

# Communities Expanding the Benefits of Broadband



## FutureGenerations Rural America FACT SHEET

### WHAT WE DO

We enable West Virginia's community institutions to meet local priorities in education, emergency response, health, and income generation through a statewide network of 60 public computer and training centers.

### HOW WE WORK

We partner with volunteer fire departments and emergency rescue squads to set up public computer centers and training programs that meet local priorities.

### IMPACT AREAS

- Digital literacy
- Job marketable computer skills
- Access to online education
- Community-based management of public computer centers
- Emergency response
- Increase health awareness through CHERP project

### WHERE WE WORK



Numbers represent the locations of public computer centers.  
Lighter blue represents the counties we are working in.



### INTRODUCTION

From West Virginia's southern coalfields to the Potomac Highlands, more than 440 volunteer fire departments serve communities. These anchor institutions are lifelines to families and double as community centers. To build on this successful volunteer service, Future Generations equips and empowers fire departments and emergency rescue squads with technology and training to benefit families.

With a \$4.4 million three-year grant (2010-2013) from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, we partner with volunteer fire departments to set up public computer centers and training programs that meet local priorities in education, emergency response, health, and income generation.

### PUBLIC COMPUTER CENTERS IN FIRE DEPARTMENTS & RESCUE SQUADS

This project has opened 60 public computer centers in 38 counties across West Virginia. Volunteer fire departments and emergency rescue squads manage these centers for the benefit of the entire community. Each computer center is open for a minimum of 10 hours a week, with dates and times set to be convenient for community members. Each center is equipped with 10 computers connected to broadband, a printer, projector or flatscreen tv, digital camera, headphones, webcam, and other supplies.

*Local Computer Mentors:* Squads manage their computer centers with the help of a person or persons that they select to be trained as a computer mentor. Mentors are trusted community members who help their neighbors overcome the fear of learning new computer skills. To date, Future Generations has trained 162 computer mentors. Each mentor participates in workshops and receives active and ongoing support. Computer mentors also network with each other, participating in monthly webinars.

## MAJOR ACTIVITIES

**Public Computer Centers:** Expand learning opportunities at 60 sites.

**Local Computer Mentors:** Continue to strengthen the skills of local computer mentors to teach their neighbors.

**Computer Refurbishing Centers:** Refurbish computers and resell them at a low cost, marketing them online and through volunteer fire departments.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Evaluate the impact of public computer labs in increasing the use and benefits of broadband (high-speed) Internet.



## PROGRAM LEADERSHIP



Director, LeeAnn Shreve, has a B.A. from West Virginia University, a M.S. in Strategic Leadership from Mountain State University, and a M.A. in Applied Community Change and Conservation from Future Generations Graduate School. As a community outreach specialist, she has over 20 years of experience in working with educational and nonprofit organizations in West Virginia. LeeAnn is also a WV community leader, previously serving for more than 12 years as a 4-H leader and as the President of Pendleton County's 4-H Leader's Association.

## CONTACT US

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## EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

This project creates new "community access points" for online education and peer-supported learning. Computer mentors run scheduled classes in digital literacy for beginners. In most centers, these classes run for two hours, two times a week. Educational partner organizations provide other training programs, including:

- Mission WV: e-commerce academy and special advanced classes
- Partnership of African American Churches: chronic disease self-management
- Monongahela National Forest: online mapping
- Johns Hopkins University Bayview Medical Center: emergency preparedness
- West Virginia State Library Commission: wwinfodepot.org

A complete online course catalog of current offerings is available at:

<http://learn.futurewv.org>. Many of these courses are self-paced and based on the "open entry, open exit" system of learning, which allows users to begin a class at any time and pursue lessons at their own pace while supported by computer mentors.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

To evaluate and monitor impact in computer and broadband use in homes and businesses, Future Generations conducts baseline and follow-up surveys in all project communities. From 2010-2011, the organization conducted 1,500 door-to-door household surveys in 50 communities using a randomized cluster sampling method. A randomized telephone survey was also conducted with 820 businesses in the project area. Survey results are available on the project website.

## COMPUTER REFURBISHING CENTERS

The affordability of computers and software remains a major online barrier to many low-income families. This project has a computer refurbishing center in Circleville, West Virginia. This center purchases used computers in bulk from government agencies through Mission WV, repairs, cleans, and upgrades them with memory, wireless Internet cards and the Linux operating system. Participating fire departments purchase these computers at cost and resell them in their communities.

## NEW OUTREACH

Future Generations received a grant from the United States Department of Health and Human Services to partner with 6 counties in West Virginia over the next three years. Ten CHERPS (Community Health Education Resource Persons) will be trained to increase the discussion of health issues in communities. Computer centers from the West Virginia Broadband Opportunities Program will help facilitate this project.