

As more services and opportunities are provided online rural communities without good broadband access are increasingly disadvantaged.

This guidance has been produced to help communities develop their access to fast broadband. It is intended to assist groups by bringing together some of the information and assistance available to them.

## Where to start

Start by developing an understanding of what the needs of your community are, why your broadband service poor and what the motivations are for doing something.

The reasons for taking action might include:

- Concern that the lack of high-speed broadband coverage is stifling business innovation and social opportunities
- Concern that employment prospects are being limited and access to job search and online training courses are restricted by the quality of existing connections
- Opportunity to bring the community together and extend social and recreational uses of the internet
- Opportunity to use broadband as a medium to address the isolation felt by all age groups, particularly in rural communities

Identify other people who may want to get involved and get together to discuss ideas and decide the purpose of the community broadband project. Many Cumbrian communities are appointing “Broadband Champions” to campaign on their behalf and disseminate information about new developments.

Things to consider include:

- What are your aims? How could they be achieved? What are the technical challenges to improving broadband and how could they be overcome?
- Avoid duplication! Is someone already doing something similar? Could you work in partnership with them?
- Who will be involved in making sure it happens?
- How will your activities be paid for? Could a new broadband service be financially sustainable by inviting households and businesses to subscribe.

### Understand your community's needs

- Why is the project needed?
- Who is it for?

### Potential Community Benefits

- Education and lifelong learning
- Social and community cohesion
- Business development
- Access to public services

### The Digital Gap

- Increased demand puts strain on an ageing broadband infrastructure, where it exists at all
- Low customer density makes commercial, market driven, solutions unlikely

### Sources of Information and Support

- Learn from the experience of existing community broadband projects
- Many sources of support and advice available; technical, funding , project planning etc

## Potential community benefits

Communities are typically challenged by:

- Young people struggling to complete their school assignments
- Small business owners frustrated that their employees are not able to access online training resources
- An ageing population unable to access the public services increasingly available online
- A sense of isolation and exclusion from a world of social networks and interaction online.

Benefit from improvements in broadband provision can help to overcome these and other challenges by providing improved access to:

- Education and lifelong learning
- Business development
- Social and community cohesion
- Access to public services

## Addressing the digital gap

As the demand for new services continues to grow the strain on the existing and ageing infrastructure, where it exists, is affecting the quality and reliability of the broadband service.

Where this is coupled with low customer density, due to a small population, there is little prospect of these technical limitations being addressed through commercial investments, where decisions are market driven.

The community can play an important role in filling the gap and there are several good working examples demonstrating how this can be done.

## Learning from others

Community broadband projects continue to grow in number. Their practical experience in overcoming physical, as well as technical and financial, hurdles provides communities considering new broadband projects with an invaluable source of advice, and in many cases, technical expertise. Two local examples are included on the ACT Community Broadband Case Study.

## Sources of help

Investigating the potential for a community broadband project can seem highly specialised, too technical, with prohibitive start up costs. Fortunately there are some excellent sources of advice for communities, such as:

The Community Broadband Network (CBN) provides support and assists with the development of community-owned broadband schemes, providing access to technical advice and expertise: [www.broadband.coop](http://www.broadband.coop)

The Rural Broadband Partnership is an online knowledge sharing network supported by the UK government and providing regular updates and a database of community broadband projects: [www.ruralbroadband.com](http://www.ruralbroadband.com)

Cumbrian broadband campaigners are connected through [www.broadbandcumbria.com](http://www.broadbandcumbria.com) there are useful resources, a glossary of technical terms and a frequently asked questions section.

Cumbria is one of four rural counties included in a pilot for Broadband investment in the UK, being run by Broadband Delivery UK: [www.discuss.bis.gov.uk/bduk](http://www.discuss.bis.gov.uk/bduk)

Cumbria County Council Connecting Cumbria site: [www.cumbria.gov.uk/broadband](http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/broadband)



**For more information please contact ACTion with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01228 817224 or visit our website: [www.cumbriaaction.org.uk](http://www.cumbriaaction.org.uk)**

## ACT champions community and rural issues

ACTion with Communities in Cumbria, Offices O-Q, Skirsgill Business Park, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 0FA  
T: 01228 817224 | [www.cumbriaaction.org.uk](http://www.cumbriaaction.org.uk) | [info@cumbriaaction.org.uk](mailto:info@cumbriaaction.org.uk) | Follow us @ACTCumbria  
Registered in England as Voluntary Action Cumbria | Charity Registration Number 1080875 | Company Number 3957858



©ACT 2011. This publication may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as ACTion with Communities in Cumbria copyright and the title of the publication specified.