Implementation Plan for the "Getting Rural Virginia Connected" TOP grant funded project

Goal: To allow communities listed below (also referred to as "participating communities" in this document) to use technology effectively to improve local social and economic conditions while including as many citizens as possible in each community's decision-making process.

Counties	Participating Communities
Accomack	Onancock, Wachaprague, Horntown
Carroll	Hillsville, Cana, Laurel Fork, Fancy Gap, Woodlawn
Craig	New Castle, Sinking Creek Valley, John's Creek Valley, Paint Bank
Cumberland	Cartersville, Cumberland
Dickenson	Clintwood, Haysi
Grayson	Independence, Fries, Troutdale
Louisa	Mineral, Bumpass
King and Queen	King and Queen Courthouse, Newtown
Northampton	Cheapside, Cape Charles, Bayview, Nassawadox, New Road

Key Outcomes:
1. Increased attendance at public meetings on key community issues by 15% per year.
2. A technology plan for each community with measurable milestones that directly address at least four serious social and/or economic issues identified by the community itself.
3. Increased Internet use in each community by 15% per year.
4. A fully functional, community network using local community members to manage content.
5. At least three new home-based and small business startups in each community each year.
6. At least six civic groups and organizations online in each community each year
7. An Information Technology Master Plan for each community
8. Permanent increased capacity in each community to use technology and the
9. Identification of and planning for regional technology corridors linking multiple communities

Implementation Task List:
1. **Conduct Extension Agent Training**
   Extension agents will be briefed about the proposed implementation plan for this project. They will also receive training in the following areas:
   a. **Introduction to telecommunications infrastructure**
      Help extension agents become familiar with the telecomm infrastructure issues facing rural communities. Agents will learn how to help communities become more independent in setting local agendas for telecommunications.
   b. **Community assessment**
      Extension agents will learn how to conduct community assessment, with a special focus on telecommunications. An Extension specialist will lead this section, with assistance from Information Systems staff. The CSPP model will be used as a starting point for technology assessment.
   c. **Introduction to community networks**
      Extension agents will learn how community networks make local communities more effective in solving problems, engaging citizens in local issues and creating a stronger sense of community.

   In addition to these training sessions, agents will also be informed about the evaluation component of this project and their role in collecting relevant data for the evaluation process. See *Appendix A: Evaluation Plan for Key Outcomes* for an overview of the evaluation process.

2. **Obtain support from county administrators and leaders within the county**
   For this project to be a success, administrators and other leaders within each of the nine counties must support this effort in their respective counties. Extension agents will contact county administrators and

leaders (preferably with a personal phone call) to explain project goals and outcomes and request their support for the project. The list of people to be contacted includes (but is not limited to) the following:
> Board of Supervisors
> County administrator
> Chamber of Commerce
> Representatives of Industrial/Economic Development groups
> Superintendent of Schools
> School Board
> Extension Leadership Council

Agents will also request these leaders to provide names of citizens that they know especially within participating communities who they think might be willing to serve on the technology leadership teams.

3. **Identify Local Technology Leadership Teams**
   Each **participating community** will have a citizen team, referred to in the grant document as the Technology Leadership Team. Using the process described in the section titled *Recruiting members for the TLT*, agents will recruit *ten to twelve citizens from each participating community*. These individuals will have a strong interest and commitment to the effort and willingness to contribute time and energy to provide leadership and direction. This group will include representatives from local governments, business and agribusiness, industry, public education, the faith community, civic organizations, youth, and seniors. **Technology Leadership Teams will play a pivotal role in the overall success of this project.**

   These teams will perform the following functions:
   1. Serve as the core group for planning and implementing the Take Charge program that will reach out to the entire community. In their capacity as the planning committee for the Take Charge process, they will undertake the preparatory tasks needed to facilitate this process successfully within their communities. These tasks are listed in *Appendix B: Getting Ready for the Take Charge Process*
   2. Advise and coordinate local program planning and to communicate and advocate the process to all segments of the community.
   3. Work with project staff and Virginia Tech faculty to perform an assessment of current technology in the community using the CSPP model and other instruments.
   4. Serve as facilitators in community workshops and forums to enhance the understanding of the general public on the potential of technology.
   5. Work with project staff to identify and secure the resources necessary to fulfill and sustain the strategies of the local plan.
   6. Remain in place after the end of the TOP funding with a commitment to continuing to provide technology leadership in the county.

