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Local Broadband Delivers Economic Impact

Dear Smart Rural Community provider,



I'm so excited to see our Smart Rural Community program continue to grow. We are 287 SRC providers strong as I write this! While exciting, the growth is not at all surprising. SRC providers know what NTCA and other industry leaders have long said: Local broadband delivers local

economic opportunities and long-term development. Many of our "Smart" providers have told us that this is one of the key benefits of connecting their community. Broadband brings economic opportunities not previously found in their small towns, those opportunities bring economic development, and development nearly always brings prosperity.

Smaller community-based broadband providers deliver the best possible connectivity, enabling better outcomes for rural communities. For example, the Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) study profiled in this newsletter shows that local providers like you deploy cutting-edge fiber networks and go above and beyond to ensure consumers and small businesses can capitalize upon these connections.

"Better outcomes" might sound like a talking point, but the

data backs it up: rural counties with high broadband adoption experience 213% higher business growth compared to communities with lower adoption. You can read about this growth and other real-life statistics below. Separately, Joshua Seidemann shares insights into measuring economic factors such as housing prices or job wages in your communities.

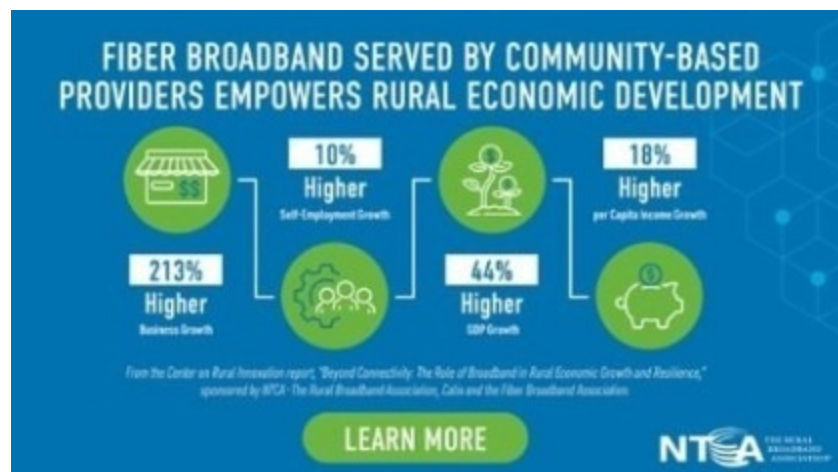
Beyond measurement, we appreciate your stories! If you need a jump start on some storytelling ideas, check out the video and steps to strengthen your role in enhancing your community with the SRC media kit, including tools to help you celebrate National Small Business Week starting May 4. Our team is working hard to make these resources easy for you, including by launching a new SRC website, **so please don't miss it!**

Sustaining and expanding broadband infrastructure is crucial for economic development and job creation. Thank you for making a significant — and quantifiable — difference.

Sincerely,



Shirley Bloomfield
CEO, NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association



Fiber Broadband As a Transformative Tool for Rural Communities

Research highlighted in the economic study, “**Beyond Connectivity: The Role of Broadband in Rural Economic Growth and Resilience**,” shows that the greatest economic benefits occur not just from broadband availability but from its active utilization. Conducted by the non-profit Center on Rural Innovation (CORI), and sponsored in part by NTCA and SRC sponsor **Calix**, the study finds that higher broadband utilization — that is, higher broadband adoption rates and a higher prevalence of small broadband service providers — improves the economic dynamism of rural areas. Specifically, rural counties with take rates over 80% have significant advantages over those with lower adoption rates, including higher business growth, self-employment growth, GDP growth and per capita income growth.

These findings underscore the need for policies and programs that don’t just build networks but also support digital literacy, education and community engagement to ensure that rural areas can fully leverage broadband as a tool for economic development. The CORI paper goes on to explore several case studies of providers that prove this point.

[Download the infographic](#) to share with your community!

DRN Powers Economic Growth with New Data Center

DRN (Ellendale, N.D.) has worked closely with Applied Digital, a data center company, to construct a facility in Ellendale. Applied Digital is in phase two of building a data center capable of supporting AI and high-performance computing — a project that has created nearly 1,000 construction jobs in the area and is estimated to establish up to 400 jobs to run the data center once the construction is complete.

