

San Luis Valley Regional Broadband Collaborative (SLV RBC) Vision Statement

San Luis Valley Regional Leadership Committee (SLV RLC) | Community Resource Center
Broadband Technical Steering Committee (BTSC) | San Luis Valley Development Resources Group

The San Luis Valley (SLV) has seen bursts of progress towards expanding broadband access, but momentum in recent years has waned despite need increasing. In 2017 the San Luis Valley Development Resources Group Broadband Technical Steering Committee (BTSC) developed a Regional Broadband Strategic Plan, which outlined inequities in broadband services and emphasized the need for collaboration to overcome barriers to development. However, due to a lack of widespread public demand and insufficient cross-sector collaboration, active committees ceased making progress.

The San Luis Valley Rural Philanthropy Days Regional Leadership Committee (SLV RLC) is a group of local nonprofit and community leaders organized by Community Resource Center to build regional nonprofit capacity. Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SLV RLC conducted a needs assessment with nonprofit partners in July of 2020. Broadband access was identified as a critical community need. Consistent and quality Internet connection poses a significant barrier to accessing virtual education, telemedicine, e-commerce markets, social interaction, and civic engagement.

"We had to provide Internet to over 100 families in our community so that they could access their education, and few resources were available for that."

"Without audio programming, those who are blind, losing vision or otherwise cannot read often do not know what resources are available and how to access them. Basic news and information from a local perspective are not assured, especially when someone does not have Internet."

"For my needs, our Internet is plenty sufficient - though if we are to grow and attract businesses to our area (particularly forward-thinking tech-driven companies and jobs), we need to work toward a Valley-wide Broadband network. This is a non-negotiable need for larger companies."

*Responses from the 2020 San Luis Valley Regional Nonprofit Needs Assessment

In October of 2020, the SLV RLC invited the SLV BTSC and convened the Regional Broadband Collaboration Summit to identify potential projects and discuss key issues around accessibility, affordability, relevancy, and collaborative organizing. The perspectives of 50+ diverse community members were uplifted, including the Board of Cooperative Education Services, Adams State University, Valley-Wide Health Systems, state and local government officials, and local Internet Service Providers (ISPs). Through robust dialogue, these stakeholders reaffirmed that equity cannot be achieved if certain communities do not have sufficient technology access for participation.

We know that nonprofits in the SLV have the skills and relationships to build bridges between the community, government, and businesses to move past impasses, even with the most complicated challenges. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofits in the SLV have been collaborating with local ISPs to fill gaps with short-term solutions, connecting community members to pop-up WiFi, hotspots, and laptops. However, these individual efforts are not addressing the root of the issue,

and the health and future of rural communities hinges on sustainable, long-term solutions. Large complicated and systemic issues require collaboration, financial resources, and leadership to make meaningful and lasting progress. Through public-private partnerships communities can subsidize certain infrastructure costs, allowing ISPs to gain additional business and connect traditionally underserved communities to quality Internet. Retaining community ownership of this infrastructure lowers consumer cost and nurtures healthy competition.

New middle mile broadband infrastructure investments in rural communities costs tens of millions of dollars, and while we are seeing more resources committed through specific funding made available at the state and federal level to support rural broadband, communities must first have the capacity to access these funds. This has created a systemic barrier for rural communities with limited local capital in accessing the funds designed to serve them in the first place. Where the SLV's collaborative efforts have struggled in the past has been in having the human capital to advance the body of work needed to tap into this abundance of funding.

There are proven solutions. In the SLV we are seeking to learn from successful public infrastructure projects undertaken in the Northwest and San Juan regions. Coined the SLV Regional Broadband Collaborative (SLV RBC), this groundbreaking partnership of SLV nonprofit leaders, local government, and regional technical experts are working together to enact lasting change.

The SLV RBC has been successfully working to secure capacity-building funding for regional broadband projects through the creation of two full-time positions set to start summer of 2021: the SLV Broadband Services Manager and SLV Broadband Community Relations Manager, to be housed within the SLV Council of Governments/Development Resources Group.

The RFP for these positions is designed where a firm or multiple individuals can apply, as has been modeled successfully in other rural regions of Colorado. The position of SLV Broadband Services Manager will provide the technical expertise needed to develop transformative projects with strong local support, manage the many public/private partnerships involved, such as local government and existing ISPs, and submit time intensive grant applications and reports.

To advance digital equity for the region's most geographically isolated and underserved areas, dedicated capacity is required to meaningfully engage with communities, especially those that may lack local government support, who may be unaware of the significance of their digital needs, or who have been frustrated by the immensity of the challenge. The position of SLV Broadband Community Relations Manager will lead community engagement to ensure digital equity efforts are inclusive of all communities in the SLV and that those furthest from opportunity have a true seat at the table. The position will work closely with the SLV RLC and leverage the existing trust and relationships held by our committee's nonprofit leaders to develop meaningful community

engagement in this process. This position will also work on wider community education and dialogues about broadband as an essential service.

Initial funding will build the capacity to executive a community-driven process at a regional level. The individuals/firms in these positions will then work to secure funding for projects investing in broadband infrastructure, such as middle mile investments which qualify for state and federal funding. This infrastructure creates additional opportunities for future last mile investments, which require collaborative work with ISPs to provide expanded broadband access into underserved neighborhoods and homes. These projects will bring in significant revenue to the community, making this work self-sustaining in the future.

These positions will fill critical gaps in capacity, bringing regional collaborative projects to fruition and ensuring that the SLV is able to seize the opportunities for broadband funding at the state and federal level. We believe these positions and the work they will advance will fundamentally shift the future trajectory of communities across the San Luis Valley.

Our work is just beginning and the door is open for others to join us. If you are interested in learning more or would like to be involved in this work, please contact Nellie Stagg at stagg@crcamerica.org or Kevin Wilkins at kwilkins@slvdr.org.

Regional Broadband Collaborative Members

San Luis Valley RPD Regional Leadership Committee Community Resource Center	
Aaron Miltenberger	Executive Director, Boys & Girls Club of the San Luis Valley
Lupita Garcia	Business Office Manager, Energy Resource Center
Amanda Pearson	Development Director, La Puente Home
Lori Laske	Alamosa County Commissioner District 1
Stephanie Sales	Bookkeeper, South Central Colorado Seniors
Nellie Stagg	Senior Program Director, Community Resource Center
Broadband Technical Steering Committee San Luis Valley Development Resources Group	
Kevin Daniel	Chief Information Officer, Adams State University
Kevin Wilkins	Executive Director, San Luis Valley Development Resources Group
James Belknap	Information Technology Director, Cities of Monte Vista and Alamosa
Ken Groff	District Technology Director, Upper Rio Grande School District
Brandon Gallegos	Systems Analyst, City of Alamosa

