

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Local Collaborative Partners with National Consultant to Deliver Essential Broadband Plan for Community

A collaborative of local stakeholders is taking steps to bridge the digital divide in Forsyth County, North Carolina. Following stay-at-home orders in spring 2020, a group of community members came together to address a pervasive issue that was exacerbated by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: digital inclusion.

Digital inclusion denotes an individual's ability to access and use communication technologies. Digital inclusion encompasses access to broadband internet, internet-enabled devices beyond smartphones, and the digital literacy that is required to fully utilize these resources.

The Forsyth County Digital Equity Committee (FCDE) quickly amassed a membership of more than 30 stakeholders. The FCDE is led by an eight-member Planning Committee comprised of representatives from the following entities:

- Forsyth Futures;
- Housing Authority Winston-Salem;
- Local Community Members;
- The City of Winston-Salem;
- The Winston-Salem Foundation;
- Wake Forest University;
- WinstonNet; and
- Winston-Salem State University.

In February 2021, FCDE launched a partnership to develop a digital equity plan for Forsyth County with A/R360 Consultants, LLC (A/R360). A/R360 is a national, woman-owned consulting firm with experience in diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and broadband assessments. A/R360 will work with the FCDE to publish a *Digital Equity Plan (Plan)* for Forsyth County.



“We are excited to begin this planning process in earnest,” commented Lynda Goff, Executive Director of WinstonNet and Planning Committee Member. “WinstonNet has been advocating for digital inclusion for more than 20 years, because we recognize that it is a civil rights issue. This *Plan* is long overdue.”

With the help of A/R360, the FCDE will soon begin engaging community leaders and local residents to gain input on the creation of the *Plan*, which will seek to end the digital divide countywide. Through the *Plan*, A/R360 will provide Forsyth County with research, data collection, community engagement, and a set of recommendations for the County's next stage of broadband implementation.

“A/R360 is honored to join WinstonNet and Forsyth County in developing their *Plan*,” said Lindsey Riley, Vice President and Co-Founder of A/R360. “Our Team knows that digital access is the foundation to providing equitable education, healthcare, workforce training, entrepreneurial opportunity, and business support to all residents. This *Plan* will be powerful for Forsyth County’s future.”

“The FCDE Committee is looking forward to seeing where broadband is, what resources we need to address, and where we need to go next,” commented Quentin Gunter, interim Equal Employment Opportunity officer at Winston-Salem State University and Planning Committee Member. “We are excited to engage community members – both those that have broadband and those that do not – and welcome the outcome of the *Plan*.”

Margaret Robinson, a Winston-Salem community leader and FCDE Planning Committee Member said the planning process will rely heavily on the wisdom and insight of those from marginalized communities. Addressing the barriers that individuals face to digital inclusion will be a hallmark of the *Plan*. “We want to hear from our community. They are the experts in what has kept them from being able to fully participate in the digital world so far.”

Residents are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience with the internet in Forsyth County. Visit <https://www.ncbroadband.gov/broadband-nc/north-carolina-broadband-survey> to tell us about your experience.

Regular updates about the *Plan* are available via the *Plan*'s website, [www.FCDigitalEquity.org](http://www.FCDigitalEquity.org), meetings scheduled within the next two months (sign up for email updates about these meetings on the *Plan* website), and via social media, <https://www.facebook.com/FCDigitalEquity>.

For more information about the *Forsyth County Digital Equity Plan*, visit [www.FCDigitalEquity.org](http://www.FCDigitalEquity.org), or email [Lindsey.Riley@AR360Consultants.com](mailto:Lindsey.Riley@AR360Consultants.com).

#### **About FCDE**

The Forsyth County Digital Equity Committee (FCDE) is a community collaborative comprised of more than 30 stakeholders from across the public and private sector in Forsyth County. For a full list of FCDE members, visit [www.FCDigitalEquity.org](http://www.FCDigitalEquity.org).

#### **About**

##### **A/R360**

A/R360 Consultants, LLC (A/R360) is a woman-owned management consulting firm focused on regional planning and non-profit organizational success. We develop and implement Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs; broadband assessments; economic and workforce development, transportation, community, health, and social service programs, plans, and projects. Our team has decades of experience working with non-profit, County, regional, state, and federal programs for client success. For more information, visit [www.AR360Consultants.com](http://www.AR360Consultants.com).