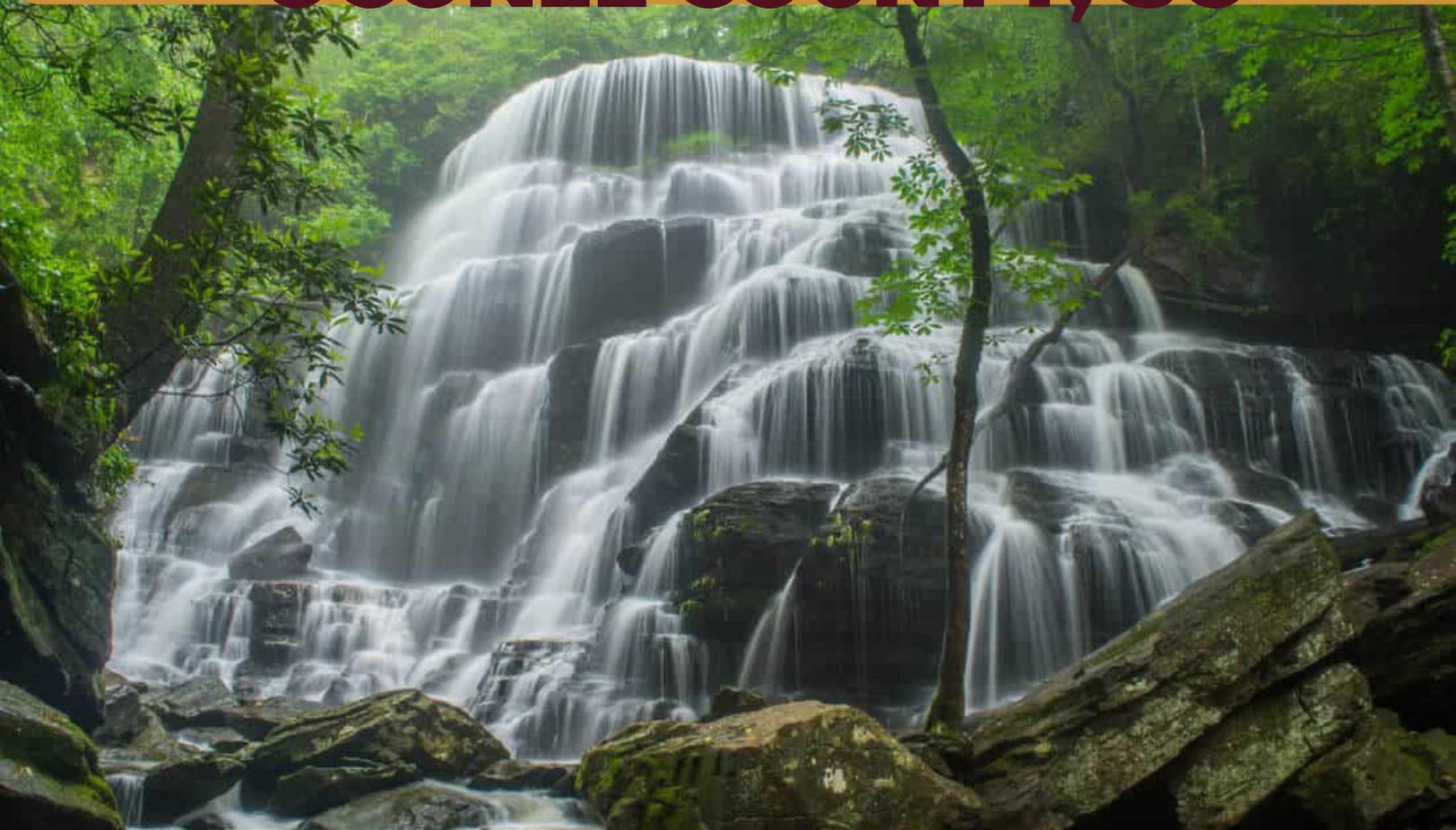


A ROADMAP FOR KICKSTARTING

**OUR
DIGITAL
ECONOMY
ECOSYSTEM
OCONEE COUNTY, SC**



JUNE 2024

**“REGARDLESS OF WHAT
FIELD YOU CHOOSE,
COMPUTER SKILLS WILL
PLAY A LARGE ROLE
IN HOW FAR YOU CAN
TRAVEL UPWARD IN ANY
ENDEAVOR.”**

Danny Edwards
RETIRED WALHALLA MAYOR

COVER PHOTO SOURCE
Visit Oconee, Yellow Branch Falls



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Oconee County at a Glance

POPULATION	78,607
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE	2.7%
RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS	6.7% Black/African American 85.2% White 5.72% Hispanic or Latino 2.2% Other Races
MEDIAN AGE	48.3 years
65 YEARS AND OLDER	24.7%
DISABLED POPULATION	16.8%
NUMBER OF HOUSING UNITS	40,788
HOME OWNERSHIP	74.4%
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	\$55,195
PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY	20.3%
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES	Education Healthcare Manufacturing
PRIMARY EMPLOYMENT	23% Education & Healthcare 17.6% Manufacturing 10.3% Construction
COMMUTERS TRAVELING INTO OCONEE COUNTY FOR WORK	10,155
COMMUTERS TRAVELING OUT OF OCONEE COUNTY FOR WORK	16,346
EDUCATION	30.2% High School Graduates 12.3% Associate's Degrees 17.4% Bachelor's Degrees 11.3% Graduate Degrees 15.3% Some College 28.7% Bachelor's Degrees or higher
HOUSEHOLDS WITH A COMPUTER	29,045 (2017–2021)
HOUSEHOLDS WITH BROADBAND INTERNET SUBSCRIPTION	79.40% (2017–2021)
BROADBAND COVERAGE	20.5% Underserved

SOURCES

United States Census 2020, American Community Survey 1 Year Estimates,
Census 2018 Commuting Patterns and Where Do County Workers Live,
SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, Ready.net

BROADBAND COVERAGE IN OCONEE COUNTY

Oconee County South Carolina Areas of Need March 31, 2023



Speed Tiers (download / upload)

- >= 100 Mbps / 100 Mbps (symmetric)
- >= 100 Mbps / 20 Mbps

Unserviced Housing Units

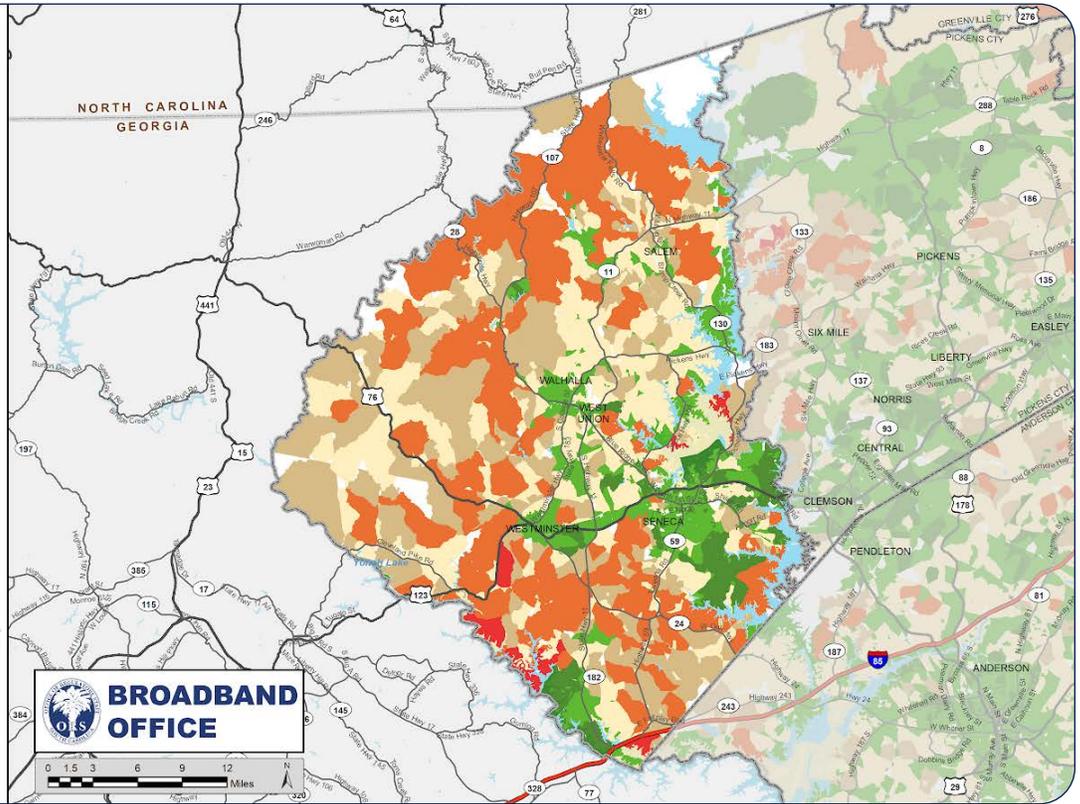
- 100 or More
- 26 - 99
- 11 - 25
- 1 - 10
- Zero

Data Sources: Based on SC Broadband Office (SCBBO) analysis of FCC Broadband Data Collection Dec. 31, 2022 submissions that were provided directly to our office by Internet Service Providers. In addition, SCBBO May 2023 Availability Challenge information has also been used to augment and update the base location data. Satellite and mobile broadband services are excluded. Outlook Speedtest Intelligence® data from Jan. 1, 2019 through Mar. 31, 2023 combined for analysis in the region.

