



ATC Communications Digital Inclusion Plan

June 2022

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.

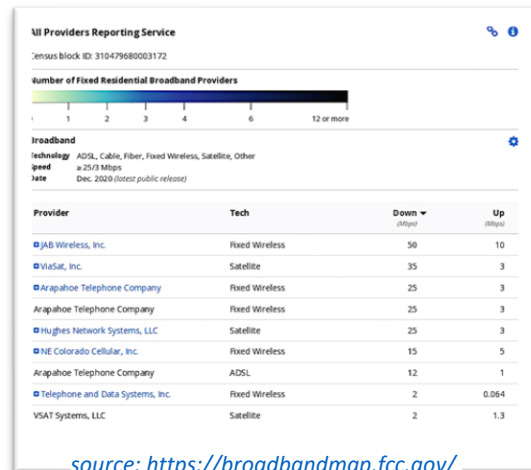
Broadband Availability

Computer and Internet Use	Keith County, Nebraska	Perkins County, Nebraska	Nebraska
Households with a computer, percent, 2016-2020	86.2%	91.3%	91.5%
Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2016-2020	82.5%	84.1%	85.6%

Source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/keithcountynebraska,NE/PST045221> and <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/perkinscountynebraska,NE/PST045221>

Broadband availability in Keith and Perkins Counties, specifically the village of Brule is a vital issue for the community. As of the last update to the FCC 477 data set for the rural areas surrounding the community, ATC Communications is only able to provide 12 Mbps DL and 1 Mbps Uplink in specific areas.

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 is unable to provide 25 Mbps DL and 3 Mbps UL or greater to all locations due to ADSL system limitations. This is true in many cases throughout the rural community. ATC also delivers service through a fixed wireless system. This has allowed us to serve many locations beyond the rate/reach limitations of DSL but fixed wireless has coverage limitations and other technology inherent qualities that do not reach all rural locations and make services of 100 Mbps DL and 20 Mbps UL unachievable.

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 proposed locations in Brule, 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. This is roughly 3% of the monthly income of lower income households (example 18k per year household income) and 0.95% of Nebraska’s median household income.

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 Keith and Perkins Counties.

Income & Poverty	Keith County, Nebraska	Perkins County, Nebraska	Nebraska
Median household income (in 2020 dollars), 2016-2020	\$52,169	\$61,389	\$63,015
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2020 dollars), 2016-2020	\$30,947	\$33,535	\$33,205
Persons in poverty, percent	11.6%	10.0%	9.2%

Source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/keithcountynebraska,NE/PST045221> and <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/perkinscountynebraska,NE/PST045221>

If we look simply at the estimated percentage of homes at poverty level for the given project in Brule, Neb., the budget of roughly 33 households would not allow 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.*
- *Affordable Connectivity Program provides eligible households with a discount on broadband service and connected devices.*

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 who assist customers with assistance programs.*

Most service providers do not offer assistance beyond these programs, however these programs alone may not be enough. Some larger Internet providers do, namely the biggest providers in the country, but these providers have zero investment in rural communities in Nebraska. ATC Communications will echo the initiative of the larger 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
- Affordable Connectivity 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)
- Affordable Connectivity Program is offered to all customers requesting service.
 - Requirements
 - Income eligible requirement; or
 - Receiving federal assistance benefits
 - Benefits
 - Monthly credit toward Internet cost
 - Access to education, health, banking, entertainment, etc. information

Summary

ATC Communications in collaboration with the Village of Brule will close the digital divide that segregates this community from its neighbors. All homes and businesses in the rural 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, and low-cost service options for those in need.