Beyond those jobs, the tangential economic impact cannot be overstated. Some workers are housed locally in fully occupied apartments and hotels.

Both those workers and the commuters contribute to the local economy when they purchase gas or meals at new restaurants and at prior establishments that weren’t full before. The data center has or will drive the need for more school seats, a



daycare, a new apartment building, a 20-home development and more.

"With any change this big, you are likely to experience some growing pains: locals questioning whether they want this sort of industry coming to our lovely quiet area," said Kent Schimke, CEO of DRN. "But the truth is that before the data center, the community was declining. And now, the economic development that the data center and broadband have delivered is a huge positive for the area. We are embracing the progress, and if we don't, we get left behind."

DRN isn't the only broadband provider experiencing the benefits of big tech coming to their community. The Wall Street Journal just published, "[The AI Data-Center Boom is coming to America's Heartland](#)," which details how tech companies are out in force, "scouring" rural America for places to build the facilities they need. The economic opportunities to leverage your fiber network are plentiful, and in the process, to revitalize the economic landscape of your communities.



Building Measurable Strategies for Smart Economic Development

By Joshua Seidemann, NTCA Vice President of Policy and Industry Innovation

I enjoy working with our Smart Rural Community providers to explore strategies for rural economic development. As a board member of the National Rural Economic Developers Association (NREDA), I have been able to examine the boots-on-the-ground success stories of our SRC companies alongside the experiences of a broad range of local economic development pros. Working with NREDA, we analyzed these collective outcomes and concluded that 1) planning and strategy are crucial for building strong rural economies, and, 2) we can approach the planning by analyzing past data and creating future projections.

The **Key Point Indicator (KPI) paper** published by SRC and NREDA offers an analytical construct for communities to measure critical factors like local wages, housing prices and business dynamics. Importantly, the paper recognizes that rural spaces are incredibly diverse, so I'm not proposing a universal solution. Instead, the KPI approach offers a framework that communities can adapt to their unique contexts.

Rural stories — and the economic factors and communities that create them — reinforce a fundamental truth: Each rural community is distinct. What works in one place might not be the best approach for another. But, when examining potential economic impacts, we can (and must) consider multiple variables and remain flexible.

Of course, broadband plays a particularly critical role in this effort. Our SRC library is filled with reports outlining the benefits of broadband for **economic development**, **agriculture**, **education** and **healthcare**. And numerous reports from other resources have demonstrated its positive economic effects, from **employment** and **e-commerce** to **real estate values** and **agricultural productivity**. But, as we note often in our SRC discussions, simply having the infrastructure is not enough — communities must actively engage with these technologies.

While broadband will not transform rural America overnight, regions without it certainly risk being left behind. SRC's goal is to share and amplify your insights to empower rural communities in their journey towards economic success.

Joshua can be reached at jseidemann@ntca.org.



Are You Taking Full Advantage of the SRC Program?

The SRC Program empowers local providers by recognizing and supporting their efforts to deliver high-speed broadband. Make sure that you are taking full advantage of the ways in which being a Smart Rural Provider can help you to build credibility, attract partnerships and strengthen your role as a driver of rural innovation and development in your community.

Bethany Leiter, Community Relations Manager, **Highline** (Escanaba, Mich.), works across several states to engage communities and governments on behalf of Highline. **Watch Bethany explain** how she utilizes Smart Rural Community assets to give Highline's communities visibility. She recommends the following steps:

- **Plan and budget for SRC activities at the start of the year, including:**
 - Order road signs in bulk.
 - Designate one "SRC Day" each month and mark it through celebrations and social media engagement.
- **Each month:**
 - Identify eligible communities, potentially by county or township zones; engage the township and county boards.

- Schedule meetings to inform communities of their SRC eligibility.
- Invite the public to attend the meeting.
- **For each meeting:**
 - Provide a folder of materials, including marketing assets.
 - Present the road sign to the board (be sure to capture photos and video!).
 - After the meeting, post on social media and send out a press release.