The SC Broadband Office is neither responsible nor liable for damages or injuries caused by failure of performance, omission, inaccuracy, inaccessibility, incompleteness or any other errors in information or formatting on this map.

Additional broadband information may be found at www.sccollaborative.org. Submit comments or questions to maps@ons.sc.gov.

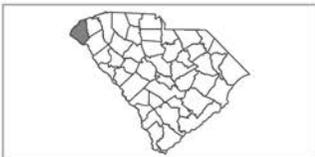
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BROADBAND OFFICE

0 1.5 3 6 9 12 Miles

Oconee County South Carolina Majority Best Available Technology March 31, 2023



Best Available Technology (type | speed)

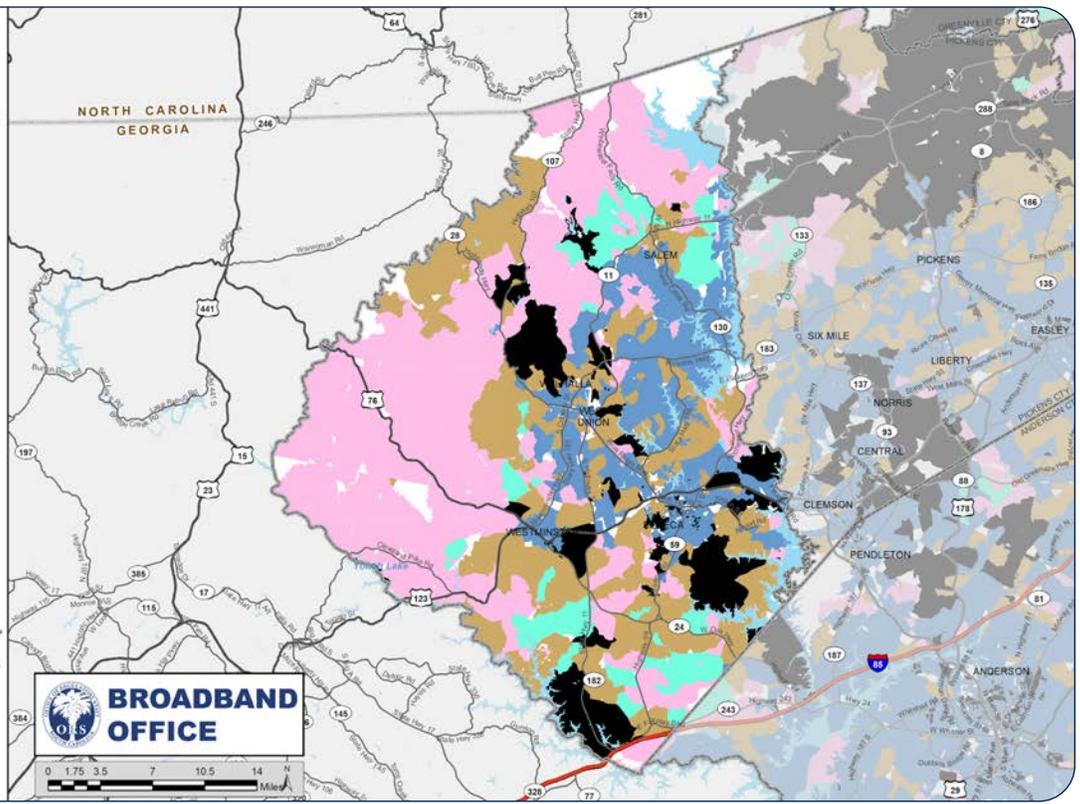
- Fiber | Speeds >= 100 Mbps/100 Mbps (symmetric)
- Cable (DOCSIS X.X) | Speeds >= 100 Mbps/20 Mbps
- xDSL | Speeds < 25 Mbps/3 Mbps
- Fixed Wireless | Speeds >= 10 Mbps/1 Mbps
- No Internet Service Available
- Zero Households

Data Sources: Based on SC Broadband Office (SCBBO) analysis of residential FCC Broadband Data Collection Dec. 31, 2022 submissions that were provided directly to our office by Internet Service Providers. In addition, SCBBO May 2023 Availability Challenge information has also been used to augment and update the base location data. Satellite and mobile broadband services are excluded. Outlook Speedtest Intelligence® data from Jan. 1, 2019 through Mar. 31, 2023 combined for analysis in the region.

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BROADBAND OFFICE

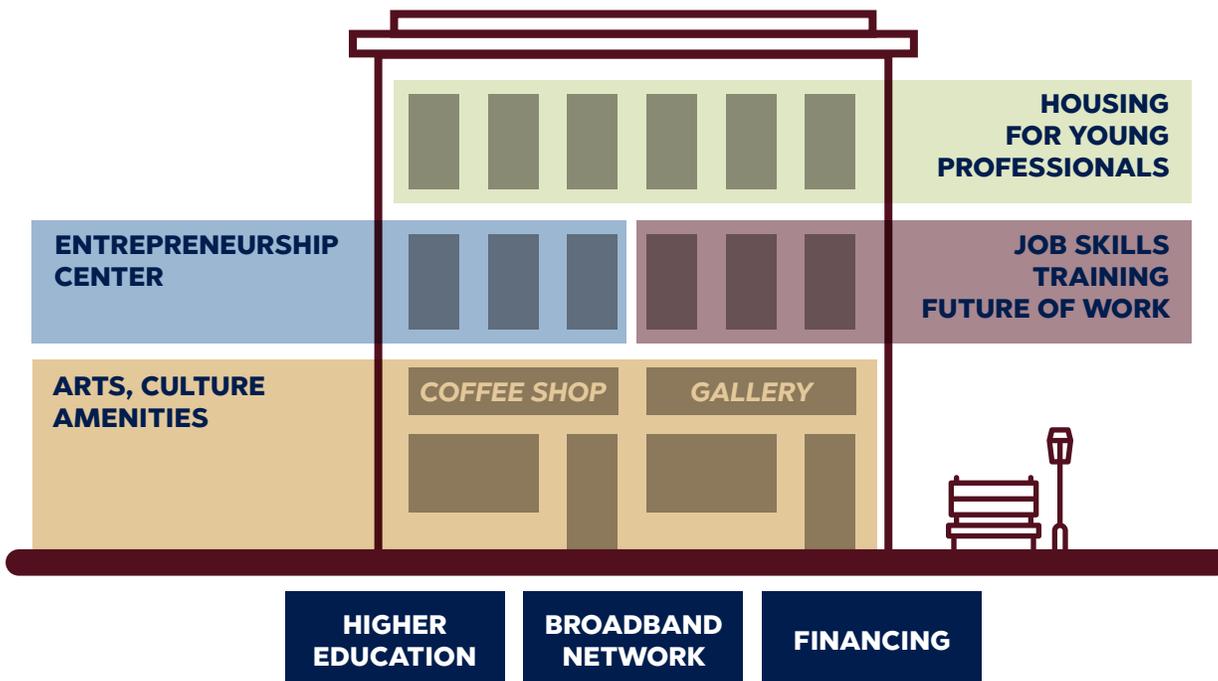
0 1.75 3.5 7 10.5 14 Miles

Defining A Digital Economy Ecosystem (DEE)

A Digital Economy Ecosystem is an interconnected network of people, programs, and structures working together to enable technology-based entrepreneurs, businesses, and individuals to thrive. It closes the digital equity gap, empowers economic and workforce development, strengthens the information infrastructure, and catalyzes technology, talent, and capital.

A DEE builds local wealth and sparks renewed interest in innovation in strategically engaged communities like Oconee County.

INNOVATION HUB



PRIMARY GOALS OF A DEE

- Improve digital literacy
- Increase digital skills
- Expand remote work opportunities
- Support digital/tech entrepreneurs
- Grow the digital skills of small business owners
- Expand the focus on workforce development

CRITICAL INGREDIENTS FOR DEVELOPING A DEE COMMUNITY

- High-speed internet
- Interest in diversifying the local economy
- Committed community leaders
- Engaged county, city, economic development, school district & chamber
- Proximity to tech schools and universities
- Attractive downtown & available buildings/space
- Recognized gaps in digital equity, knowledge & opportunities

Every community kickstarts its DEE revitalization process from a different starting point, using a formal Readiness Assessment as a guide. Community members explore strengths and weaknesses and focus on opportunities critical to achieving and sustaining success.

