

# Technology Inclusion in Prince William County



# Background

In 2020, The Prince William County Department of Information Technology (DoIT) identified the lack of high-capacity internet access as a critical issue threatening the immediate quality of life and economic survival of residents and local businesses. It also diminishes the experience of tourists who, according to the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) and the U.S. Travel Association, contributed \$643 Million to the local economy in 2019.

The lack of broadband services in communities (for both residents and businesses) can hinder quality of life for residents, and stifle prospects for new business creation. Additional negative effects include property values, real estate activity, and a diminished potential for home-based business opportunities. Finally, broadband service gaps also impede virtual telecommuting, virtual education, telehealth services, and new business creation by restricting access to the technologies and the internet economic forces that drive commercial success, economic vigor, and opportunities for residents and businesses to thrive in the technology economy of the 21st century.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the associated focus on virtual methods of remote learning, remote commerce and remote entertainment has exacerbated and compounded the impacts of broadband service gaps in rural, under-served and unserved areas of Prince William County.

In response to these issues, and a directive from the Prince William Board of County Supervisors to investigate options for providing fast and reliable broadband internet service to rural areas of the County, DoIT is seeking to deliver improved outcomes through the agency's Technology Inclusion Initiative.



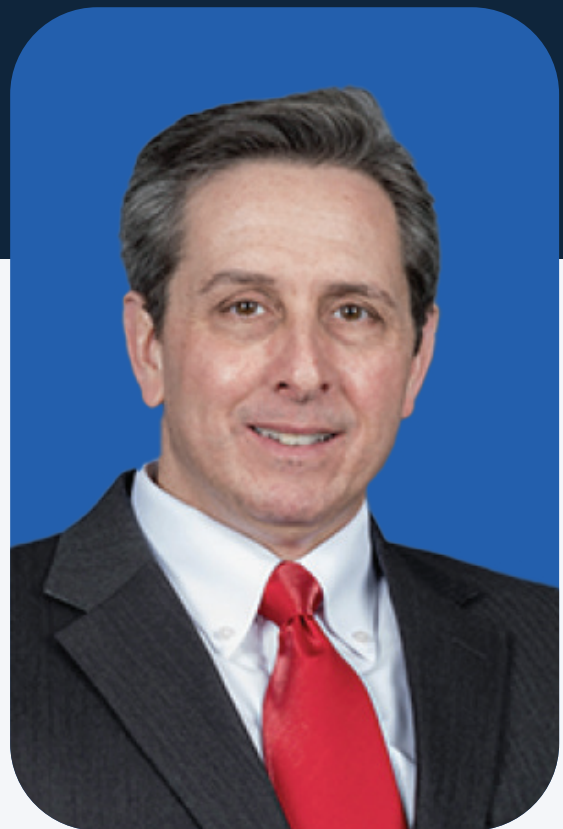
# Creating a Connected Community - Technology Inclusion

DoIT launched the Prince William Technology Inclusion Initiative (TII) in the last half of 2020 to help resolve chronic issues of technology access, affordability, and literacy across the County. As a specialized program, TII serves under DOIT as a broadband strategist, advocate, sponsor, public-facing program, and domain representative for Prince William County. The program is a multi-year effort that leverages partnerships, grants, county funding and ingenuity to achieve its goals.

For example, in 2020, DoIT and Prince William County Public Schools applied for and received a \$1.2 Million grant through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) to buy 4,061 [Wi-fi hotspot devices for students](#) in Title 1 County schools without reliable internet service. These and other initiatives underway go to the heart of what technology inclusion means to Prince William County:

**“** *We are not simply looking to meet people where they are. We want to meet them at a higher point of potential.*

**Rob Mancini, CIO**





# Program Priorities & Investments for 2021

Service availability is only one aspect of creating sustainable and equitable technology outcomes for residents and businesses. Affordability and technology literacy are also essential elements. Current investment areas include:

## Technology Literacy

Prince William County will host a series of free technology education courses for County residents and businesses beginning in November 2021. The goal is to improve technology adoption through a deliberate strategy of addressing all impediments that might exist for residents and businesses. This initiative is an essential first step toward building a more extensive plan for providing valuable and free technology learning opportunities for the public. It includes establishing partnerships within the business community to offer future technology literacy options. Examples of potential courses include:

- Basic introduction to the internet, web browsers, and security best practices
- Intermediate internet, web browser, security best practices, and common computer use tasks
- Basic introduction to mobile devices and smartphones



## County-wide Broadband Survey

This initiative will identify all of the locations in Prince William County that are unserved and under-served for broadband service. This data will enable the County to develop and execute a comprehensive plan for addressing broadband service gaps. Scheduled to be completed by November, 30, 2021, the scope includes:

- Conduct a County-wide broadband survey. Document current broadband technologies, speed, performance, vendors serving those locations, and other information that could be applicable to all areas of the County.
- Develop potential strategies for resolving broadband/high speed internet service access obstacles to all underserved and unserved areas of the County.
- Identify ideas and/or recommendations on methods to speed deployment of broadband/high speed internet service infrastructure to meet Prince William County broadband/high speed internet service goals.
- Identify suggestions on how the County can leverage specific partnerships, incentives, state and federal government programs, utilize existing assets, coordinate broadband/high speed internet service deployment with other infrastructure improvements and/or take other steps to reduce broadband/high speed internet service deployment costs.
- Identify regional considerations that may be relevant to the TII program's ability to meet its goals.
- Identify potential challenges, roadblocks or barriers that may prevent residents and businesses from taking advantage of the benefits of broadband/high speed internet service, including approaches to ensure uncapped access to the internet at reasonable costs (relative to the current markets and technologies) and a high degree of availability.

## Broadband Partnership Broker

DoIT has engaged a variety of broadband partners to help deliver broadband services to areas in Prince William County that are unserved and/or under-served. The County's broadband partners and service provider associates are independent subject matter experts and trusted advisors charged with helping identify the best products, services and solutions and pricing to meet the unique needs of the County. Our partners will also assist with securing grant or special funding opportunities, and identifying strategies for structuring and/or implementing the Initiative to stimulate interest in providing broadband/high speed internet service access to all underserved and unserved areas of the County.

# Summary

Prince William County is aggressively investing in a holistic Technology Inclusion Initiative that positions the County to be among the first in the nation to achieve universal broadband access. These investments will provide a detailed roadmap essential for effectively competing for funding that may come available, assist in attracting partners and engender confidence in the County's ability to achieve access, affordability and literacy goals. This may be the last chance in a long time for county governments to get it right. Prince William County intends to do just that.

