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## **Richland County Joins Connect South Carolina's Connected Program Initiative**

*Kickoff Meeting Focused on Access, Adoption, and Use of High-Speed Internet in Richland County*

**Columbia, SC** – Richland leaders have enrolled their community in the innovative [Connected](#) program that seeks to boost the local economy and quality of life for residents through increased access, adoption, and use of high-speed Internet.

Connect South Carolina Program Lead Heather Jones met with 58 representatives from the Richland County community to initiate the kickoff of the Connected program on September 30 at the Richland County Administration building in Columbia. Community leaders gathered to discuss various ideas and challenges of increasing high-speed Internet access, adoption, and use in the area.

Attendees included leaders representing Richland County school districts, libraries, governmental departments, local providers, hospitals, IT groups, and several others who were given the opportunity to discuss the Connected engagement goals and objectives for their community.

The Connected Community Engagement Program involves building a comprehensive action plan for developing a technology-ready community by reviewing the technology landscape, developing regional partnerships, establishing local teams, and conducting a thorough community assessment. The gathered information from the meeting on September 30 will be used to help create the official Technology Action Plan for the Richland community.

“I am hoping the Connected initiative will be useful in identifying vulnerable communities in Richland County and allow for a concentration on public access by analyzing the costs and rewards of broadband access and adoption,” said local businessman and active community member Jim Prater.

Jones presented the current Richland County data at the kickoff meeting, including information related to technology in the business and residential sectors of the community. Jones shared that Richland County is above average in most areas of broadband and related technology compared to the rest of South Carolina, but there are still areas of the county that need significant improvement.

Attendees were divided into three focus groups of access, adoption, and use to discuss the community’s broadband inventory to date including: public computer centers, digital literacy training programs, vulnerable population technology programs, and broadband applications in the fields of healthcare, government, economic opportunity, and education. Each committee recognized a champion to collect information and organize future individual group meetings to continue working on the assessment.

“I am confident that this support to create broadband accessibility throughout the county will be very economically beneficial,” said Richland County Director of Economic Development Nelson Lindsay. “Developing these services will assist in attracting new companies to the area, creating jobs, and ultimately benefiting many citizens of the community.”

The Connected program is part of the Connect South Carolina initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce NTIA State Broadband Initiative program.

*Photo: Heather Jones of Connect South Carolina discusses goals for broadband access, adoption, and use at the Richland County kickoff meeting on September 30 at the Richland County Administration building in Columbia.*

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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**<sup>SM</sup>  
Community Engagement Program

*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. <http://www.connectednation.org/get-connected>

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**About Connect South Carolina:** As the State Broadband Initiative, Connect South Carolina is leading the effort to increase high-speed Internet access, adoption and use to ensure South Carolina's competitiveness in the connected global economy of the twenty-first century. Connect South Carolina is a public-private partnership designated by the state to work with all broadband providers to create South Carolina's first interactive map of broadband coverage. This work serves as a foundation for addressing remaining service gaps while also engaging state, regional and local leaders in workforce development activities designed to bridge South Carolina's digital divide. For maps, research or to get involved with efforts in your community please visit: [www.ConnectSC.org](http://www.ConnectSC.org).

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