

## Information Item

**Date:** April 13, 2021

**To:** Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore, and Members of the City Council

**From:** Ben Rowe, Assistant City Manager  
Tom Kureczka, Chief Information Officer

**Subject:**  
Information Regarding the Forsyth County Digital Equity Steering Committee

**Strategic Focus Area:** Service Excellence

**Strategic Objective:** Ensure Service Delivery Efficiency and Effectiveness

**Strategic Plan Action Item:** No

**Key Work Item:** No



The Forsyth County Digital Equity Steering Committee (FCDE) is a collaborative group of local stakeholders that is taking steps to bridge the Digital Divide in Forsyth County. Simply defined, the Digital Divide is the gap between those who have access to technology, the internet, and digital literacy training and those who do not.

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 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 FCDE quickly grew to a membership of more than 30 stakeholders. The FCDE is led by an eight-member Planning Committee comprised of representatives from the following entities:

- Wake Forest University
- Winston-Salem State University
- The Winston-Salem Foundation
- City of Winston-Salem resident (not affiliated with any of the other agencies)
- The City of Winston-Salem
- WinstonNet
- Forsyth Futures
- The Housing Authority of the City of Winston-Salem

The FCDE Mission is to bring awareness and change through community collaboration to ensure that information technology is accessible, affordable, and relevant for all Forsyth County residents, especially those in underserved communities.

This supports the FCDE Vision of Forsyth County being a thriving, inclusive community where all residents, especially residents of underserved communities, have equal access to learn, participate, and contribute to society through robust and digital information technology.

FCDE's goal is the creation of a Digital Inclusion Plan for Forsyth County to address five critical components of digital inclusion:

- Affordable and robust broadband internet access.
- Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user.
- Access to digital literacy training.
- Quality technical support.
- Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration.

FCDE released a Request for Proposals (RFP) in February, seeking a professional consultant to guide them through the necessary steps for the creation of a successful Digital Inclusion Plan (Plan). This will include research, data collection, community engagement, and recommendations that will shape the Plan and help implement sustainable policies, practices, and solutions to address the five critical components.

FCDE received several responses to the RFP and, after follow-up interviews, has contracted with A/R360 Consultants, LLC, a national, woman-owned consulting firm with experience in diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and broadband assessments. Funding to cover the project costs is available through grants from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust (\$25,000), Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation (\$25,000), and NC State University Institute of Emerging Issues (\$5,000).

Following the project kickoff, A/R360 and the FCDE Planning Committee are actively working on multiple tasks, with a projected completion and final delivery of the Digital Inclusion Plan by the end of May. Very soon, a webpage will be made available to the public for sharing FCDE information and progress on the Plan with the community, as well as for collecting community input.

FCDE will provide regular updates to the Mayor and City Council for the duration of the project and beyond, as intentions are that the Digital Inclusion Plan will be maintained as an on-going, living community document.