

PLANNING PROCESS

In early 2003 a group of leaders came together through the New River Planning District Commission (NRVPDC) to assess the telecommunications infrastructure in the region. These leaders—principally from education, local government, private business, and economic development--were concerned that the New River Valley is being “outflanked” by neighbors in far Southwest and Southside Virginia, where state and federal resources have accumulated to develop broadband telecommunications infrastructure. The NRV Telecommunications Committee of the NRVPDC was formed to assess this need and develop a plan of action. Funding was sought for the planning process. The Committee also called a Telecommunications Summit in October 2003, to draw attention to the work of surrounding areas and gauge interest and need. Funding awarded from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Virginia Center for Innovative Technology (CIT) have paid for planning staff time to develop this document. Technical expertise, guidance and informational products have been donated by the Virginia Tech Information Technology Department and the eCorridors Programs (as well as Cisco and Corning.)

Information on current and future telecommunications in the NRV has been gathered through existing public information, the Committee, the Telecommunications Summit, surveys and a visioning work-session. Methodologies for the surveys and visioning session follow. A summary of citizen participation is included next and then the timeline of significant events in the telecommunications planning process. *Related newspaper articles and letters are in Appendix A.*

Telecommunications Summit: October 2003



Telecommunications Visioning: March 2004



Survey Methodology

Two survey instruments were created by staff: the first for “users,” to measure current and future telecommunications uses and the second for Internet Service Providers (ISP’s) to detail current and future services. The user surveys were distributed to at least 150 entities (via email) in six major sectors: medical services, local government (including emergency services), K-12 education, higher education, economic development, and private businesses. Eighty (80)

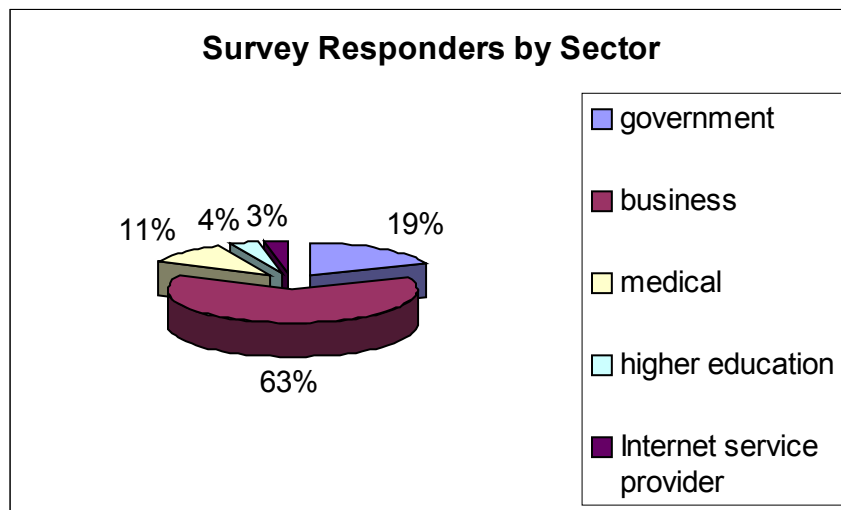
completed surveys were returned, with respondents well-distributed across the geographic area and among the sectors. Table 3 below shows these survey responses by geographic area, and Figure 3 shows respondents by sector. The ISP survey was distributed to all ISP's with local contacts; only two ISP's completed surveys (both local companies); the results will be discussed later. *The survey instruments and copies of the two ISP completed surveys are available in Appendix B.*

TABLE 3
Geographic Distribution of NRV Telecommunications Survey Responses

JURISDICTION	Percent of SURVEY RESPONSE	Percent of NRV POPULATION	2000 POPULATION
Floyd County	6.0%	8.4%	13,874
Giles County	9.0%	10.1%	16,657
Montgomery County	43.0%	50.6%	83,629
Pulaski County	27.0%	21.3%	35,127
City of Radford	15.0%	9.6%	15,859
New River Valley	100.0%	100.0%	165,146
Virginia	na	na	7,078,515

Sources: NRV Telecommunications Survey and U.S. Census Bureau.

FIGURE 3



Visioning Session Methodology

Keynote speakers set the tone by describing perspectives on the pace of technological changes and the possibilities those changes afford those who are ready. Participants were then divided into three groups. A facilitator asked each group these questions:

- If a broadband community network existed, how could you imagine using it?
- Why are these uses important to you and your community?

