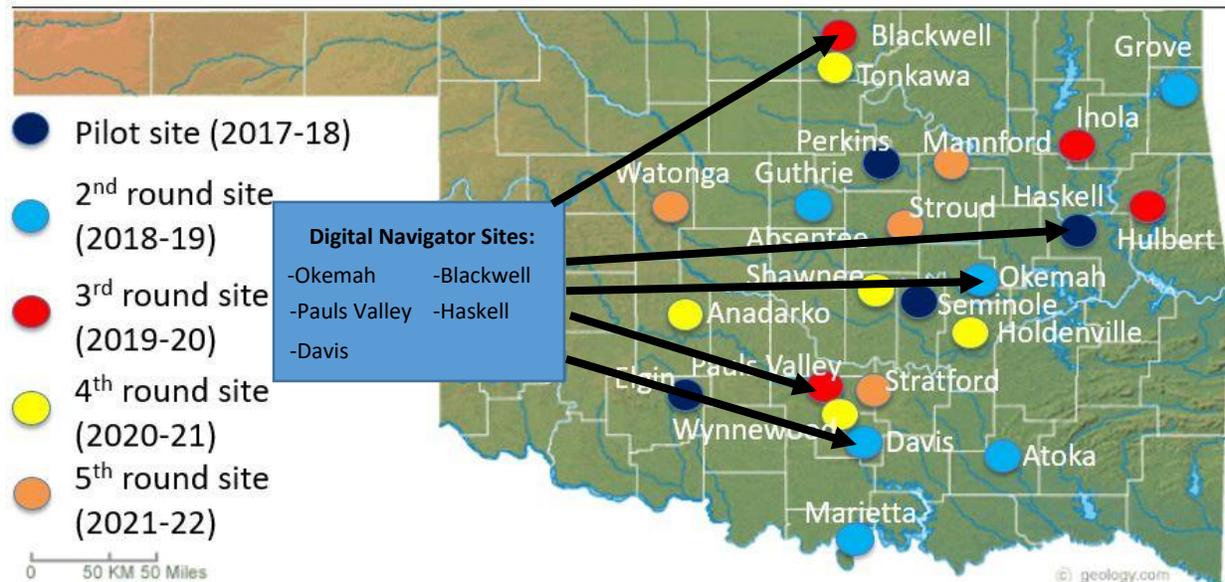


Rural Library Digital Navigators in Oklahoma – Summary Brief

Program Description: Since 2017, AARP and Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) have collaborated with rural libraries across the state to loan out hotspot devices (which provide a mobile Internet connection) to their patrons. We currently have 23 participating libraries in communities ranging from 800 – 10,000 population. In late 2021, we received a national AARP grant to hire a part-time worker in five (5) specific libraries to focus on digital equity issues in the local community. We call those workers “*digital navigators.*” We selected some of our best library partners in areas of highest need (i.e. locations with lowest home broadband adoption / computer access rates; or that serve mostly minorities).



Rural Library Hotspot Loan Locations across Oklahoma, with 5 Digital Navigator Awardees Highlighted.

Digital Navigators can assist local residents in topics such as:

- Signing up for the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) and its follow-on program;
 - o The EBB provides a subsidy of up to \$75 / month for home broadband service
 - o The EBB also provides a 1-time \$100 discount for a laptop / tablet
- Obtaining their own low-cost hotspots (through PCs for People);
- Exploring options for low-cost service or devices through national programs and local non-profits;
- Demonstrating telehealth use (sometimes in partnership with local hospitals / clinics);
- Gaining computer skills valued by local companies (Excel; data entry);
- Determining reliable sources of information online.

The current program has hired a digital navigator in each of our 5 participating libraries, who works on these topics for 10-15 hours per week. The navigators hold regular hours in the library to help people with one-on-one sessions, and attempts to follow-up with each patron to make sure they have achieved their goals. The navigators also travel with OCES / AARP personnel to make presentations about their services to the local community.

Program Length: The program is currently funded through December 31, 2021. However, more funding for this type of work is available via the recently-passed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and we hope to continue – and expand – the program to other libraries across the state.

Point of Contact:

Dr. Brian Whitacre, Professor and Neustadt Chair
(405)744-9825, brian.whitacre@okstate.edu