



**Project Title:** Creating Rural Economic Development Opportunities through Broadband Adoption  
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The Information Use Management & Policy Institute (Information Institute, <http://ii.fsu.edu/>) of Florida State University (<http://www.fsu.edu/>), College of Communication & Information (<http://cci.fsu.edu/>), School of Information (<http://slis.fsu.edu/>) has received an award from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to collaborate with leaders from Opportunity Florida,<sup>1</sup> the Panhandle Library Access Network<sup>2</sup> (PLAN) and community organizations in rural northwest Florida on a six-month planning project to identify strategies to promote education, instruction, and broadband planning in rural public libraries, local community anchor institutions, and to create opportunities for local economic development. The overall goal of this planning project is to determine how best to educate rural librarians and others in the local nine county communities in order to maximize the benefits of broadband adoption in rural northwest Florida. The project address the following questions: what topics are essential, who should be involved in the education and planning processes, and which venues are most appropriate and effective for the broadband training.

The planning project's success will facilitate the development of a Laura Bush Continuing Education proposal from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to be submitted in September 2014. This secondary project will equip rural librarians and other community members: to facilitate community broadband planning and adoption; to educate anchor institution staff on broadband deployment and digital literacy; to leverage training and coordinate it with local school districts; and to coordinate effectively community-wide efforts to adopt and utilize broadband to maximize local economic development potential.

Achieving these goals will allow the planning team to address the significant need of librarian and other community members for support, training, and collaborative partnerships for successful broadband adoption to generate economic development and greater digital literacy in rural counties of Northwest Florida and to further support IMLS goals and mission. This project directly benefits participating libraries and other community organizations by establishing beneficial relationships among various community groups. These relationships will support librarians and others as they engage in additional professional development opportunities and support greater broadband adoption and utilization in their communities. Further, the investigation of ways to prepare rural public librarians and others to educate local anchor

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.opportunityflorida.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.plan.lib.fl.us/>

institution counterparts in digital literacy, including local government officials and school district staff, may lead to a profound impact on rural communities.

Because the needs of rural Florida's communities are representative of rural communities throughout the United States, gaining insight into conditions in this locale will yield important data for national rural broadband planning and implementation. This project will, in affirmation of IMLS goals, enable librarians work with other community organizations to plan broadband implementation for better broadband services and additional opportunities for economic growth in their rural communities. The lessons learned from the proposed project will also help librarians in similar rural areas nationwide

The *Creating Rural Economic Development Opportunities through Broadband Adoption* planning project will establish groundwork for librarians and other anchor institutions to provide communities with much needed digital literacies to promote economic development. As digital literacy increases within the rural counties, local economies will be propelled by community members with broadband-enabled information skills. This Information Institute project will identify librarians' and others' broadband education needs and possible venues, increase collaboration between librarians and local community groups, and advance broadband technologies for community economic development.

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