Participants were then invited to identify themes in their own group's reporting and then broader themes at the end of the session. *Detailed notes from the visioning sessions are available in Appendix C.*

**Summary of Citizen Participation
New River Valley Telecommunications Planning**

NRV Telecommunication Summit

October 7, 2003

This well-publicized event was attended by at least 80 people representing a variety of interests, from private businesses to local officials to educational institutions. Speakers include Andrew Cohill, Skip Skinner, and Jack Lewis (President of New River Community College.) At this event, information was collected from participants about where they lived and what type of Internet service they had.

NRV Telecommunications Committee Meetings

Monthly meetings

Open Telecommunications Committee meetings with a range of stakeholders have been held monthly for more than a year (preceding grant award.) Local media has been involved in promoting and covering key meetings.

NRV Telecommunications Survey

Date: January and February, 2004

PDC staff sent out more than 150 survey regarding current and future telecommunications uses, and received back more than 50% (80 completed surveys). Sectors surveyed included local governments, k-12 education, higher education, medical service providers, economic developers, and Internet service providers.

NRV Telecommunications Visioning Session

March 3, 2004

About 40 people participated in the Visioning Session. The keynote speakers were Erv Blythe, Virginia Tech's Vice President for Information Technology, who spoke about economic development and broadband, and Jim Sandidge, of Pulaski County Public Schools, who described and demonstrated the dramatic difference between dial-up and true broadband connectivity. Among the vision themes were:

- ✓ We need this technology to be competitive
- ✓ This technology brings possibilities
- ✓ We need to become more open to change and risk
- ✓ We want to embrace the globalization of communication and economy
- ✓ We can become more efficient – faster, better, more connected.

Unveiling the NRV Telecommunications Plan

June 15, 2004

About 40 people attended the afternoon "roll-out" session and another 15 in the evening. Participation was broad and included the local cooperatives, local governments, universities and private business owners. The plan include 283 miles of fiber and 127 potential anchor tenants.

Timeline of NRV Telecommunications Planning

Date	Event	Result
Mar-03	NRV leaders shared telecom concerns and began meeting <u>monthly</u>	Decided to form official Committee
May-03	NRV leaders sought ARC telecom planning funds	\$7,500 awarded from the Appalachian Regional Commission
Oct-03	Committee convened a NRV Telecommunications Summit	Over 70 leaders from variety of interests were educated about broadband uses and implementation models. Information was collected from participants about where they lived and what type of Internet service they had.
Dec-03	Staff meetings with Virginia Center for Innovative Technology and eCorridors staff	Survey instruments created; eCorridors (Virginia Tech) agreed to donate assistance; Virginia Center for Innovative Technology agreed to lend support and provide \$3,500 in planning funds.
January and February 2004	PDC staff sent out at least 150 “user” surveys on existing and future telecommunication uses to providers in medical, k-12, higher education, local government (and EMS), and business and economic developers. Local ISP’s were sent a separate survey.	At least 80 completed user surveys were returned, with respondents well-distributed across geographic area and sector. Surveys revealed that more than a quarter of all connections in these sectors are still “dial-up.” Of the largest employers, 6 were less than satisfied with the speed of their connections. Only one Internet Service Provider responded (Citizens, a local cooperative.)
Mar-04	Telecommunications: Bringing the World to the New River Valley (visioning work-session)	About 40 people heard visions about economic development and broadband and educational and economic advantages of broadband. Vision themes were generated, including “we need this technology to be competitive, this technology brings possibilities . . . and we can become more efficient—faster, better, more connected.” Also, information was collected on new telecommunications projects.
Mar-04	Technology Roadshow	Four representatives from the NRV PDC Telecom Committee learned more about the value and significance of broadband, and about efforts in neighboring regions.
Apr-04	Preliminary Design Team meetings for the proposed Community Network	Information technology and economic development officials reviewed the initial design, which was also posted online for review and comment.
May-04	Congressman Boucher’s Telecommunications Conference in Abingdon	At least 12 NRV PDC committee members attended the conference and had a private lunch with municipal broadband attorney Jim Baller.
Jun-04	Unveiling of the NRV Telecommunications Plan with proposed 283-mile fiber optic network interconnecting 127 anchor tenant sites.	More than 50 people attend the two sessions, and the event was well covered by local media.