



Building a healthier, better educated, and more financially secure North Carolina requires an affordable, high-speed internet connection in every home. Too many communities across the state lack the broadband speeds that are critical to doing your homework, applying for a job, or seeing a doctor without leaving your home. Rural parts of the state feel this disconnect most dramatically. According to the Federal Communications Commission, approximately 95 percent of the homes in North Carolina that lack a broadband connection are located in rural areas.

Governor Cooper's budget addresses two areas where this need is strongest: supporting the deployment of broadband infrastructure in rural areas and attacking the homework gap that exists when children are assigned digital homework but lack an internet connection at home.

Building Broadband Infrastructure

The Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) program housed within the Department of Information Technology supports private internet service providers deploying broadband infrastructure in the state's most economically distressed tier one counties. The legislature appropriated \$10 million for the program in 2018. Governor Cooper's budget increases this investment to \$30 million for the program's second year, and expands eligible projects to the state's 80 most economically distressed counties.

Grant applications are scored on a range of criteria. This budget also provides incentives for broadband projects that will result in low-cost service options, because affordability is one of the most significant barriers to broadband adoption.

Closing the Homework Gap

The homework gap is one of the cruelest elements of the digital divide. Until every household in North Carolina has access to a high-speed internet connection, Governor Cooper's budget recommends providing resources to schools to purchase and lend internet hotspots to students who do not have internet access at home. The \$5 million competitive grant program also will allow schools to purchase wi-fi technology for school buses.