

Getting Connected

The Mississippi State University
Extension Broadband Initiative



A Year in Review

Without question, local access to broadband is vital to the economic, educational and social viability of Mississippi communities. Thanks to the efforts of the Mississippi Office of the Governor, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration/Department of Commerce, the Rural Utilities Services/USDA, and other key agencies and organizations, broadband access is becoming a reality in many communities across the state. While access is essential, citizens must also understand how to use the technology to better their daily lives.

That is where the Mississippi State University Extension Broadband Education and Adoption Team (e-BEAT) comes in. Thanks to support from the Mississippi Office of the Governor, e-BEAT has been responding to the broadband education and information needs of households, local governments, small businesses, public libraries, schools, and others since its establishment in July 2011. This brief report showcases some of the important work that e-BEAT has launched, in collaboration with its partners, through September 2012.

WEIGHING IN: Capturing the Views of Mississippians

From the beginning, e-BEAT took time to gather the perspectives of a wide array of Mississippians to ensure its proposed activities matched their needs.

- More than 2,400 households participated in an April - July 2011 statewide phone survey designed by e-BEAT and administered by MSU's Social Science Research Center.
- More than 500 residents provided feedback on the Mississippi Broadband Connect Coalition's "Mapping Mississippi's Digital Future" report through an online survey and 22 community roundtables.
- 90 small businesses and entrepreneurs completed a survey specific to their needs.
- Six Broadband Advisory Councils located in regions across the state helped develop and implement education and information plans suited to their regions.

Top priorities from the "Mapping Mississippi's Digital Future" report, selected by Mississippians taking part in e-BEAT sponsored roundtables and surveys include:

1. Develop, promote, and provide digital literacy programs
2. Facilitate communities and/or organizations forming partnerships to aggregate demand for broadband
3. Assist with promoting initiatives designed to help cover service costs
4. Educate local economic developers on the importance of promoting broadband advantages in their recruitment strategies

Launching Education and Communication Activities

The initiative also focuses on developing and adapting education programs tailored to its constituents' needs. Because digital literacy ranked as the highest need by Mississippians, e-BEAT has a variety of programs designed to introduce Internet applications to multiple audiences, including local government and community organizations, small businesses and the general public. Whether taught face-to-face or accessed online, these tutorials are teaching people why broadband is important and how they can implement technology to better their lives.

The e-BEAT website offers digital literacy resources, state broadband survey reports, upcoming training events in each of the six regions, self-paced tutorials, and up-to-date broadband maps and data produced by state and federal government sources. E-BEAT also uses social media outlets to connect people in a variety of ways.



www.ebeat.ms



facebook.com/MSUeBEAT



[@MSUeBEAT](https://twitter.com/MSUeBEAT)



[@msuebeat](https://pinterest.com/msuebeat)

Responding to Technical Assistance Needs

Working in partnership with state and federal agencies, e-BEAT has worked hard to become one of the go-to sources for broadband technical assistance. Over the past several months, Extension team members have worked with state agency partners to carry out the following technical assistance activities:

- **Wireless Provider / Carrier Interactions:**
Assisted wireless providers in expanding their coverage area and getting added to the MS Broadband Map
- **Aggregation of Demand:**
Provided guidance to four communities seeking information on creating sufficient demand to secure high-speed Internet service
- **Small City/ Town Wi-Fi Projects:**
Conducted feasibility reviews for Wi-Fi in three small towns in the state; reviewed and offered recommendations of vendor proposals for Wi-Fi hotspots being considered by a municipality; investigated problems with a city's wireless deployment project
- **Individual/ Small Business Access Assistance:**
Assisted a group of residents seeking to bring higher bandwidth and more available DSL circuits to their area; acquired competitive pricing and availability for T-1 circuits for small businesses; helped numerous individuals in determining potential for broadband services at their location
- **Business Development:**
Aided an individual in evaluating the potential for a wireless deployment as a new business venture in the Southeast region of the state

DOCUMENTING IMPACTS: By The Numbers

- Extension Regional Broadband Coordinators: 6
- MSU Extension personnel engaged in e-BEAT efforts: 7
- Regional Advisory Committee members: 81
- Households participating in statewide broadband survey: 2,420
- Municipalities completing broadband assessment survey: 151
- Broadband survey report highlights released: 9
- Events conducted/supported (since Jan. 2012): 389
- e-BEAT program participants (since Jan. 2012): 5,051
- Educational resources developed/adapted: 18
- Municipal websites developed by MSI, MS ITS and e-BEAT partnership: 12

