



Broadband Community Champions Training Initiative (BCCT)

South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development's (SCACED) Broadband Community Champions Training Initiative (BCCT) is designed as a train the trainer model to empower grassroots leaders through knowledge on the important of broadband, its application and the benefits to rural communities. BCCT builds local capacity of community leaders to engage with internet service providers (ISP) and governmental agencies to access resources to deploy high-speed connectivity for rural prosperity.

Ken Harvin, Rural Program Director, SCACED

South Carolina Association
for Community Economic Development
(SCACED)

SCACED is a member-based, statewide association of over 170 individuals and organizations who support the development of healthy and economically sustainable communities throughout South Carolina. For 28 years, SCACED and its members have worked collaboratively to build wealth and create economic opportunity for all S.C. residents, including a focus on minority communities and other groups that have been left out of the economic mainstream. SCACED offers trainings through its Community Development Institute, grant funding through its Community Impact Fund, Community Garden and Hoop House Grants, and our Community Economic Development Fund, capitalized with appropriated dollars from the S.C. Legislature. In addition, SCACED and its members collectively advocate for policies advancing community economic development in South Carolina.



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OPPORTUNITY

South Carolina rural communities have historically been underserved and traditionally under-invested. Prior to COVID-19, the state took a laissez-faire approach to broadband deployment. This approach left thousands of rural households at the height of COVID-19 scrambling to figure out how they would educate their children from home without government intervention. To address this problem, USDA-Rural Development granted SCACED the funding in 2019 to launch the Broadband Community Champions Training Initiative in 2020.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, South Carolina had 221,731 households without access to internet speed greater than 25>3, according to S.C. Broadband Office. K-12 students of color in rural communities of low-wealth households experience the greatest challenge in accessing high-speed internet.

To address the disparity of access to high-speed internet in South Carolina, SCACED, through its BCCT Initiative, partnered with the S.C. Broadband Office to provide broadband expansion plans in several counties that participated in the initiative. Since 2020, counties participating in the BCCT include Allendale, Barnwell, Bamberg, Chester, Chesterfield, Clarendon, Dillon, Fairfield, Greenwood, Jasper, Marion, Marlboro, Newberry, Orangeburg, Union and Williamsburg counties.

STRATEGY

Launched in 2020 through a partnership with USDA and Revolution D, BCCT teaches rural grassroots leaders from health care, K-12 education and local and county governments how to talk about broadband and its importance, and how to position their community to attract providers to increase access, adoption and use by their neighbors. The initiative provides technical assistance to communities to develop funding proposals in partnership with ISPs.

Other partners include the Conservation Voters of S.C. and Dominion Energy, which helped engage community stakeholders and policymakers. In addition, the state created a new broadband office under S.C. Office of Regulatory Staff in which SCACED serves on the advisory board to make policy recommendations and to ensure equitable investments are made in rural communities.

OUTCOMES

Since 2020, SCACED has trained over 150 Broadband Community Champions in rural communities across the state of South Carolina.

- Since the establishment of the State Broadband Office, approximately 90,000 households have access to broadband compared to 137,000 without access to the internet as of Jan. 1, 2023.
- Leveraged Funds: \$204,675 in USDA/RCDI funds leveraged a minimum of \$11 million in additional funds to increase broadband access in rural counties, representing a leverage of 54:1.

After the pandemic exacerbated the broadband disparity problem in 2020, the federal and state governments brought a renewed focus to making broadband economically feasible for rural communities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- From a training perspective, one of the lessons learned about mapping data was the important of targeting household units and not populations without internet because broadband is connected to the build environment (e.g., houses, schools, church, businesses).
- From a training perspective, one of the lessons learned was the importance of collecting and sharing data in real time on where students live to monitor the deployment of broadband to where the need is great.
- Collaborating with the S.C. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to collect quantitative data on the location of K-12 public school students.

NEXT STEPS

- Greater access to federal and state broadband resources for telehealth services in rural communities.
- Increase greater access to federal and state broadband resources to support rural economic prosperity.
- Stronger collaboration with local community-based organizations and ISPs to increase adoption and use of broadband by households.

