster their earning potential. This partnership will be crucial to any workforce development needs related to expanding digital opportunities, as the workforce council can connect to educational resources as well as employers.

Other members of this coalition will include local service providers such as Cox Communications, which has supported agency efforts in the past, financial institutions such as Bank of America, Wells Fargo and Truist, local colleges and universities (Hampton University, Christopher Newport University, Old Dominion University, Virginia Peninsula Community College), and municipal agencies and redevelopment and housing authorities from across the



region. HRCAP is still in the process of developing these and other partnerships across the region and look forward to expanding the capacity of the Connection Coalition to improve access to digital resources.

Here is a simplified timeline of the agency's Regional Digital Opportunity Plan. This timeline needs to be flexible in order to respond to the timing and availability of resources, and whether those resources will cover proposed activities. The need to seek additional or alternative funding streams may impact when, or how much, of these plans can be implemented.

- Year 1, Month 1
  - review plan key activities and meet with partners to prioritize implementation and timing of programming.
  - Initiate recruitment of any staff identified as part of program operation.
  - Finalize budgeting of available funding and outline plans to secure additional funding as needed.
- Year 1, Month 2
  - Schedule Connection Coalition meeting to pull partners together for first time to discuss program implementation, staffing, outreach and funding.
  - Select and interview applicants for program staffing.
  - Outline outreach activities related to increasing awareness of programs available.
  - Start the process of developing or adapting a core curriculum that will enhance the digital literacy of Hampton Roads residents.
- Year 1, Months 3 to 5
  - Hire staff as necessary.
  - Continue quarterly meetings of Connection Coalition.
  - Review data regarding service gaps due to infrastructure in western and rural areas of the region, connect with service providers to determine how these gaps may best be filled.
  - Finalize outreach and digital literacy programming.
  - Develop robust evaluation plan outlining data collection methodology, measurable outcomes and analysis of program effectiveness.
- Year 1, Months 6 to 12
  - Launch outreach initiatives to inform residents of affordable options for internet service.

- Develop and fund additional subsidy programs to provide connectivity options to very low-income residents as well as other residents who may not meet eligibility requirements of programming already in place.
- Launch Digital Literacy initiative, recruit participants and provide workshops/classes in partnership with the HRWC, institutions of higher education, and other organizations.
- Monitor locality and service provider activities in regard to infrastructure expansion and additional opportunities for residents.
- Year 2, Months 1 to 3
  - Continue with outreach activities, digital literacy initiative and meeting with the Connection Coalition to review and revise the RDOP.
  - If funding is available, launch new subsidy program for identified populations.
- Ongoing
  - Outreach
  - Connection Coalition
  - Digital Literacy
  - Resources Survey
  - Subsidy Program
  - Evaluation

The key to implementing this Regional Digital Opportunity Plan are the many partners that will support and work with the agency to progress on the issue. These partners will include service providers (T-Mobile, Cox Communications, Verizon and Verizon Wireless), local government (Hampton Department of Social Services, City of Norfolk), non-profits (United Way of Virginia Peninsula, Virginia Peninsula Foodbank), institutions of higher education (Virginia Peninsula Community College), public libraries (Newport News Public Library, Suffolk Public Library, Virginia Beach Public Library, Slover Library), faith-based organizations (Zion Baptist Church, First Baptist Church Jefferson Park in Newport News, Providence Bible College & Theological Seminary in Norfolk), corporate partners (Newport News Shipbuilding, Zel Technologies, LLC., RFK Solutionz, Corporation, Cobb Technologies), local housing authorities (Norfolk Redevelopment Housing Authority, Suffolk Redevelopment Housing Authority),

financial institutions (Langley Federal Credit Union, Bank of America, Atlantic Union Bank, Truist Bank, TowneBank), health care systems (Riverside Health System, Sentara Health System, Southeastern Virginia Health System), and school systems (Hampton City Schools). Many of these partners provided feedback that was vital to the development of this plan, and many more will provide additional support and expertise as the plan is implemented and refined.

## 6 Conclusion

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In an age when the power of technology to reshape societies, economies and cultures in ways previous generations could not have imagined, it is vital that all citizens have access to the benefits of that technology. As a long-time advocate for marginalized populations throughout the Hampton Roads region, HRCAP is committed to lead on issues related to digital equity, ensuring that as many local residents as possible will have access to the services and resources that they need.

Working with broadband and wireless service providers, local governments, institutions of higher education and a variety of other partners, HRCAP will continue to refine the plan, working to create new opportunities for digital access. From infrastructure expansion and improvement, through use of both broadband and wireless, to outreach, education and subsidy programs, HRCAP will create programming that is comprehensive, adaptive and beneficial to low-income, disabled, veteran, and elderly residents.

But this Regional Digital Opportunity Plan is just the beginning of HRCAP's efforts to improve digital access for the residents of southeastern Virginia. The agency will continue to seek new opportunities, partnerships and funding sources that will allow us to expand access for all at-risk populations. In order to be responsive to the needs of these residents, the plan must be flexible and grow along with the communities that it serves. HRCAP will work with our partners and continue to adjust and alter the plan as needed to best serve those communities.

## 7 Appendices

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See attached.