



ATC Communications Digital Inclusion Plan

September 2021

Goal Statement or Vision Statement

ATC Communications is a rural broadband service provider and understands the uniqueness of rural Nebraska Communities. This unique lifestyle is proliferated with the spirit of neighborhood, community, and trust we are able to give each other. Challenges emerge and among them is access to services members of larger communities may take for granted. As a broadband provider, ATC is singularly capable of closing the gap for rural communities by offering reliable modern high speed internet services, making the services affordable for all members of the community, and providing no charge access at public spaces.

Broadband Availability

Computer and Internet Use	Deuel County, Nebraska	Nebraska
Households with a computer, percent, 2015-2019	85.8%	90%
Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2015-2019	72.4%	83.4%

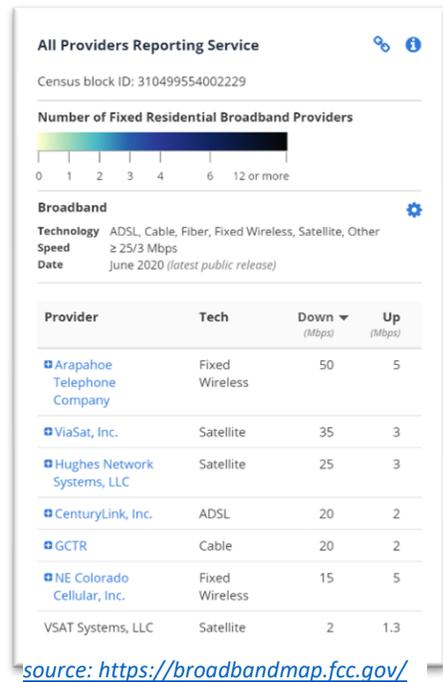
source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/deuelcountynebraska,NE/INC110219#INC110219>

Broadband availability in Deuel County, specifically the village of Big Springs is a vital issue for the community. As of the last update to the FCC 477 data set for the community, the community’s primary wireline communications providers are only able to provide 20 Mbps DL and 2 Mbps Uplink.

While it may not be clear to the general public, the audience of this document will likely realize the inherent shortcomings of the FCC Form 477 reporting mechanisms. Deployment reporting is especially flawed in certain circumstances.

ATC Communications supplies 50 Mbps DL and 5 Mbps UL through a Fixed Wireless Solution. This is true, and the service is available throughout the community. However, the fixed wireless system in place has a “households connected” limit. At current, the system can only supply this type of service to a maximum of 15 homes in the project area. Other, speed categories below the 25 DL and 3 UL standard are being offered and brings service to additional homes. Additionally, Fixed Wireless systems capacity can be increased to bring on more homes or offer more bandwidth.

However, ATC feels the only truly inclusive and future proof investment is Fiber. There are no location count limits, and virtually unlimited bandwidth. For the 190 + locations in Big Springs the gap in modern service availability will be closed.



Broadband Affordability

Broadband Access in Nebraska is generally affordable when available. Most providers offer a broadband package sufficient for residential subscribers in a package that totals below 50.00 per month or 600.00 per year. Roughly 3% of the monthly income of lower income households (example 18k per year household income). A much smaller percentage for the average income household (1.2 % of a median home).

However, percentages and averages do not tell the real story. Every dollar counts for families at or near the poverty level. Consider the income demographic in Deuel County.

Income & Poverty	Deuel County, Nebraska	Nebraska
Median household income (in 2019 dollars), 2015-2019	\$47,287	\$61,439
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2019 dollars), 2015-2019	\$26,351	\$32,302
Persons in poverty, percent	11.2%	9.9%

source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/deuelcountynebraska,NE/INC110219#INC110219>

If we look simply at the estimated percentage of homes at poverty level for the given project in Big Springs, Nebraska: Roughly 20 homes could not perceive of the extra cost associated with a “fixed” internet service of any type. Some tough it out anyway, “the kids need it”, others forego the burden.

Federal and State assistance exists for these cases:

- *USAC (Universal Services Administration Company) offers assistance to qualifying individuals to reduce the monthly service fees for broadband subscription by subsidizing one service per household.*
- *Nebraska’s Public Service Commission offers additional support if they qualify for the federal subsidy.*
- *Emergency Broadband Benefit Program exists to temporarily eliminate the costs completely.*

Discount Program Accessibility:

- *Federal and State subsidy programs may be difficult to find, even with an online search.*
- *Social workers may assist eligible applicants in enrollment.*
- *Service providers may have trained staff that assist customers with assistance programs.*

However, most service providers do not offer assistance beyond these programs. These programs alone may not be enough. Some providers do, namely the biggest providers in the country, but these providers have zero focus on rural communities in Nebraska. ATC Communications will echo the initiative of the large providers with a program to provide a dramatically discounted high speed internet service for those who need it most.

Actions, Strategies and Programs

Strategies and Programs that help those who don't have broadband at home

Existing Programs and Resources that Can Be Leveraged

- Universal Services Administration Company – Lifeline Program + Nebraska PSC Contribution
- Emergency Broadband Benefit Program
- Public Internet access at Public Library or Privately owned facilities with public internet access.

New Strategies, Actions and Programs to help those who don't have broadband at home

- ATC Communications Direct Discount – ATC will offer a reduced cost service plan.
 - When a potential customer qualifies for USAC Lifeline assistance
 - Supplies enrollment verification for the following programs:
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefits
 - Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
 - Medicaid
 - National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
- Public WiFi Accessibility at indoor or outdoor locations designated by the Village Board.
 - Examples
 - Outdoor Community Space / City Park
 - Indoor/Outdoor – Big Springs Public Library
 - Indoor Only – Community Center

Summary

ATC Communications in collaboration with the Village of Big Springs will close the digital divide that segregates this community from its neighbors. All homes and businesses in the community will have access to high-speed broadband services on a greenfield network that has the future of broadband access in mind from conception. This proposal seeks to include all residents by offering premium connectivity for each location, low-cost service options for those in need, and public access to the service with no service requirement.