   Recruiting members for the TLT: Extension Agents are fundamental to the process of recruiting these members because they know their communities and the members that represent the power base. They will use the following process to recruit members for the Technology Teams *in each participating community*:
   1. Begin by inviting members of the local government board or council. This is usually best accomplished by a personal phone call explaining the process and intended outcomes. Agents should get a firm commitment from at least one member of the board or council in each of the participating communities.
   2. Create a list of other leaders in the communities using *Appendix C: Significant Segments of the Community and Decision Makers* as a guideline. Every effort should be made to include as many sectors as possible. Inform these individuals about the project and invite them to join this effort.
   3. Contact individuals identified by local leaders as most active and likely to champion the process. Request these individuals that if they cannot participate that they recommend likely individuals who

     could then be invited to serve on the leadership team. In most cases, several follow-ups may be necessary to fill all segments of the community.
4. Publicize the project and the need for participants from within the general population using a combination of the following suggestions:
   1. Plan an informational meeting to collect interested parties
   2. Meet and make informal presentations to local groups to generate interest
   3. Run advertisements for the informational meeting in the local papers
   4. Distribute and flyers place posters within the community
   5. Send out personal invitations to groups such as, but not limited to:
      Clubs and organizations in the community
      Fire/Rescue
      Service organizations
      NAACP
      Churches
      Principals and staff of all schools
      Historical societies
      Business heads that have shown support for progress in the county
      Private residents that have shown interest in economic growth
      Senior Citizens groups

This process is designed to provide an opportunity for citizens from all walks of life within participating communities to volunteer for this project. Standardizing on a recruitment process ensures that all interested parties have the same opportunities for volunteering for this effort. It also allows the project management team to document and report efforts made within each community to the Department of Commerce (the organization that's funding this effort).

Selecting team members for the TLT: TLT members will be selected based upon the following criteria:
1. They have a personal commitment to using technology to improve the community
2. They are willing to participate actively in both training and ongoing citizen team training
3. They represent a broad cross section of the community
4. They remain in place past the end of the grant period in order to help their communities with their ongoing technology needs

As part of the selection process, **agents will inform each member that unless otherwise requested, their names and the community they are representing will be displayed on the TOP Website and also supplied to the Department of Commerce for record keeping purposes**. *No other personal information will be displayed on the Web site or provided to the Department of Commerce*. Members have the freedom to list other information in the community directory if they choose to do so.

Agents will email the TOP Coordinator (jaime.dunton@vt.edu) the following:
1. A summary of the steps they took to recruit the team
2. A list of its members selected including name, occupation (specific companies are not required)/segment of society they represent, and community they are representing.

Note: Where appropriate, activities of the various community citizen teams will be combined and coordinated at the county level in order to simplify the logistics of providing training and related information to these teams.

4. **Train Technology Leadership Teams**
    TLT members receive training in three areas:
    a. **Introduction to telecommunications**
        Team members will become familiar with the telecomm infrastructure issues facing rural communities. Team members would learn how to help their communities become more independent in setting local agendas for telecommunications.
    b. **Take Charge**
        Team members will learn how the Take Charge program works, key aspects and phases of the initiative, and how to participate effectively in Take Charge. During this session, responsibilities for finding suitable locations in three areas of the county, establishing dates for the community meetings, finding sponsors for food, notebooks, copying, workshop materials, and establishing a plan for advertising the Take Charge program will be divided among various team members. See *Appendix B: Getting Ready for the Take Charge Process* for details.
    c. **Introduction to community networks**
        Team members will learn how community networks make local communities more effective in solving problems, engaging citizens in local issues, and creating a stronger sense of community. Team members would also receive training in how to use email and the Web (if needed), and how to use online tools effectively to support communication within the community.

5. **Conduct Take Charge Workshops**
    Extension agents will facilitate the Take Charge program that includes three, three-hour workshops. These workshops are designed to foster collaboration among the citizens of each community, to move the group toward consensus, and to provide a framework for creating a vision for the county. *All participating communities within a county will come together for these workshops*.