In doing this, Leading Opportunity Assets surface, igniting a strategic action plan framework for stimulating community buy-in, attracting funding/investors, and building momentum for a new economy and forward-thinking way of life.

DIGITAL SKILLS VERSUS TECHNICAL SKILLS

It's a known fact that rural residents are less likely than their urban counterparts to use a desktop, laptop, tablet, or phone. At the same time, a Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta report says over 92% of all jobs require digital skills. Yet, one-third of workers don't have the foundational skills to qualify.

Tech skills require expertise with specific tools and software, while digital skills focus on finding, evaluating, using, sharing, and creating content using digital devices. Cultivating a productive blend of both helps to position workers for jobs, careers, and salaries competitively.

Digital Skills

Use modern technology—laptops, tablets, and smartphones—to undertake everyday digital activities relevant to a job, such as data entry, graphic design, social media management, and administrative assistance.

Technical Skills

Design, build, and maintain computer hardware and software systems, such as web developers, cybersecurity specialists, and database administrators.

UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL ECONOMY JOBS

3M. Adobe. Airbnb. Autodesk. Citigroup. HubSpot. Amazon. Dell. CVS. Dropbox. Salesforce.

The digital economy is the financial output of the worldwide network of economic activities, commercial transactions, and professional interactions enabled by information and communications technologies. If you purchase groceries online, pay your water bill, or download a yoga app, you're participating in the digital economy.

While technology is making some jobs obsolete, many never-before-imagined professions continue to emerge, forcing companies of all sizes and types to change how they do business. This shift forces people to continue honing their skills to seek remote and flex-work digital employment opportunities.

In an April 2024 report, the Pew Research Center found that approximately 22 million employed U.S. adults work from home, just over one-third of all workers. Twenty-six percent of all U.S. households have at least one person working remotely at least one day per week.

According to the Greenville News, South Carolina's tech sector contributed more than \$12 billion to the state's economy in 2022, employing approximately 54,000 residents. iT-oLogy's 2023 Annual Report says the state's tech job growth rate is 3.2%, with 4,996 current open computing jobs with an average annual salary of \$77,383.

DIGITAL ECONOMY JOBS



WHAT ARE JOBS OF THE FUTURE?

Modern, tech-based occupations that upgrade, improve, and enhance certain aspects of society include travel, education, healthcare, housing, and agriculture. The evolving job market challenges us to continually learn new skills and embrace the future of work to ensure we stay cutting-edge and employable.



DIGITAL ECONOMY JOBS

- Digital Marketing Specialist
- Cloud Engineer
- Software Engineer
- Cybersecurity Analyst
- Virtual Assistant
- Website Designer
- Digital Content Developer
- Network Administrator
- Virtual Recruiter
- UX Designer



REMOTE WORK DIGITAL ECONOMY JOBS

- Bookkeeper
- Customer Service
- Data Entry Specialist
- Graphic Designer
- Medical Billing & Coding
- Search Specialist
- Social Media Manager
- Virtual Assistant



CRITICAL SKILLS FOR DIGITAL ECONOMY JOBS

- Digital literacy—passionate about technology; tech-savvy
- Strong written & oral communication skills
- Eagerness to learn new things & interested in current events
- Strong organization & time management skills
- Critical thinking, analysis & collaboration
- Problem-solving, team-playing, creative-thinking

ACKNOWLEDGING THE NEED FOR DEE ROADMAPS IN RURAL SOUTH CAROLINA

The Center on Rural Innovation (CORI), headquartered in Springfield, Vermont, launched in 2017 to address the dramatic opportunity gap between rural and urban communities. Since then, CORI has empowered rural communities to build thriving digital economies supporting scalable entrepreneurship and local tech job creation.

In 2018, South Carolina's Rural Innovation Network (SCRIN) invited CORI founder Matt Dunne to visit the Palmetto State to discuss utilizing CORI's model to build a statewide network of Digital Economy Ecosystem (DEE) communities. CORI gave SCRIN the green light.

In 2019, CORI partnered with Rural Innovation Strategies, Inc. (RISI), a taxable nonprofit, and CORI Innovation Fund (CIF), a seed fund, to deploy data-driven strategies and digital economy expertise to advance its rural equity and opportunity work and invest in early-stage companies. Today, nearly 40 DEE communities have formed across the U.S., not including the six originating in South Carolina or others in the pipeline.

By 2030, CORI wants 12% of the nation's digital jobs to match each rural region's race & gender demographics.

SOUTH CAROLINA'S GROWING DIGITAL ECONOMY SUCCESS

South Carolina's Rural Innovation Network (SCRIN) and the South Carolina Office of Rural Health (SCORH) joined forces in 2019 to close the digital equity gap, increase digital skills and jobs, and create healthier rural communities where individuals and families prosper. With financial support from USDA, the organizations assessed 20 prospects before selecting Barnwell and Williamsburg Counties as the state's inaugural DEE communities to develop custom Roadmaps to guide local transformation through economic and workforce development.

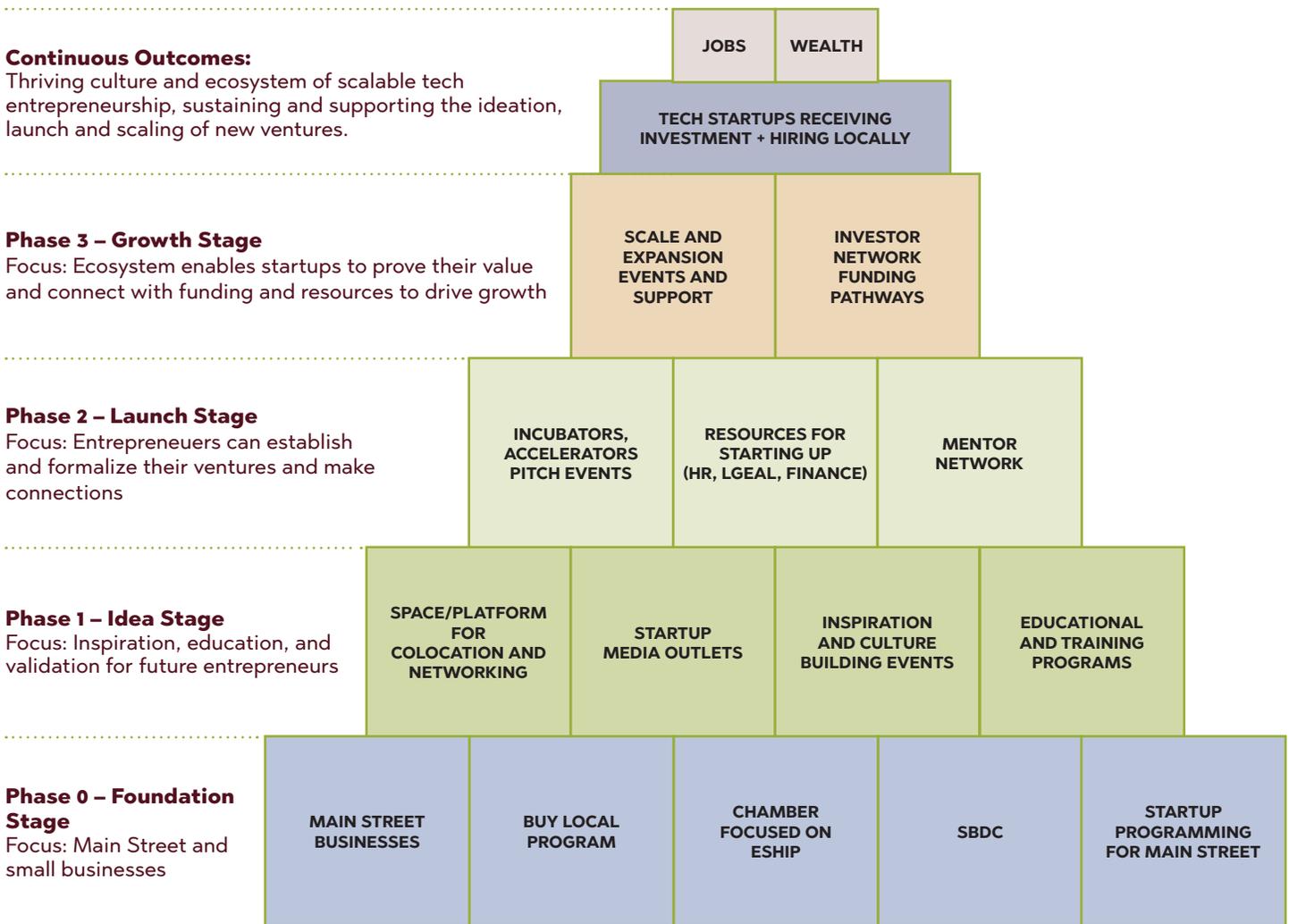
In each community, groups of 10–20 diverse thinkers and leaders converge to form what is known as a local "DEE Dream Team." The Dream Team meets regularly for 8–10 months to address the challenges and opportunities in building a digital economy and to create a custom Roadmap with an action plan for addressing local needs and goals. The Roadmaps encompass strategic projects designed to kickstart momentum for a sustainable ecosystem.

