



Howard County Leaders Launch Technology Planning Effort

Media Contact: Jessica Ditto
jditto@connectednation.org
(202) 251-4749

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County enlists in Connect Iowa's Connected program to bridge technology gap, boost economy, and pave way for improved quality of life

Howard County, IA – On Saturday, Howard County community leaders held a kickoff meeting to join Connect Iowa's [Connected Community Engagement Program](#) that seeks to boost the local economy and quality of life for residents through increased access, adoption, and use of broadband.

More than 30 community leaders attended the launch meeting on Saturday. The team has been dubbed "Task Force Howard County" and is a collaborative effort between Howard County Business & Tourism and the Howard-Winneshiek Community School District. Staff from Connect Iowa, the statewide nonprofit promoting broadband expansion, led participants through the steps of the program. The Connected program offers a comprehensive and localized way for communities to assess broadband use and increase technology in schools, libraries, homes, and businesses.

Keri Schatz, in charge of public relations for Howard-Winneshiek Community School District, is excited to see the opportunities for technological progress that the Connected process will bring.

She said: "It is no secret that Howard County is the most underserved county in the Northeast Iowa region regarding high-speed broadband, and I think many leaders in the community agree that by increasing our Internet infrastructure we can do a better job of meeting the needs of everyone – from school-age children who are increasingly using technology in and out of the classroom to learn and collaborate with students and teachers all over the world; to individuals who telecommute to work; and for those who want to grow business and industry, both locally and globally. Broadband just might be the key to an economic boost for Howard County, by putting us in a better position to compete and collaborate with the world."

In October 2013, Governor Branstad announced the Connected Community Engagement Program as part of the Connect Every Iowan initiative aimed at making Iowa the most connected state in the Midwest.

“This is a very enthusiastic and invested group of leaders. We are excited to see the county taking up broadband as a key economic development issue,” said Amy Kuhlers, Connect Iowa program manager. “One of the benefits of this program is that we will take into account all perspectives and ensure that broadband is fully leveraged in all facets of society to attract jobs and retain talent, boost education opportunities, and promote innovative healthcare services.”

Several local leaders are already involved in the project. The committee is part of Iowa’s plan to deliver broadband access to every part of the state. Ultimately, the goal of the Connected Community Engagement Program is to increase the number of high-tech companies and jobs in Iowa, and ensure schools have access to the quality of broadband required to deliver the best educational resources available through the Internet.

The team will assess the current state of technology in the county, determine what improvements are needed, and devise a plan for achieving those goals.

Community members interested in the project are welcome to join future meetings. Volunteers represent the following areas:

- Business and industry
- Healthcare
- Libraries
- K-12 education
- Higher education
- Community-based organizations
- Government
- Agriculture
- Tourism, recreation and parks

For more information about the project or to join the Connected community technology team, please contact Connect Iowa at info@connectiowa.org, or Connect Iowa Program Manager Amy Kuhlers at (515) 421-2561.

The next meeting of the Howard Connected Community Technology Team is set for: February 22, 2014.

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About Connect Iowa: Connect Iowa is a subsidiary of Connected Nation and operates as a nonprofit in the state of Iowa to promote broadband access, adoption, and use. The Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) is leading the initiative to increase broadband Internet access throughout rural Iowa. Connect Iowa was commissioned by the state to work with all broadband providers in Iowa to create detailed maps of broadband coverage and develop a statewide plan for the deployment and adoption of broadband. For more information visit: www.connectiowa.org.

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Connected Nation developed the Connected Community Engagement Program to help guide a community through an assessment of its overall

broadband and technology status. Connected certified communities have measurably demonstrated their proficiency for effective Access, Adoption, and Use of broadband-supported technologies. Connected Nation through its partners provides a national platform for recognizing those communities that excel across these important benchmarks. Funded by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), this effort is part of the State Broadband Initiative.

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