    Workshop #1 - Where Are We Now?
        Examine historical and current trends and characteristics of the community and consider implications for the future.
        Self examination of the community's strengths and vulnerabilities in terms of financial, social, human, and natural assets.

    Workshop #2 - Where Do We Want To Be?
        Develop a collective vision for the future of the community. Findings for each community will be combined to develop a collective vision for the future of the county.
        Assess the opportunities for and threats to achieving that vision.

    Workshop #3 - How Do We Get There?
        Identify and frame overarching development issues
        Identify existing resources to help address these issues
        Explore alternative ways to organize the community for action

    Issues identified by the Technology Leadership Teams during the Take Charge process will be highlighted on each community's Web site.

6. **Hold Community Readiness Workshops**
   These workshops are open to citizens at large and local community teams. Topics include:
   a. Why community networks and technology investments help communities make the transition to the Information Economy
   b. How community networks increase worker job skills and expand the pool of high tech workers
   c. How technology can help rural communities retain traditional "small town" qualities and remain active, vibrant communities
   d. What communities have to do to attract high tech companies
   e. How to set up and run a community network

7. **Perform Community Technology Assessments**
   Extension agents work with TLT members to perform an assessment of current technology in the community, using the CSPP model and other instruments developed by Virginia Tech. These assessments will be used to guide the development of technology master plans for the community.

8. **Deploy Community Network**
   Each community will receive professional support and all systems needed to have a complete local version of the Blacksburg Electronic Village services referred to as ***BEV in a Box*** customized for the community. Design team meetings will be held with each community team to design the community Web site and services. This deployment of BEV in a Box will be done in stages and will include the following activities:
   1. Meeting to discuss and finalize design issues
   2. Training on the use of the various components of BEV in a Box i.e. discussion forum, community calendar, community directory, community village mall
   3. Training on maintaining the Community Network and Community Connection accounts.

9. **Develop Technology Master Plan**
   BEV staff and Extension agents will meet with community leaders over a nine month period to develop Technology Master plans for each community. They will also develop regional Master Plans that will help develop regional technology corridors.

10. **Conduct Citizen Team Meetings**
    Each community team will have ongoing meetings with the project coordinator and the local Extension agent. Community teams will also participate in cluster meetings and quarterly project meetings (all communities) to ensure constant communication and the development of regional technology corridors.

11. **Prepare Report for communities**
    A comprehensive report will be produced in partnership with local teams and disseminated to all project partners within three months following the completion of the 24 months of TOP funding.

12. **Prepare Public Report**
    Write, edit, review, and print the final public report on the effort. This report will document the model used throughout the life of the effort, include all relevant assessment data, will document the impacts of the program, and be oriented specifically to be useful by other communities and regions.

13. **Perform Assessment Research**
    The assessments conducted for each community will be used as the basis of an ongoing research effort during the two years of the project to document differences and similarities in the communities related to technology needs and impacts. BEV staff and VCE researchers will seek to discover common issues among these communities, try to identify common strategies that worked across multiple communities, and document this work in technical reports and published papers, including peer-reviewed journals.

Appendix A: Evaluation Plan for Key Outcomes

Outcome 1: Increased attendance at public meetings on key community issues by 15% per year.
Evaluation plan: Attendance lists and agendas of all public meetings will be maintained and examined through the project (this will include any public meetings that take place to address issues identified in the Take Charge Program). This tracking should begin with the Take Charge public meetings. Items will include: meeting topic, date, location, agenda items, and total number of participants.

Outcome 2: A technology plan for each community with measurable milestones that directly address at least four serious social and/or economic issues identified by the community itself. An information technology master plan for each community.
Evaluation plan: A format for the technology master plan will be developed by project personnel. A panel of experts will be formed to review the technology master plan for each community. The panel will critique the master plan for appropriateness and practicality using a review sheet that will be developed. Once the measurable milestones have been identified, the evaluation team will work with the community to determine measurement strategies.

Outcome 3: Increased Internet use in each community by 15% per year.
Evaluation plan: Once the community website is developed and online, usage statistics will be monitored on a monthly basis to determine change in Internet use over time.

Outcome 4: A fully functional community network using local members to manage content.
Evaluation plan: Establishment of a functional and operating technology team will serve as evidence that this outcome has been achieved.