It only takes about two hours of planning each month. Celebrate your community's broadband achievements — big or small. Please let SRC know when you have your monthly #SRCDay, and we will amplify your efforts! Need ideas? Reach out via the [Listserv](#)!



You've Built the Business, but Are Customers Happy? Yes!

Survey Says Focused Business Units Key to Telcos' Satisfaction Success

By Laura Withers, NTCA Vice President of Strategic Communications

Internet service and cable providers notoriously rank among the lowest in the country for customer satisfaction and were close companions to [subscription TV and streaming services](#) in a recent consumer ranking of industries. The

incredible economic opportunities a high-speed broadband connection creates may diminish if customers aren't happy. However, a recent survey found that small, rural ISPs perform better in that department than their larger counterparts.

According to an analysis by SRC sponsor **NRTC** (Herndon, Va.) and **Pivot Group** (Wilsonville, Ore.), net promotor scores for rural ISPs are pretty good, with the average being 51 — a huge difference from larger providers, which earn -41. What's more, global consulting firm McKinsey & Company **found** in a survey of telco CEOs that a key to overcoming mounting capital and regulatory pressures might be “delaying” — or separating into multiple focused entities, each putting its customers at the center, while having the entities collaborate where appropriate (such as sharing data or best practices).

That sounded familiar to NRTC CEO Tim Byan, who **told attendees of the cooperative's annual meeting**, “The largest consulting firm in the world says, ‘you should be more like us.’”

Smart Rural Community providers know the power of local, focused service and of putting the customer at the center to unleash their communities' unique talents and economic opportunities. It's gratifying to see others highlighting this smart play.

Laura can be reached at lwithers@ntca.org.

Get Social! Leverage the SRC Brand for Visibility

We are stronger when we message together, so when all Smart Rural Communities focus on the same messaging, it increases the collective value of our entire group, and your local partners will be empowered to advocate for you as well. The theme for April and May is: Local Broadband Delivers Economic Development and Small Business Growth.

Implement this theme by:

- In April and May, choose your SRC Day for each month! Share photos of the townships that you have met with

recently! Use #SRCDay and #SmartRuralCommunity in your posts.

- From May 4-10, celebrate entrepreneurs and small business owners during **National Small Business Week**. This is a chance to highlight partners and members in your community. Use #NationalSmallBizWeek to join the conversation online.

What have our SRC providers shared lately?

Many SRC providers have recently participated in career day or similar activities with their local schools. We've also seen a local tech day for continuing education. These providers are working with their community partners and spotlighting the "Local Broadband Delivers Local Impact" theme. Take a look and get inspired!



Webster-Calhoun Cooperative Telephone Association

about 3 weeks ago



Last Friday, Webster-Calhoun hosted the meeting space for our Local Girl Scout Troop. Members of our staff discussed what we do at WCCTA as a fiber-based Internet, TV, and Telephone service provider. This was a great opportunity for the kids to learn more about a career based in STEM!

Topics covered:

- 🌳 The importance of calling 811 to locate underground facilities
- 🐕 Gizmo the Internet Guard Dog coloring book [NTCA - The Rural Broadband Association ... See more](#)



👍 31 💬 Comment ➡ 5



Triangle Communications

March 14 at 5:44 PM · 🌐

That's a wrap on the 9th annual Big Sky Tech Fest! 🎉

Last week, we had the pleasure of hosting industry professionals from across Montana and Wyoming for a few days of education, collaboration, and connection at our headquarters in Havre. It's always great to see our telecommunications community come together to share insights, learn from each other, and, of course, have a little fun!

A huge thank you to our partner vendors for sponsoring, and to everyone who attended for making this event such a success. We can't wait to do it all again next year!



- [Star Communications](#) (Clinton, N.C.)
- [FOCUS Broadband](#) (Shallotte, N.C.)
- [Kingdom Telecommunications](#) (Auxvasse, Mo.)
- [Arriva](#) (Bay Springs, Miss.)
- [Ben Lomand Communications](#) (McMinnville, Tenn.)
- [RiverStreet Networks](#) (Wilkesboro, N.C.)

See you soon at the NTCA Marketing & Sales Conference!

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