Dear rural and broadband stakeholder,

With the digital age in full swing, it is of utmost importance to help rural communities transition to, plan for, and prosper in this dynamic and disruptive context. This is the mission of the Institute, and we work to accomplish it through outreach and research.

In this report, we would like to share with you what the Institute has been doing to fulfill its mission. Many challenges lay ahead, but the gratification of working with rural communities provides the drive to move forward.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or, better yet, if you are interested in helping rural communities through this transition.

Sincerely,

Dr. Roberto Gallardo  
Associate Extension Professor & Leader  
MSU Extension Intelligent Community Institute
Outreach

The Intelligent Community Outreach Process (ICOP) consists of four steps—awareness, checklist, implementation, and nomination—and uses the Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) indicators as a roadmap—broadband connectivity, innovation, knowledge workforce, digital equality, marketing, and sustainability.

For awareness, meetings and presentations take place to educate and increase awareness regarding the digital age and its implications for rural communities. Communities where awareness presentations are completed may or may not continue in the ICOP.

For the checklist step, the community fills out an online checklist (asset-mapping), from which a report is prepared and discussed with key leaders and stakeholders. This group also defines priorities from the report and formulates an action plan.

The implementation phase deploys Extension and non-Extension programs and resources to address the priorities identified. Throughout this process, documentation of outputs and outcomes takes place.

The final stage is nomination. If the community desires, the Institute can submit a nomination package on behalf of the community to the annual award committee managed by the ICF. Though it is the final step in the ICOP, it is not the end of the road for the community. With a digital mindset in place, the community can move on in a sustainable way.

Below is a summary of outreach outputs between October 2014 and September 2015:

- 1,503 people reached through 85 events and in 24 communities (21 in Mississippi, one in Nebraska, one in Colombia, and one in Canada)
- Six communities participating in the ICOP (considered participating if checklist was reviewed, priorities identified, and action plan formulated)
- Events worth highlighting:
  - Six checklist reports completed and reviewed
  - 30 presentations in 19 different communities
  - 25 hands-on workshops in five different communities
  - Six output events include placing a 3-D printer in a public library, installation of a free Wi-Fi hotspot, volunteers loading Ubuntu on three donated laptops, and a municipal website launched
- Events grouped by Intelligent Community indicator (where applicable):
  - Broadband connectivity: 4
  - Innovation: 21
  - Knowledge workforce: 3
  - Digital equality: 12
Research

In order to address the need for more research regarding the impact of the digital age in rural communities, the Institute released a request for proposals, resulting in five proposals submitted. A five-panel jury selected four proposals to be funded.

These four proposals are currently under a peer-review process, and the deliverables will include a 10-page white paper as well as PowerPoint slides for a 15-minute presentation. The idea is to then disseminate the findings of this research to rural communities through ICF’s worldwide network and the Extension system.

The titles of the proposals are below:

- Are Intelligent Communities More Likely to Be Civically Engaged?
- Broadband and Civic Engagement in Rural Areas: What Matters?
- Design & Implementation of eBaby4U: Filling the Gap in Culturally Relevant eHealth Outreach to Minority Teen Mothers
- Telemental Health in Rural Communities in Mississippi: Investigating Opportunities and Barriers of Developing Intelligent Communities

In addition, two Mississippi broadband quickfacts documents were published, as well as seven digital age and rural community-related articles in three different electronic outlets, including the Daily Yonder, Pointe Innovation, and Government Technology.

Funding

The Institute obtained a total of $231,938 in external funding. Of this, $45,000 was direct funding, and the additional $186,938 was in collaboration with the Extension Center for Technology Outreach, Extension Center for Government and Community Development, and MSU Department of Food Science, Nutrition, and Health Promotion. Funders included C Spire, Verizon Foundation, and Connect Mississippi. Thank you for your support!

This funding was used in part to buy time of Extension personnel (faculty and agents), pay for travel of Extension agents to be trained on the ICOP and participate in the robotics academy, purchase a 3-D printer, develop a mobile broadband locator app, develop a coding/robotics curriculum for 5- to 7-year-olds, develop curriculum and virtual tours for tourism technology, and increase telehealth education and e-commerce efforts.