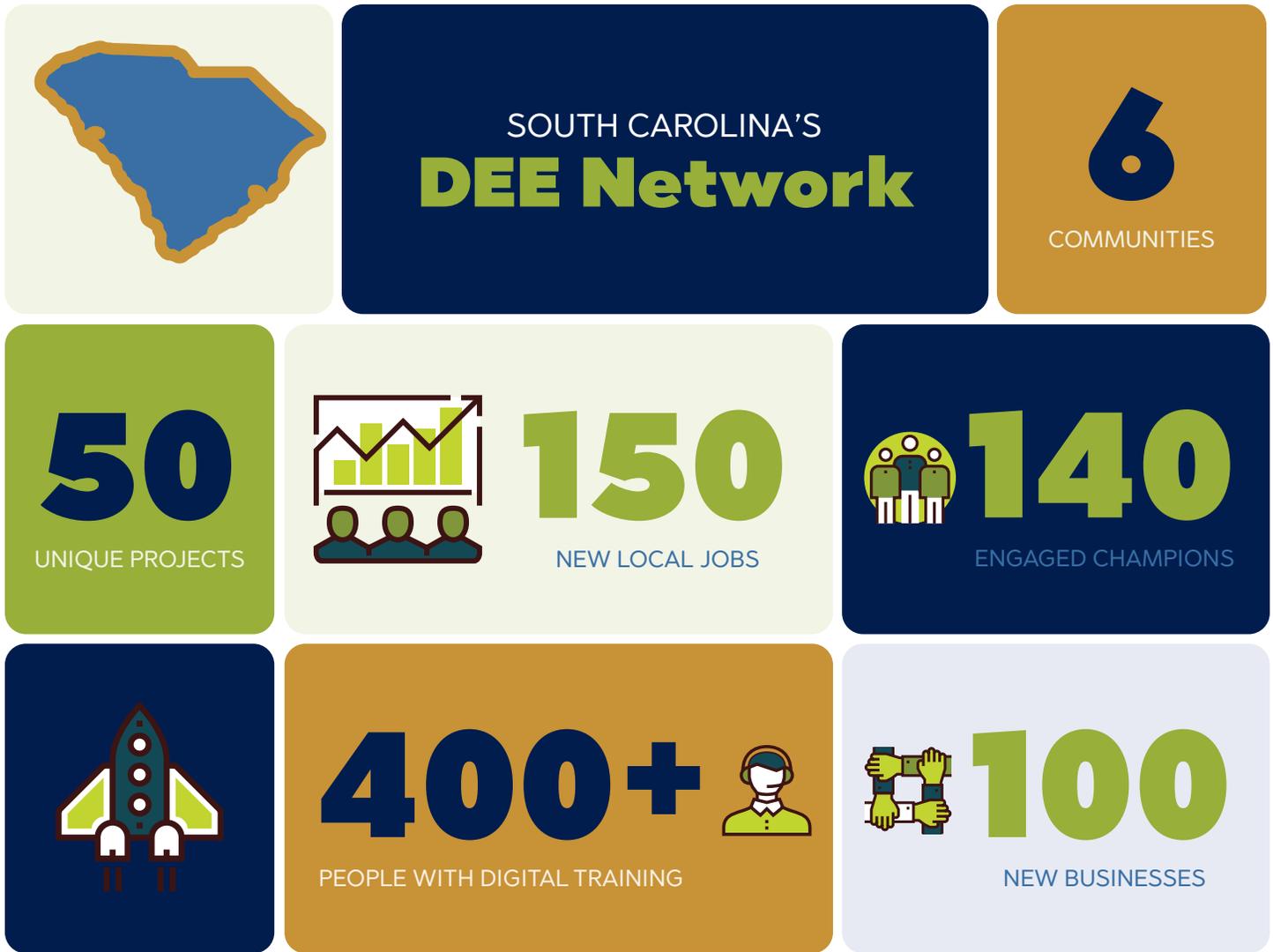
"In the age of the internet, there should be no limit to where tech jobs and innovation-based startups can thrive."

— **Matt Dunne**, CORI Founder

BUILDING BLOCKS OF A SCALABLE TECH ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEM

How can rural communities create and support local scalable tech startups? By providing targeted efforts at every stage of a startup's journey, communities can elevate their startup ecosystem by focusing on key assets and initiatives to support founders through all phases of growth and maturity. The Center On Rural Innovation is a nonprofit action tank working to advance economic prosperity in rural America through the creation of inclusive digital economy ecosystems that support entrepreneurship and job creation.





Barnwell County DEE Highlights

- The Palmetto Innovation Center: Co-Working, Training, and Entrepreneur Programs
- Just Co-Work in Williston
- Propel Business Lab, 12-week Business Accelerator, Creating 60 New Businesses as of June 2024
- Newly Certified Regional Women’s Business Center
- Adult Coding School with SC Codes
- Summer Tech Institute for High Schoolers

“The DEE Roadmap has been a crucial document for helping us shape the opportunities we provide our community and gives us a foundation from which we can continue to articulate our goals easily.”

— **Bob Snead**
PRESIDENT & CEO
Southern Palmetto Regional Chamber and Palmetto Innovation Center

Williamsburg County DEE Highlights

- Digital Lane Innovation, Co-Working & Training Center
- Hired an Executive Director & Recruiter/Career Coach
- New Smart Climate Program for Small Farmers
- Ongoing Digital Skills Training Classes
- New Aquaponics Program for High Schoolers
- New Farmers Market + Community Garden
- New Cybersecurity & eSports Offerings

“The DEE and the Digital Lane are creating opportunities that improve the lives of our citizens. It continues to be a catalyst for positive change in our community and a motivator for ongoing transformation.”

— **Charlie Fulton**
MAYOR
Lane, SC

Newberry County DEE Highlights

- SparkHive Innovation Center
- Digital Skills Training Classes
- Co-Working Program
- TechTalk Networking
- Entrepreneur Support
- Summer Tech Institute for Rising 8th-9th Graders

“We love where we live and want every resident to benefit from having the same opportunities as our neighbors in larger, more urban communities. We are committed to making our DEE a reality.”

— **Michelle Long**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Newberry County Chamber

Orangeburg County DEE Highlights

- Regional Innovation Center
- Digital Skills Training Classes
- Active Co-Working Program with 30 Members
- Apprentice Programs for High School & College Students
- Farmers Co-Op
- Smart Money Program & Equity Fund for Emerging Businesses

“The Orangeburg Regional Innovation Center was in its infancy when we were first introduced to the DEE initiative. It opened our minds to a new world and perspective to view and engage the digital economy. We continue to be excited about where it is leading us.”

— **Gary Robinson**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Orangeburg Regional Innovation Center

Greenwood County DEE Highlights

- SpinLab Innovation Center
- Tech Threads Networking Program
- Digital Skills Training Classes
- Entrepreneur Activities & Symposium
- Co-Working Memberships
- Workforce Development Partnerships

“This initiative required an all-hands-on-deck team effort that resulted in a one-team mindset demonstrated by every member of our Dream Team. When we succeed at bringing an innovation center and quality programming to our community, we will be extremely proud of the continued innovation that follows.”

— **Kay Self**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Vision Greenwood

Partnering for Prosperity in Oconee County: A Collaboration to Build a Digital Economy Ecosystem Roadmap



Developing a vibrant Digital Economy Ecosystem is critical to the future of Oconee County. A DEE will enhance the workforce, create local digital/tech jobs and remote work opportunities, and spark wealth creation through countywide efforts focused on entrepreneurship, innovation, small businesses, and technology startups.

In October 2023, the SC Office of Rural Health (SCORH), in partnership with the SC Rural Innovation Network (SCRIN), received support from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention to provide technical assistance to Oconee County for the development of a customized DEE Roadmap.

Collaboration among community leaders encompassed four crucial steps: 1) Understanding the availability and accessibility of high-speed internet; 2) Identifying leading foundational elements, direct drivers, and existing community assets; 3) Developing key strategies and action plans for digital/tech transformation; and 4) Building a visionary team of community champions to carry the Roadmap across the finish line and into an active implementation phase.

