

## **Tool: Cool & Connected**

**Provider: Smart Growth America / Broadband Catalysts**

### **Summary:**

Broadband—fast, reliable Internet service—can be an important piece of the digital puzzle for communities trying to find their place in the 21st-century economy. Many rural communities are actively seeking new opportunities to drive economic growth but are restrained by inadequate broadband access.

Expanding broadband access can help communities revitalize their downtowns and attract and retain a new generation of workers. Retirees and younger Americans are looking for places to live that are affordable, walkable, and offer a high quality of life, something that many smaller cities and towns across the country have the potential to offer. Businesses need fast and reliable connection speeds to process payments and orders, participate in online commerce, and stay competitive in an increasingly tech-oriented economy. Without it, anchor institutions such as schools and hospitals are unable to move and manage information quickly and provide public services as efficiently as possible.

Helping rural communities bridge the broadband gap and fully leverage it for the highest return on investment is critical to strengthening their economy. With the right investments in reliable broadband, communities can revitalize their downtowns and attract younger Americans who can bring their existing businesses and remote jobs with them.

But beginning the process can be daunting, particularly for smaller communities with limited resources. This technical assistance program helps rural communities find new economic opportunities by providing planning guidance for sustainable downtown development and investments in broadband Internet access.

### **Description:**

The workshops bring together local leaders and residents to evaluate current and potential local policies, and to strategize potential ways local organizations, businesses, anchor institutions, broadband providers, and other entities could work together to attract downtown investment by way of broadband. The technical assistance team facilitates discussions and group exercises to help distill the community's ideas and priorities into an overarching vision with specific goals and actionable steps—identifying the key players and funding strategies to achieve each item.

A follow-up action plan will gauge progress and leave the community with further actionable next steps.