Outcome 5: At least three new home-based and small business startups in each community each year.
Evaluation plan: The community web site will be monitored for new business presence (e.g., Virtual Business Incubator, Village Mall). A survey may be developed and administered to the new startups to determine the extent to which the web presence affected their business.

Outcome 6: At least six civic groups and organizations online in each community each year.
Evaluation plan: The community web site will be monitored for civic groups' and organizations' presence (e.g., Community Connections, Organization Directory).

Outcome 7: An Information Technology Plan for each community.
Evaluation plan: The Information Technology Plan for each community will be reviewed to ensure that it contains the outcomes of the Technology Assessments conducted in each community.

Outcome 8: Permanent increased capacity in each community to use technology and the Take Charge planning process to address community needs well beyond the end of the grant period.
Evaluation plan: The Take Charge process will be evaluated at each of the three meetings as well as a follow-up survey/interview with members of the planning committee.

Outcome 9: Identification of and planning for regional technology corridors linking multiple communities.
Evaluation plan: Evidence to document this outcome will be contained in the technology master plan.

Appendix B: Getting Ready for the Take Charge Process (Pam Gibson**)**

Before the three community-wide meetings can take place, a planning committee made up of a cross-section of the community leadership whose activities will be coordinated by the county extension agent will have to perform the following preparatory tasks to ensure the success of this process:

1. The planning committee should reflect the various interests of the community. Please see the checklist in *Appendix C: Significant Segments of the Community and Decision Makers* for use as a guideline. Getting commitment from community sectors to work on the Take Charge program will help to guarantee that those sectors of the community will come to the community meetings. For success, there needs to be community wide buy-in by every sector in the community. It is imperative that members of the county board and town council participate. They control the budget and will have the power to implement the changes the community identifies.

2. The three community wide meetings typically occur one night a week for three consecutive weeks for three (3) hours. Typically the meetings run from 6pm to 9pm or 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm.   The meeting dates should be established. Every attempt must be made to publicize these meetings at least two weeks in advance.

3. The meeting locations should vary according to the community. By varying the location, it makes at least one meeting very accessible to one portion of the county. The meeting room should accommodate 50 to 100 people with tables for work areas, room for food set up, accessible restrooms. School lunchrooms have worked well.

4. Once dates and locations are established, it is time to find some sponsors to prepare food for the three evenings. Many people have to come directly from work to attend the meeting and don't have time to eat dinner, so having things like sandwiches available makes it easier for them to attend.

5. There will need to be commitments by the planning committee to purchase or find sponsors for notebooks, create notebooks, photocopy materials, stuff notebooks.

6. Participants will need to be registered for each meeting, given name tags and notebook materials.

7. The meeting locations need to have numerous flipcharts with paper, overhead projector or other audio visual aids.

8. After dates and locations have been established, the planning committee can begin to identify how to ensure that every member of the community knows about the meetings. Pam Gibson has a brochure in MS Word that can be adapted for each county. Putting ads in the newspaper, community newsletters, hanging posters in prominent places, sending notices home with school children are some of the ways to reach members of the community. It is also important that the identified movers and shakers attend the meetings and invite their constituencies.

9. As it closer to the time of the community-wide meetings, facilitators will want to enlist others to help work with the break out groups.

10. Facilitators may also want input from local historians for the first meeting. In the past, it has been popular to have the community history prepared for the notebooks on the first night and have the local historian(s) talk about the founding of the community.

11. Someone has to agree to take notes, collect information and have it ready for the notebooks the following week.

Appendix C: Significant Segments of the Community and Decision Makers
(Reproduced from the Take Charge Manual, Appendix A Page 81)

Agriculture

Banks/Financial Institutions

Chamber of Commerce/ Commercial Clubs
Churches

Civic Organizations

Community Improvement/ Betterment Groups

Educational Organizations
        Schools
        Extension Service
        Other
Elderly

Health Care

Industry
Local Development Organizations
Local Government
        Town Board or City Council
        Park Board
        Zoning Board or Planning Commission
        Economic Development Commission
Professionals (Attorneys, Accountants, Architects, Marketing Specialists)
Real Estate
Retail Businesses

Unions

Utility Companies
        (Electric, Gas, Railroads)
Youth