TIMELINE

November 2023 — Broadband Champion Training

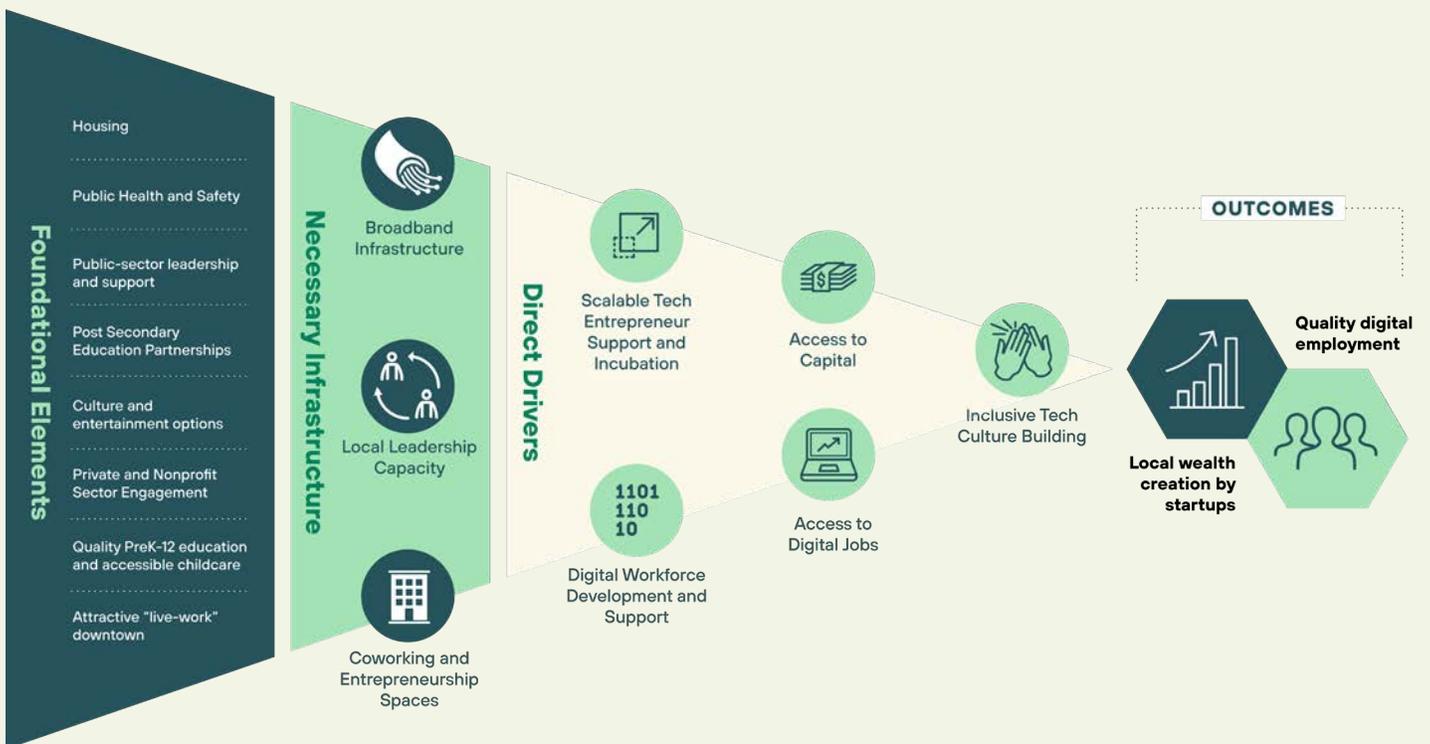
- Introducing community members to what’s available, accessible, and lacking in broadband connectivity

November 2023–March 2024 — Small Group Work Sessions

- Educating community members on the definition of a DEE and how a roadmap will guide the strategic framework and implementation for establishing a new ecosystem and economy
- Exposing members to active DEE communities and leaders in South Carolina and beyond
- Conducting a readiness assessment to evaluate current foundational elements and direct drivers
- Performing an asset mapping exercise to highlight community strengths and identify gaps
- Providing resources like videos, one-pagers, and guest speakers to educate, enlighten, and deepen engagement

April–June 2024 — Strategy Development & Creating an Action Plan

- Defining the challenge and opportunity
- Creating mission and vision statements
- Identifying the approach and focus areas
- Creating a team structure
- Outlining execution plans and KPIs
- Determining budgets and resources
- Explaining WHY Oconee County will ultimately achieve success



Leaders Committed to Driving Change: Our Digital Economy Ecosystem Dream Team

The Oconee County DEE Dream Team comprises 14 community champions. This committed group of visionary leaders represents an assortment of ages, backgrounds, occupations, skill sets, and life experiences working together to achieve a common goal.

During regular bi-monthly work sessions, the Dream Team collaborated to create a strategic Roadmap for kickstarting a new economy and establishing a highly productive ecosystem that develops, retains, and attracts digital/tech talent.

Cross-collaboration among municipalities, groups, individuals, and leaders is essential to Oconee's ecosystem success.

Dream Team Members

Lekesha Benson

Founder,
The NOLA Network + Seneca Council Member

Mark Bloomer

Director of Development Services,
City of Walhalla

Ruben Cantu

Executive Director,
Office of Inclusive Innovation and
Entrepreneurship, University of Texas at Austin

Ashley Dunston

Social Worker & MSW Candidate

Danny Edwards

Retired Walhalla Mayor

Dave Eldridge

Tri-County Entrepreneurial Development
Corporation

Tyler James

Project Manager,
Oconee Economic Alliance

Sarai Melendez

Bilingual Tax Preparer +
Walhalla Council Member

Nivia Miranda

Bilingual Facilitator, SDOC

Amber Mulkey

Director,
Tri-County Technical College, Oconee Campus

Tim Murakami

Technical Operations Manager/Site Labs +
Owner/Murtech MakerSpace

Allison Smith

United Way of Oconee County

Benny Smith

Small Business Development Center Manager

Lorilei Swanson

Upstate Regional Carolina
Family Engagement Center



“One of the best things about working to create a DEE for Oconee County has been the teamwork. We have come together as a team and accomplished a lot. We have helped each other during the process, and that makes the process especially rewarding. I know that we will be successful because of our incredible teamwork.”

— **Mark Bloomer**, DEE Dream Team

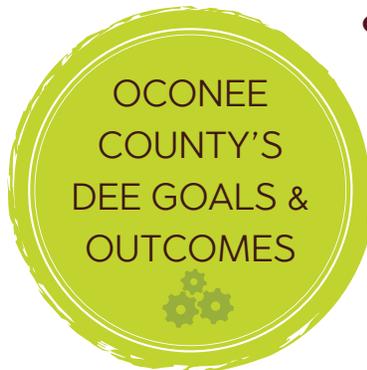
THE DEE DIFFERENCE

Optimized Workforce + Economic Development

Increased Number of Remote Workers

Co-Working Space(s)

Entrepreneur Support + Access to Capital



Increased Number of Digitally Skilled Workers

Emphasis on Tech Company Startups

Dedicated Talent Pipeline

Improved Digital Literacy

A New & Inclusive Conversation Around the Future of Work

Roadmap Kickoff: Assessing Our Readiness and Mapping Our Community's Assets

When it comes to kickstarting a digital economy, some communities have more of what it takes than others—those necessary ingredients like a stable economy, local champions, and readily available, easily accessible high-speed internet.

We evaluated Oconee County's existing Foundational Elements and Direct Drivers to assess the community's readiness for DEE transformation. This exercise guided the Dream Team in prioritizing opportunities to build momentum where digital opportunity gaps were prevalent.

Seven Foundational Elements for Building a DEE

1. Attractive Live-Work Downtown
2. Culture & Entertainment Options
3. Quality K-12 Education with STEM Skill Emphasis
4. Broadband Infrastructure
5. Public Safety,
6. Community Leadership & Engagement
7. Public Sector Leadership and Support

Five Direct Drivers for Growing a DEE

1. Digital Workforce Development & Support
2. Access to Digital Jobs
3. Entrepreneur Support & Incubation
4. Access to Capital
5. Co-Working, Networking and Social Spaces

For Oconee County to develop, maximize, and benefit from the Roadmap's full impact, the team determined the Foundational Elements that could best enable the Direct Drivers with the highest potential. Through a series of Q&A sessions, worksheets, and group discussions, we narrowed the scope of readiness to concentrate on assets best suited as a starting point for local strategy development.

A READINESS ASSESSMENT OF FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS

Certain critical elements within a community, such as public safety, education, broadband, and culture, enable a digital economy ecosystem to thrive. As such, we evaluated the seven primary Foundational Elements critical to building a new economy and ecosystem. We ranked them in order of their capacity to accelerate our goals.

Oconee County's Top Three Foundational Elements are Public Safety, Public Sector Leadership, and Culture and Entertainment options.

A READINESS ASSESSMENT OF DIRECT DRIVERS

Direct Drivers enable communities to compete in a digital economy by building local capacity and successfully providing access to training, jobs, networking, and business support.

