

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell

I ILLINOIS Extension

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Agriculture operations using precision ag tools, telehealth care, and online learning are just a few examples in which broadband connections are critical. Extension webinars and strategic planning sessions are working to support this critical development effort.

Building Capacity for Broadband Expansion

Broadband technologies and applications are an integral part of any economic development effort in today's economy. Having access to broadband and enhancing people's knowledge and application of this valuable resource is vital to the social and economic well-being of the region. University of Illinois Extension has worked closely with several partners to provide training and support for broadband expansion locally as well as across the state.

Illinois Extension has worked closely with the Illinois Office of Broadband, in the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to ensure that stakeholders and communities throughout Illinois were equipped to participate in the Connect Illinois program. As the country's largest competitive matching grant program, Connect Illinois seeks to extend critical high-speed internet access to homes, businesses, and community anchor institutions throughout the state.

The four-part Connect Illinois webinar series was held in May and June to a live audience of almost 400 participants. The recordings continue to offer education. This series provided expertise and support for the application process.

A second webinar series, Broadband Leadership, was co-hosted by Benton Institute for Broadband & Society and the Illinois Office of Broadband. This series provided 530 participants with strategies to address connectivity issues, develop a shared community broadband vision, and help create digital equity among residents.

Locally, Fulton County has formed a broadband strategic plan to advance the mission to utilize broadband for businesses and organizations, as part of a USDA Rural Economic Development Innovation planning program facilitated by Illinois Extension. The broadband strategy was developed based on online surveys and research, the implementation of broadband awareness sessions throughout the county and region, as well as individual community, carrier, government, and business leadership interviews.

Fulton County broadband strategy is focused on three key areas:

- Improve/upgrade broadband connectivity/access throughout the county in multiple phases
- Expand and deepen technology adoption by county businesses and agencies
- Integrate digital inclusion strategies into community and economic development efforts.

Data gathered, as part of this planning process, was utilized for local grant submission in which Century Enterprises, Inc. was awarded a \$3.1M grant as part of

a \$6.2M rural fiber project. The project, slated to begin Spring 2021, will build a Fiber to the Premises (FTTP) that will serve approximately 581 households, businesses, farms, and anchor institutions in Fulton, Peoria, and Knox Counties in the rural communities of Rapatee, Laura, Dunlap, Kickapoo, Hanna City, Trivoli, Knoxville, Princeville, Williamsfield, Maquon, Bernadotte, and Ipava.

The broadband access project will stimulate the local economy and help businesses compete on a larger scale and provide a better quality of life to residents.



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