



## Digital Inclusion Plan for Jefferson County

### Introduction:

Diode Communications, along with sister company Diller Telephone Company, is a rural broadband service provider in Southeast Nebraska. In recent years, the gap between rural and urban broadband service has been magnified, with numerous rural areas still being unserved or underserved with broadband. Our Digital Inclusion Plan aims to bridge the digital divide in Jefferson County to ensure equitable access to digital resources, technologies, and skills for all residents. By providing reliable broadband service, Jefferson County will foster equal opportunities, empower individuals and communities, and enhance economic development through increased digital inclusion.

### Current Broadband Availability:

Computer and Internet Use	Jefferson County, NE	United States
Households with a computer, percent, 2017-2021	87.7%	93.1%
Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2017-2021	75.8%	87.0%

[Table Source](#)

As displayed in the table above, Jefferson County has approximately 11.2% lower internet subscription than the rest of the United States, even though percentage of households with a computer has a narrower margin. Reliable internet should be accessible to provide equal opportunities for all, no matter where they live.

According to the National Broadband map, areas around Plymouth, NE only have access to a maximum speed of 10mbps ([Source](#)). This is only enough bandwidth for one person in a household to be using one device. The average number of devices per household in 2022 was 22 devices connected to Internet ([Source](#)).

Our goal is to continue to bring opportunities to these rural areas through reliable, fiber optic technology. Everyone should have the same opportunities no matter where they live, whether that be working from home, running a business, taking online classes, telehealth, and more.

**Current Broadband Affordability:**

Income & Poverty	Jefferson County, NE	United States
Median Household Income (in 2021), dollars	\$51,587	\$69,021
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2021), dollars	\$28,313	\$37,638

[Table Source](#)

In addition to broadband availability, affordability is a key issue that creates a divide in digital inclusion. The average median household income and per capita income in Jefferson County is approximately 7.5% lower than the averages in the rest of the United States. In 2022, the median cost of high-speed internet service was \$74.99 per month ([Source](#)). This does not include certain factors such as internet speed, the type of connection, additional fees, and availability. The cost of internet can be a concern for families that make every dollar of their income count.

Our current pricing for our fiber packages is listed below:

Speed	Monthly Price
100mbps/100mbps	\$59.95
500mbps/500mbps	\$89.95
1 gig/100mbps	\$99.95

We do not charge any fees for installation. We also do not require annual contracts for our customers.

**Community Outreach and Available Programs for Assistance**

Diode Communications has partnered with the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners to create a Public/Private partnership using ARPA funds. This partnership is vital to ensure these funds are being utilized towards fiber internet buildouts in unserved areas of Jefferson County. In addition to the Public/Private partnership, staff members of our company have attended local listening sessions conducted by the Nebraska Public Service Commission regarding broadband availability and affordability in the state. By engaging in these sessions, we can provide additional context and education for various topics regarding broadband in Nebraska.

For the 2023 Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program, we have asked members of the local community for letters of support. These community members include Jarod Spahr, IT Coordinator at Tri-County Schools, Senator Brandt of rural Plymouth, and Jefferson County Commissioner, Mark Schoenrock. They each have gladly agreed to write letters of support for these projects. We will continue to reach out to community members for letters of support as we apply for future grants.

Recently, the FCC rolled out the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) which helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare, and more. This benefit provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households. We

participate in the ACP so our customers have access to the \$30 monthly benefit. By participating in this program, eligible households can select our highest speed package and still pay less than the median cost of internet in the United States.

We will continue to evaluate future assistance programs and encourage our customers to participate in them, pending eligibility.

### **Conclusion**

As outlined, there are numerous areas in Jefferson County that are still underserved or unserved with broadband. We hope to close the digital divide by bringing fiber connections to additional rural households so they too can have access to equal opportunities.