CONNECT SI - PROJECT REPORT

Connect SI is a 20-county collaborative effort aimed at improving the quality of the lives of Southern Illinoisans. While the project isn't only about broadband Internet access, it will enhance the economic and community development of Southern Illinois through greater Internet access and bandwidth. Connect SI will change the way we in Southern Illinois work, live, and communicate with the world. Connect SI will affect many sectors of life in the region. Healthcare delivery, business and industry, education and training, government, agriculture — even our own homes can benefit from greater accessibility and visibility through a successful Connect SI project.

Broadband and Bandwidth

Broadband Internet access provides the greatest amount of data flow as opposed to dial-up access. With broadband Internet operating at high bandwidths, a tremendous amount of data can flow between points in a very short period of time. The greater the ability to send high volumes of data, the more attractive a region is for development and growth. Ways to achieve broadband Internet throughout the region include the installation of fiber-optic transmission lines and wireless technologies that are continuing to emerge.

Regional Application

Broadband applications for the Southern Illinois region are limited only by imagination. In the healthcare sector, remote-site consultations could increase specialty care available in the region. Physicians could view high resolution X-rays at virtually any location. Emergency room services could be enhanced and ambulances could transmit information and images to waiting ER professionals while still in transit. In construction, engineers could transmit live images or complicated schematics to experts in another country when expensive and crucial equipment breaks down. Economic developers would be given additional strategies to compete within a global market. Rather than travel to other cities or states, workers could access training on new products and services without leaving their homes or workplaces. Retailers would have a global market for their products and services through websites that reach a global audience of millions.

SIUC Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development’s Role in Connect SI

The CRHSSD has provided the organizational dynamic that has brought various and disparate healthcare groups together to make Connect SI possible. As an early and enthusiastic driver of the initiative, along with the Southern Illinois Coal Belt Champion Community, many of the planning meetings were organized and hosted by the CRHSSD at the Dunn-Richmond Economic Development Center at SIUC.

Connect SI began as a loose-knit group of representatives of education, economic development, elected leadership, internet service providers, healthcare administrators, and other community sectors. This group has provided the regional planning leadership.

The healthcare industry is one of the leading sectors most knowledgeable about specific technology applications that are possible through increased broadband access. This technology could enhance access to quality healthcare throughout Southern Illinois as well as positively impact the sustainability of healthcare providers in the area.

In part, because of the efforts of the CRHSSD staff in support of the initiative, Dr. Glenn Poshard, President of the SIU system, recognized the value of the Connect SI to the region. He has given the initiative a home under the Office of the President at SIU and has designated Rex Duncan as Executive Director. Dr. Poshard has made several important commitments to Connect SI, but none more important than his personal philosophy of servant
leadership by the SIU system to the entire region. Connect SI is now housed in permanent office space on the SIUC campus.

Opportunity for Collaboration

A successful Connect SI will provide new national and global markets for our goods and services, including tourism. By effectively using the internet as an increasingly important medium for promotion and information sharing, Southern Illinois businesses, industries and destinations will have the potential to gain literally millions of prospective new customers.

In short, by increasing broadband Internet availability and bandwidth throughout Southern Illinois, the Connect SI initiative seeks to provide a dramatic and positive result for the entire region. For the past few years, we have talked about collaboration – the concept of one Southern Illinois community. Now we are presented with a project that offers not only the opportunity to act collaboratively, but also to see a payoff for that collaborative behavior for the entire region.

For more information or to connect your organization to this collaborative effort, contact Kim Sanders at 618-453-1270 or kimsand@siu.edu