We evaluated the five primary Direct Drivers critical to creating a DEE and ranked them in order of opportunity to grow, accelerate, and aid the master plan.

Oconee County's Top Two Direct Drivers are Entrepreneur Support & Incubation and Co-Working, Networking, and Social Spaces.

Asset Mapping Our Strengths

Across the U.S., rural communities are planning and implementing innovation and economic development strategies, leveraging their strengths to create digital economies and chart new paths to prosperity.

Because evaluating critical assets motivates communities to acknowledge existing capabilities and competitive advantages, we utilized Asset Mapping to prioritize short and long-term goals and create strategic Roadmap projects with considerable potential for lasting impact.

We evaluated eight asset categories and identified three concentration clusters to compile our Asset Map Highlights and determine Leading Opportunity Assets.

We evaluated 1) Educational and Training Programs, 2) Physical Spaces, 3) Cultural Assets, 4) Economic Assets, 5) People Assets, 6) Policy Levers, 7) Philanthropic and Funding Sources, 8) Social Institutions/Civic Groups.

Our Concentration Clusters include:

Leading Education Assets

Clemson University, Tri-County Technical College, OCSD + 19 K-12 Schools + Adult Ed + Vocational Rehab, Hamilton Career & Technology Center, Small Business Development Center, SCORE, SCWorks, BRIEF

Leading Cultural Assets

Festivals, Performing Arts Centers, 20 Waterfalls, 90,000 Acres of Forest, 4 Lakes, 2 Rivers, Trails, Mountain Bike Park, Clemson University Sports

Leading Enrichment Assets

Committed Group of Community Champions, Oconee Economic Alliance, Oconee Regional Airport, Oconee Chamber + Main Street Programs, Tri-County Entrepreneurial Development Corporation (TCEDC), Blue Ridge Community Center, Visit Oconee, United Way, Library System

Identifying Leading Opportunity Assets

We identified eight Leading Opportunity Assets to leverage in building our DEE strategies and action plan. A successful launch depends on access to broad support, talent, ideas, and our community's commitment to change. These assets represent valuable advantages already in motion across our county.

- Healthcare + Oconee Memorial Hospital
- 60 Manufacturing Companies + 6700 Employees
- Tri-County Technical College, Oconee Campus
- Outdoor Adventure + Visit Oconee Recreation & Tourism
- Oconee Economic Alliance + Tri-County Entrepreneurial Development Corp.
- Blue Ridge Community Center
- Upcountry Fiber
- Proximity to Larger Tech Cities & Hubs

ASSET MAP HIGHLIGHTS



CONCENTRATIONS

Healthcare
Advanced Manufacturing
BioScience, Energy, Automotive, Distribution
Education
Small Business
Adventure + Recreation + Tourism



LEADING OPPORTUNITY

Healthcare + Oconee Memorial Hospital
Manufacturing + 60 Companies + 6,700 Employees
TCTC Oconee Campus
Outdoor Adventure + Visit Oconee Recreation & Tourism
Blue Ridge Community Center
Oconee Economic Alliance
Proximity to Large Tech Cities/Hubs
Upcountry Fiber



EDUCATION

Clemson University
Tri-County Technical College
OCSD + 19 K12 Schools + Adult Ed + Voc Rehab
Hamilton Career Technology Center
Small Biz Development Center
SCORE + SCWorks + BRIEF



CULTURAL

Festivals + Performing Arts Centers
29 Waterfalls + 90,000 Acres of Forest
Trails + 4 Lakes + 2 Rivers
Mountain Bike Park
Clemson Sports



ENRICHMENT

Committed Group of Community Champions
Oconee Regional Airport
Oconee Chamber + Main Street Programs
Think Oconee + United Way + Library
Oconee Economic Alliance + TCEDC + Blue Ridge Community Center

Developing a Digital Economy Ecosystem: Action Planning

Community efforts toward building a digital and innovation-based economy require skilled project management, open communication lines, and an action-tracking system with regular progress reports.

ACTION PLAN STRUCTURE

KEY THEMES, FOCUS AREAS, DESCRIPTIONS

Digital/Tech-Skilled Workforce · Innovation-Based Local and Remote Work Jobs · Digital/Tech Support for Emerging Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses · Establishing an Innovation Center with Co-Working, Training, and Satellite Locations Across the County

TEAM MEMBERS, ROLES/ASSIGNED FOCUS AREAS, PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Innovation Center – **Lekesha Benson**
Digital Skills Training – **Tim Murakami, Amber Mulkey, Mark Bloomer**
Communications Plan – **Nivia Miranda**
Co-Working Program – **Nivia Miranda**
Support for Digital/Tech Entrepreneurs – **Sarai Melendez, Ruben Cantu, Nivia Miranda**
Digital Marketing Support for Small Businesses – **Sarai Melendez**
Cybersecurity Training – **Mark Bloomer, Tim Murakami, Tyler James, Amber Mulkey**
Networking Programs – **Lekesha Benson, Tim Murakami**
Digital Talent Pipeline – **Nivia Miranda, Lorilei Swanson, Ashley Dunston**
Data Gathering – **Lorilei Swanson**

ACTION STEPS, DUE DATES, OBJECTIVES, NOTES

Outlined in the Completed Roadmap

PHASE ONE

GET ORGANIZED

Prioritize securing an HQ for our innovation center, plus satellite locations
Prioritize developing a digital skill training calendar & recruiting facilitators
Prioritize surveying the community regarding digital skilling interests

BUILD OUT ACTION PLAN

Roadmap Distribution
Community Presentations
Fundraising
Program Launches

ASSIGN ROLES, ACTIONS & DEADLINES

Recruit volunteers to support implementation
Partner with the county and municipalities
Build out a team, board of directors, and inaugural sponsors

PHASE TWO

Continue implementing programs
Continue building staff and volunteers
Increase marketing and visibility
Monitor progress and evaluate outcomes

EXPLORATION & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Develop a pitch deck
Present to local groups and potential partners and funders
Explore new avenues to capital

Bridging the Digital Gap: Defining Our Problem and Solution

To define our problem and solution, we pinpointed unnecessary gaps preventing us from growth by zeroing in on our strengths and weaknesses. We clarified our goals and aspirations for WHY we are embarking on this charge for change. Working collaboratively, we compiled the community's barriers into a singular, overarching challenge and devised a worthwhile solution for guiding the creation and implementation of our action plan.

Our Problem

Oconee County is rich in manufacturing and tourism, has a robust education system, and has many reasons to call it home. However, we lack accessible opportunities to advance our skills and build quality careers in digital/tech industries. We must create compelling reasons for people to stay, return, or choose Oconee County.

Our Solution

For Oconee County residents to develop and sustain a prosperous community, we must create a robust digital economy ecosystem built on access to ideas, training, and resources in emerging job sectors while providing increased entrepreneurial/startup support and capital. To grow, we must ignite our innovative spirit.

“The DEE Roadmap project will strengthen the digital economy in Oconee County. Our action steps will utilize enhanced technology to support initiatives that address health, education, and workforce inequities for diverse individuals and families. The DEE initiative will enhance the ability of families, schools, and communities to support improved educational outcomes and workforce opportunities for all.”

— **Lorilei Swanson**, PhD, LMFT, LPC, Dream Team Member

Creating Strategy: Developing Our Vision and Mission

The successful development of workforce talent, quality digital employment, and wealth creation through local entrepreneurship characterizes a thriving digital economy.

Despite external barriers to creating DEE success, such as access to tech talent and capital, we are committed to eliminating internal obstacles as well, like fear of change, lack of understanding or awareness of opportunities, perceived competition, organizations working in silos, and poor communication.

Referencing the mantra “Creating jobs and careers you can be proud of in a community that you love,” we recognize the significance of building a culture that will grow and support a DEE. It’s why we strive for inclusivity, resource development, and a countywide communications plan that keeps residents interested, informed, and engaged.

Vision Statement

To be a recognized innovation and collaboration digital economy hub by fostering a culture of inclusive, constructive dialogue and creative, place-based digital and tech solutions. We will provide tools and resources to anyone with a dream and raise the quality of life for all residents of Oconee County.

Mission Statement

To be a haven for meaningful work and healthy rural living by cultivating a thriving workforce that can adapt to challenges and opportunities by leveraging new technologies and facilitating accessible, equitable, and affordable chances for advancement, growth, and prosperity in the digital/tech economy.

“Working on the Roadmap has broadened my understanding of the current state of our county and opened my eyes to the strategic significance of increasing access to technology in an equitable and responsible way. With the recent rapid growth in Oconee County, we are approaching a critical juncture in its development where our efforts may long echo into history.”

