The mission of the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County is to ensure that the county’s population has affordable universal broadband access in their homes, businesses and transportation to support economic viability, ensure health and safety, and access educational opportunities.

California’s rural economy is threatened by inadequate broadband access. Faulty maps, based on unverified data provided by the telecommunications industry, and compiled by the state and federal governments, hide this escalating crisis.

In 2011, government data claimed that 84% of Mendocino County had broadband access, while Alliance on-the-ground estimates indicated that over half the County was still on dial-up. Because of this disconnect between official data and on-the-ground reality, Mendocino County has been denied funding for critical broadband projects throughout the County.

2011 also saw the business failure of a major Internet service provider (ISP) for coastal southern Mendocino and northern Sonoma Counties. Even though this service was too slow to qualify as broadband, it was the only viable ISP for many areas. This failure had a cascading negative economic impact.

Some local businesses were immediately forced to switch to expensive, inadequate satellite service. Some small businesses, who couldn’t afford satellite service, failed. Library and senior services were disrupted, and tourists had disappointing visits.

Without adequate broadband access, rural economies will stagnate and fail.
In 2011, the Alliance conducted an online county-wide needs assessment to determine actual, on-the-ground, broadband access throughout the county. Using an online form, or hard copy survey forms, people could report broadband access data at specific street addresses. After receiving data for over 7% of all county residences, the Alliance produced maps showing the extent of the problem.

Working with its contacts throughout the county, the Alliance compiled a broadband access inventory for county anchor institutions including emergency services, medical services, schools, libraries, colleges, and major businesses. Alliance data conflicts with government data for the same period.

In 2012, the Alliance will identify broadband deployment projects throughout the county, start getting currently buildable projects built, and advocate for the changes needed to build the currently unbuildable.

Initial study indicates some projects will not be built under current broadband regulations, due to economic constraints. Costly middle-mile fiber over-builds might be avoided if existing middle-mile bandwidth were made available in unserved/underserved areas.

Without recourse to reasonable regulatory change, many rural areas throughout California won’t benefit from broadband. Their communities will become increasingly disenfranchised, and their economies will eventually disintegrate.

The Alliance has received a three-year, $60,000 planning grant from the California Advanced Services Fund, and a $40,000 challenge grant from the Community Foundation of Mendocino County, of which over half has already been raised.

The Alliance is largely staffed by volunteer professionals supported by part-time paid staff.

Contact the Alliance today - help us ensure that everyone in California benefits from broadband.

www.MendocinoBroadband.org