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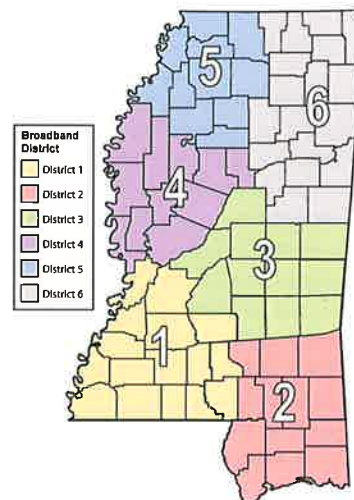
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LINKING OUR ASSETS: Vital State Partnerships

In an environment where fiscal resources are limited but needs great, the idea of going solo is untenable. The broadband team is well aware that expanded adoption and use of high-speed Internet will only be achieved if it is willing to work in partnership with other appropriate groups across the state. With a "better together" view, e-BEAT has joined with the six agencies below to promote effective uses of the Internet in numerous ways:

Mississippi Department of Employment Security: Enhancing the Job Search Process

- Providing digital literacy training for WIN Job Center clients
- Training job seekers to utilize WINGS online job search program

Public Library Commission: Promoting Broadband Education

- Launching Technology Academy training targeted to library staff
- Delivering digital literacy training to library patrons

Social Security Administration: Expanding Use of Online Resources

- Targeting current/future retirees to expand awareness for online SAA resources for retirement application and benefits

Mississippi Development Authority: Boosting Entrepreneurship Statewide

- Providing digital literacy and e-commerce training to entrepreneurs working with the Entrepreneurship Center

Mississippi Interactive: Getting Municipalities Online

- Helping 12 municipalities across the state develop a website and online presence

East Mississippi Community College: Building Skills

- Offering introductory and intermediate online educational programs targeted for community college students and the public

Region 1: Creating Statewide Partnerships On the Frontlines

Region 1 Broadband Coordinator Chance McDavid has played a major role in laying the groundwork for new partnerships with state agencies and organizations. Among the most important is e-BEAT's link to the Mississippi Library Commission. MCL Executive Director Sharman Smith said: "Combining the resources of public libraries and the Extension Service is a natural step in better serving Mississippi communities and residents. By working together, public libraries and the e-BEAT team can reach Mississippians with the technical training tools necessary to help each individual and to increase broadband adoption across the state."

Region 2: Delivering Digital Literacy Training to Local Residents

With promoting digital literacy emerging as one of the Mississippi Broadband Connect Coalition's top priorities, Region 2 Broadband Coordinator Andy Collins has been a leader in delivering a variety of digital literacy training to the general public in southeast Mississippi. Nearly 60 workshops with more than 350 attendees have introduced participants to Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, email, and browsers. Many participants were 50 or older, the demographic group with the state's lowest digital literacy rate.

Region 3: Advancing the Online Presence of Municipalities

Thanks to the efforts of Region 3 Broadband Coordinator Mike Anderson, e-BEAT has forged a valuable partnership with the Mississippi Municipal League. The organizations have joined forces to assess the online presence and activities of more than 150 municipalities in the state, providing valuable insights on the broadband needs of cities and towns. Through the MML



Region 4: Expanding the Computer Resources of Local Technology Center

Seeing the need to add more computers available to meet community demand, Region 4 Broadband Coordinator Duan Walker sought the assistance of the MSU Extension Service to help the Arcola Technology Center. With three of its six computers needing repairs, Walker helped the center increase its capacity by asking the Extension Service to donate seven computers. The additional computers allow him to offer a wide range of digital literacy courses at the site. He also hosted a summer Vacation Broadband School for local youth.




Region 5: Partnering with Schools to Build Youth Technology Skills

Working with school-aged youth and their parents on Internet opportunities and applications is a passion for Region 5 Broadband Coordinator Kourtney Hollingsworth. Specific outcomes she has achieved to date include: (1) getting 10 computers and docking stations donated to Coldwater High School; (2) helping three youths receive their high school diploma by completing online courses; (3) training to more than 1,000 youth; (4) assisting more than 100 parents secure low-cost Internet service (\$9.99 per month); and (5) training more than 200 parents on such topics as online tutoring, online scholarship opportunities, social media, school websites, and cyber-bullying.



Region 6: Increasing Ready Access to Health-Related Mobile Apps

Mississippians struggle with some of the nation's highest obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease rates. In response to his citizen advisory committee, Region 6 Broadband Coordinator Chip Templeton has been researching, compiling, and organizing mobile applications that can help Mississippians gain access to valuable health-related information and resources through their smart phones, tablets or computers. While these apps are not intended to serve as a substitute for physician advice, the resources can help residents: (1) identify and evaluate their health





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