— **Tim Murakami**, DEE Dream Team

OCONEE COUNTY

Developing A Digital Economy Ecosystem: Strategy Development

A shared vision and key concepts comprising a community's strategy document are the driving forces behind developing a tech-skilled workforce, promoting innovation-based jobs, energizing entrepreneurship, and establishing an ecosystem that attracts positive attention, investment, and momentum.

VISION

To be a recognized innovation and collaboration digital economy hub by fostering a culture of inclusive, constructive dialogue and creative, place-based digital and tech solutions. We will provide tools and resources to anyone with a dream and raise the quality of life for all residents of Oconee County.

MISSION

To be a haven for meaningful work and healthy rural living by cultivating a thriving workforce that can adapt to challenges and opportunities by leveraging new technologies and facilitating accessible, equitable, and affordable chances for advancement, growth, and prosperity in the digital/tech economy.

CHALLENGE & OPPORTUNITY

OUR CHALLENGE: We lack accessible opportunities to advance our skills and build quality careers in digital/tech industries.

OUR SOLUTION: We must create a robust digital economy ecosystem built on access to ideas, training and resources in emerging job sectors while providing increased entrepreneurial/startup support and capital.

APPROACH

Our Focus Areas: Cohesive Structure + Center of Gravity + Leadership & Sustainability + Workforce & Talent Development + Communication & Connectivity

TEAM

The OC Dream Team will recruit additional team members and volunteers, work with the county and municipalities to implement strategies, and increase awareness countywide. Eventually, we will hire a full-time staff.

EXECUTION PLAN

We will execute ten strategic projects over the next 12 months with help from team members, volunteers, and support from the county and municipalities. Each project has its own implementation plan, goals, and measurements.

SUCCESS METRICS

Each of our ten strategic projects has KPIs to measure progress and impact.

RESOURCES/BUDGET

Implementing ten strategic projects is estimated to cost around \$600,000 in year one.

CONCLUSION

Without access to modern skilling opportunities and the development of a robust ecosystem, Oconee County will continue falling further behind in population growth, talent retention, talent attraction, and innovation. Our Roadmap provides a comprehensive solution to this challenge.

Creating Focus Areas: Developing Core Strategies

With well-defined problem and solution statements to explain the critical gaps facing our community and vision and mission statements to frame our aspirations, we took strategy development to a higher level by narrowing our scope of concentration clusters and primary focus areas for Roadmap strategy development.

Our Focus Areas represent themes for short-term priority projects that we will begin implementing as soon as possible. As other projects emerge, they will become part of our core Roadmap structure.

We established Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each Focus Area to evaluate our progress in implementing and operating our DEE efficiently and effectively.

Cohesive Structure

Harnessing and aligning existing and new initiatives to create a connected, cohesive approach to building a successful DEE while leveraging our high-speed broadband capabilities.

KPIs: Organizational and operational structure; Qualified and effective leadership team; Network of community partners and supporters; Number of programs we offer & the number of participants benefitting; Number of training opportunities we make available; Number of jobs filled or created; Number of new businesses; Consistent countywide communication

Center(s) of Gravity

Creating a primary center of gravity with other spaces and/or satellite locations that signify action, innovation, and movement toward establishing an inclusive DEE with opportunities to participate, benefit, lead, and succeed.

KPIs: Secure a headquarters for the DEE Initiative, plus satellite locations throughout the County; Be operational, effective & sustainable; Provide a variety of training courses, programs, and events; Evaluate the effectiveness of each; Assess community visibility & media mentions

Leadership & Sustainability

Establishing quality leadership to sustain the DEE initiative through fundraising, grant writing, special events, networking, and other diverse revenue streams, such as memberships, rentals, and unique programs.

KPIs: Hiring a qualified and talented leader; Amount of dollars raised and earned; Number of successful partnerships & collaborations; Community engagement & DEE ambassadors

Talent Pipeline, Digital Training & Innovation Culture

Creating education initiatives that expose the talent pipeline to DEE skills and careers, training initiatives that prepare our ready-to-work population for local and remote jobs, innovation initiatives that help small businesses grow with the help of digital tools, and encouraging an expanding entrepreneurial culture.

KPIs: Number of programs; Number of participants; Number of people trained; Number of jobs secured; Number of new businesses; Number of existing companies helped; Countywide reach

Communication & Connectivity

Developing strategies for sharing news, information, opportunities, and successes across various platforms, including email, social media, website, word-of-mouth, public relations, and print assets like flyers and posters.

KPIs: Number of posts & followers; Number of emails opens; Number of website visits and clicks; Number of participants via print assets; Number of media mentions; Number of survey takers and responses

Creating Action Groups: Developing a Successful Leadership Model

Oconee County's leadership team identified 10 strategic projects with descriptions, budgets, and action plans using our Focus Areas and Asset Concentration Clusters as a guide. We aim to grow each Action Group with new members from outside the DEE Dream Team to continue enhancing our Roadmap with fresh perspectives, energy, and programs while expanding visibility and buy-in. Every strategic project has an Action Group Leader or Leaders who will steer implementation and communication until our initiative has funding for a full-time staff.

Our Action Groups

Cohesive Structure & Framework: The Comprehensive DEE Initiative

Group Leader: Lekesha Benson + Nivia Miranda

Center(s) of Gravity: The Innovation Center + Satellite Locations

Group Leader: Lekesha Benson

Leadership & Sustainability: Staffing + Operations + Budgeting

Group Leader: Lekesha Benson + Nivia Miranda

Talent Pipeline, Digital Training & Innovation Culture

Ready-to-Work Adults

Ready-to-Learn Youth

Entrepreneurs & Small Businesses

Group Leaders: Tim Murakami, Mark Bloomer, Sarai Melendez, Ruben Cantu, Amber Mulkey, Ashley Dunston, Nivia Miranda, Lekesha Benson, Tyler James, Lorilei Swanson, Allison Smith

Communication & Connectivity: Ensuring Digital/Tech Opportunities are Inclusive and Well-Communicated Countywide

Group Leader: Nivia Miranda

Our DEE Roadmap: Kickstarting Our Digital Economy

Ten strategic projects with an estimated budget of \$590,215 comprise Oconee County's DEE Roadmap, a custom blueprint for advancing economic and workforce development by implementing a digital/tech-based ecosystem to transform county culture and prosperity.

The Roadmap is a guide for leveraging existing assets, closing digital equity gaps, and expanding opportunities for Oconee County residents. A living document, the Roadmap will continue to grow and evolve, adding new projects and goals as necessary.



1. CREATE A DEE CENTER OF GRAVITY: AN INNOVATION, TRAINING & CO-WORKING CENTER

Focus Area

Center of Gravity + Cohesive Structure

Concentration Cluster

Operations + Education

Description

Innovate Oconee is a dynamic community resource for advancing digital/tech-based economic and workforce development and strengthening the local economy beyond traditional industries. It will be the go-to hub for acquiring future-ready skills, opening doors to new job and career opportunities, supporting the technology needs of small and emerging businesses, preparing and attracting tech entrepreneurs, and building a localized ecosystem that drives the economy and generates modern prosperity. The Center will have satellite training locations throughout the county.

Action Group Leader

Lekesha Benson

Resources Needed

Funding, Location, Leadership, Technology, Software, Equipment, Furnishing, Member Access System, Facilitators, Staffing, Signage, Marketing

Timeline

6–12 Months

KPIs

Number of supporters, sponsors, co-working members, offerings, events, courses, participants, new jobs, saved jobs, new businesses, remote workers, course feedback, public engagement and visibility, revenue growth and retention rate

Action Steps

Confirm HQ location + satellite locations, establish partner agreements, build financial pro forma and sustainability plan, secure funding and sponsors, create job descriptions, hire team, determine course offering menu and calendar, recruit facilitators, create a pitch deck, schedule networking events, launch marketing and PR

Budget

\$590,215

(this represents the operating budget for the DEE and all 10 strategic projects)

2. CREATE DIGITAL/TECH SKILLS TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW, ADVANCE & ATTRACT TALENT

Focus Area

Digital Training & Innovation Culture

Concentration Cluster

Workforce Development

Description

Design and implement a program to fill the gaps in digital skills training to build a capable, innovative workforce that grows local prosperity, attracts more tech talent and eventually attracts tech companies.

Action Group Leaders

Tim Murakami, Amber Mulkey, Mark Bloomer

Resources Needed

Training facilities, satellite locations + partnerships, marketing support, and funding for technology, facilitators, evaluation tools, curriculum development, Zoom, Coursera, and equipment

Timeline

3–12 Months

KPIs

Number of programs offered, participants trained, course interests, employment rate of trained participants, reviews and feedback, industry partners and sponsors

Action Steps

Survey the community for interests, promote the opportunities via special event gatherings, print, and digital marketing, develop curriculum using free or paid online resources, recruit instructors and facilitators, develop custom train-the-trainer content, evaluate, iterate, and improve

Budget

\$96,918

3. CREATE A COUNTYWIDE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR SHARING INFORMATION ACROSS ALL COMMUNITIES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Focus Area

Communication & Connectivity

Concentration Cluster

Communications

Description

Create a robust communications plan that shares the story of the DEE Initiative and outlines opportunities and benefits for community members. Our plan will communicate the facts while engaging our audiences with compelling content via various platforms and channels, such as a website, social media, newsletter, and public launch events with pitch decks, pop-up signs, rack cards, program flyers, ads, swag, and word-of-mouth strategies.

Action Group Leader

Nivia Miranda

Resources Needed

Brand identity with logo, fonts, and color guidelines, funding for creating digital and print assets, content development, graphic design, and a social media manager

Timeline

3–6 Months

KPIs

Number of email signups, website visits, social media followers, reach + conversions, public presentations, inquiries, and news mentions and features

Action Steps

Recruit volunteers to serve as the communications team, develop a brand identity, voice, and personality, create content, build a website, launch social media, launch newsletter, create a pitch deck, schedule public events and presentations

Budget

\$22,120

4. CREATE A ROBUST CO-WORKING PROGRAM WITH AN HQ AND SATELLITE LOCATIONS, PLUS MEMBERSHIPS, ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Focus Area

Center of Gravity & Innovation Culture

Concentration Cluster

Entrepreneurs + Remote Workers

Description

Create a robust and inclusive coworking program with a central headquarters and satellite locations where remote workers, entrepreneurs, and visiting professionals can secure a desk or office for a day, month, or year, depending on space and availability.

Action Group Leader

Nivia Miranda

Resources Needed

Funding for technology, equipment, furnishings, member access system, signage, hospitality center with refreshments, special activities, organized programs, and marketing

Timeline

6–12 Months

KPIs

Number of members, sponsors, programs, events, active participants, revenue, retention, media mentions, testimonials

Action Steps

Research other co-working spaces, develop a membership program + revenue model, create a sponsorship program, develop core program offerings, develop a marketing plan, secure necessary furnishings, technology, and systems, launch marketing & PR

Budget

\$97,960

5. CREATE A CUSTOM PROGRAM TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE LOCAL DIGITAL AND TECH ENTREPRENEURS

Focus Area

Innovation Culture

Concentration Cluster

Entrepreneurism

Description

The Tech Entrepreneur Incubator will foster innovation and business acumen among residents in the tech sector. It will target budding entrepreneurs, students considering tech careers, and professionals seeking to pivot into tech-oriented businesses. Opportunities include two-day boot camps, four-week prototyping, launching new venture courses, digital marketing courses, fundraising and entity formation courses, professional development, a final showcase, mentors, panels, site visits, toolkits, and more.

Action Group Leaders

Sarai Melendez + Nivia Miranda + Ruben Cantu

Resources Needed

Partners, Venues, Technology & Funding

Timeline

Phase 1–3 Months; Phase 2–6 Months; Phase 3–12 Months

KPIs

Number of participants and satisfaction ratings, number of startups launched, funds raised by program graduates, engagement levels in follow-up events and advanced workshops

Action Steps

Identify partners, collaborate with tech experts on curriculum, marketing, logistics, program launch, monitor progress

Budget

\$155,232

6. CREATE DIGITAL/TECH MARKETING TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS

Focus Area

Digital Training & Innovation Culture

Concentration Cluster

Small Business Growth

Description

Create a collection of hands-on training programs to support digital/tech marketing skill development of small business owners, emphasizing websites, social media, print collateral, and marketing plan development and strategies

Action Group Leader

Sarai Melendez

Resources Needed

Technology, Equipment, Trainers/Facilitators, Sponsors, Marketing

Timeline

6–12 Months

KPIs

Money raised, number of programs, number of participants, outcomes, visibility

Action Steps

Research similar offerings, develop a course list, recruit facilitators and trainers, purchase technology and equipment, market and evaluate

Budget

\$41,661

7. CREATE A CYBERSECURITY PROGRAM TO SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACROSS ALL INDUSTRIES

Focus Area

Digital Training

Concentration Cluster

Workforce Development

Description

This program provides residents with an opportunity to develop the skills to pursue a career in cybersecurity. It aims to support individuals new to the workforce and those seeking a job or career change.

Action Group Leaders

Mark Bloomer + Tim Murakami + Tyler James + Amber Mulkey

Resources Needed

Partners, training locations, instructors to teach in both English and Spanish, technology, stipends, software, and individuals to help promote the opportunity in different languages

Timeline

12 Months

KPIs

Number of participants, course feedback, number of people exposed to the opportunity, number of people pursuing cybersecurity jobs and careers, number of people securing jobs, partnership effectiveness

Action Steps

Network for partners, develop curriculum, seek input from professionals, secure training locations, schedule classes, market and recruit

Budget

\$55,936

8. CREATE NETWORKING PROGRAMS TO BUILD AND SUPPORT A DIGITAL/TECH COMMUNITY AND TECH ENTREPRENEUR COMMUNITY

Focus Area

Innovation Culture

Concentration Cluster

Educate & Collaborate

Description

Create engaging networking programs for digital/tech workers, entrepreneurs, and those who want to learn more. Our monthly programs will feature guest speakers, interactive experiences, and support/resources for residents eager to change jobs and careers.

Action Group Leaders

Lekesha Benson + Tim Murakami

Resources Needed

Funding for refreshments, marketing, resources, and guest speaker stipends

Timeline

6–12 Months

KPIs

On-time launch, number of sponsors, events, and participants, and program evaluations

Action Steps

Develop a program name, recruit sponsors, recruit guest speakers, develop a program calendar, develop resources, and market countywide

Budget

\$4,545

9. CREATE A DIGITAL/TECH TALENT PIPELINE WITH SUMMER EXPERIENCES TO ENGAGE & INSPIRE

Focus Area

Talent Pipeline

Concentration Cluster

Education

Description

Partner with the Hamilton Career & Technology Center and the Oconee County School District to develop and deliver summer camp experiences for rising 7-9th graders to increase awareness and exposure to digital/tech jobs, careers, and learning opportunities.

Action Group Leaders

Nivia Miranda + Lorilei Swanson + Ashley Dunston

Resources Needed

Curriculum, teachers, equipment, technology, sponsors, marketing

Timeline

12 Months

KPIs

On-time launch, sponsorships secured, number of participants, program evaluations and feedback, visibility, repeat campers

Action Steps

Meet and collaborate with the career center, research similar programs, set year 1–3 goals, build a timeline, develop curriculum, recruit sponsors, market and promote

Budget

\$5,740

10. CREATE A SYSTEM FOR GATHERING DIGITAL/TECH INTERESTS, ACCOMPLISHMENTS & EVALUATIONS

Focus Area

Communication & Connectivity

Concentration Cluster

Data Gathering

Description

This project commits to regularly surveying community members about their technology needs and interests. We aim to stay connected, communicate our findings consistently, and plan for ongoing data collection processes.

Action Group Leaders

Lorilei Swanson + Tim Murakami + Sarai Melendez

Resources Needed

Survey Monkey software, listserv, refreshments, gift cards, translation interpretation assistance, funding to support ongoing data collection

Timeline

Fall 2024 Kick-Off

KPIs

Number of people surveyed, number of responses, number of one-on-one interviews, number of listening sessions and attendees

Action Steps

Identify target audiences, develop interview questions, identify a diverse group of 10-15 individuals to interview, obtain translation and interpretation services, plan and host listening sessions

Budget

\$1,900

Launching with Confidence: Securing Funding to Support Our DEE Dream

Following eight months of Roadmap development comes the uphill climb of establishing buy-in throughout the county and fundraising. In addition to seeking financial support, we will draw on other capital assets, including intellectual, social, cultural, natural, built, and political, to ensure the successful launch of each project.

Over time, we develop a capital stack comprising some combination of equity, debt, credit enhancement, and grants or subsidies. Until then, our priorities include gaining county and municipal support, followed by inaugural sponsors and members.

We will seek startup funding and ongoing financial investments via:

Local Funding

County, Municipalities, Community Foundations, Hospitality Tax Revenue, Tax Credits, In-Kind Support

Capital + Technical Assistance

Community Development Financial Institutions, Small Business Association

Grants

USDA, USEDA, National Realtors Association, SC Department of Commerce, SC Department of Digital Opportunity, Invest Appalachia, T-Mobile, PowerED

People

Sponsors, Investors, Partnerships, Members

Our Formula for Success: The *Why* Behind Our DEE Roadmap



“We will achieve our DEE goals because we are committed advocates for change, passionate about advancing our county and providing its citizens with inclusive access to digital and tech economy opportunities. Our DEE will create a culture of innovation and education that fuels individual and business growth and elevates our economy and way of life.”

— **Oconee County Dream Team**





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