

Digital Inclusion & Regional Workforce Plan

Piscataquis County

Submitted by:

Mark Ouellette & Susan Corbett

Axiom

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207.255.0679

mark@connectwithaxiom.com
susan@connectwithaxiom.com



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Piscataquis County

Digital Inclusion & Regional Workforce Plan

At Axiom, we believe rural broadband deployment is about much more than a fast connection — it is about people’s livelihoods, education, and well-being.

While much of the report you are reading is about how to better connect communities to the internet, this part of our report deals with what you do *once you have connectivity*. The structure of this report is intended to walk you through four major themes:

- ✓ Results of Community and Business Surveys and what they tell us
- ✓ A Digital Inclusion section with a plan and pricing
- ✓ Workforce Investment strategies
- ✓ An Employers Initiative Program

Taken one at a time, or simultaneously these programs are an investment in the citizens within the communities of Piscataquis County, and enhances the larger regional connectivity effort contained in this report.

Benefits include:

- **Higher Take-rates**, as people understand the value of an internet connection to their lives, they are more likely to take service
- **Reduces barriers** to adoption and helps community members access learning tools for increased on-line presence
- People with service are more likely to **upgrade service**, again increasing the viability of a project being successful
- **Helps businesses understand how to leverage on-line tools and cloud services** to add value and productivity to their business
- Helps individual community members **access life enhancing content, including e commerce, telemedicine services and educational opportunities**
- **Bridges the Digital Divide**, helping teach disadvantaged members of the community to participate in what is increasingly an on-line world

By removing barriers and exposing people and businesses to educational opportunities that improves their understanding of on-line benefits Axiom believes we can change the economic status of a region

Surveys, Interviews and Meeting Results

Axiom interviewed businesses, community and municipal leaders, as well as residents in Piscataquis County to discuss Computer Skills/Digital Literacy Training and Workforce Skills Training.

Business

For the business community, an online survey was distributed, followed by interviews. Key businesses were identified to target during this process. In addition to the survey being available to all businesses in each community, Axiom contacted 70 businesses via email or phone calls, Piscataquis County Economic Development Council (PCEDC) sent out the business survey link, and it was posted on PCEDC's website and Facebook page. A total of 85 businesses responded to the survey and/or interviews. (See Addendum 1 – Business & Workforce Needs Survey Results)

Residential

As with businesses, community & municipal leaders and the residential community was invited to participate in a Community Broadband Survey by PCEDC. It was the goal of the survey for these community and municipal leaders to understand what citizens of the region were voicing as their issues and concerns around better broadband connectivity. A total of 409 residents completed the survey. (See Addendum 2 - Community Internet Survey Results)

Community & Municipal

Increasingly rural communities are unable or unaware of how to take advantage of the economic and educational opportunities that a robust broadband connection can do. A series of meetings occurred to discuss the importance and understanding of broadband capabilities and how individual residents might take advantage of these types of connections. Demonstrating distance learning education, telehealth, telecommuting, cloud-based services and software begins the process of developing a Digital Literacy Plan for the region.

Through the interview and survey process, Axiom identified five key focal points for Piscataquis County.

Key Components:

Aging in Place

Piscataquis County, with a population of 17,535 residents, has a median age of 48.1 years old; 47% of the population is over 50 years old; 20% of the county's population is over 65 years old, per the 2010 American Census Survey.

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

Piscataquis County should consider exploring technology tools and offering classes and workshops that will assist their residents to remain in their homes as they become older. Current technology programs available are medication reminders; pill dispensers; health management (monitor blood pressure, pulse, heartbeat, blood glucose levels); nutrition guides; fitness tools; and brain games. Also available are home monitoring systems; personal emergency response systems; and GPS tracking systems.

A “Shared Community Health Needs Assessment” was published in 2016 for Piscataquis County. <http://www.mayohospital.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/chna-piscataquis.pdf>. The report is a comprehensive review of health data and community stakeholder input on a broad set of health issues. It states that access to health care in Piscataquis County is lower than the state, specifically, a lower percentage of residents have health insurance and a higher proportion report a lack of care due to cost. Although this report does not specifically focus on residents over 65 years of age, it does report that cancer rates in Piscataquis County are similar to the state and cancer is the leading cause of death in the county. Cardiovascular disease is also a concern with rates of hospitalizations for heart attack and stroke, and mortality rates for acute myocardial infarction and coronary heart disease, significantly higher than the state.

In addition, a study was completed by the Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine, and presented at the Blaine House Conference on Aging in September 2006. The report, “Maine’s Aging Economy and the Economy of Aging” <http://www.maine.gov/msl/libs/data/issuebriefdemographics.pdf> stated, “*that within Maine, the growth in Maine’s elderly population will not occur evenly, with the result that some parts of Maine will be distinctly older than others*”. Those areas with a disproportionate elder population should be addressing the specific needs of this particular population.

Axiom Education & Training Center’s “National Digital Equity Center” (NDEC) can provide training to Piscataquis County’s senior population and to family members to leverage available technologies. NDEC can provide the community with trained educators to teach seniors, caregiver alliances or remote classes for family caregivers. The senior citizen and the family member can learn firsthand how to use the online monitoring systems or even use something as basic as an iPad for communicating and visual check-ins. Patients can connect to providers for care and support via videoconference (telehealth), as well as including family members to actively participate in the care of a loved one.

Collaborating partners to consider are:

- Eastern Area Agency on Aging www.eaaa.org
- Penquis www.penquis.org
- Mayo Regional Hospital www.mayohospital.com/about/community-health-needs
- Pine Tree Hospice www.pinetreehospice.org
- VNA Home Health Hospice <http://vnahomehealth.org>
- Gateway Seniors Without Walls <http://gatewayseNIorswithoutwalls.org>
- Care & Comfort Home Health & Mental Health Services www.careandcomfort.com/news.asp?article=6182
- Piscataquis Thriving in Place Collaboration <http://charlottewhitecenter.org/services/piscataquis-thriving-in-place-tip-collaboration>

Tourism

The beautiful, rural, Piscataquis region offers a myriad of landscapes and activities. Beautiful rivers, ponds, and lakes beckon anglers, paddlers, bikers, and swimmers throughout the summer, and then freeze over for ice fishers, hunters, snowmobilers, cross-country skiing, dogsledding, and ice skaters in the winter. Visitors can enjoy four seasons of activities – geocaching, ATV's, floatplanes, whitewater rafting, hiking, camping, birding, and generally enjoying the great Maine woods and waters.

There are many tourism related businesses - lodging, restaurants, guided tours, the arts, as well as locally Maine-made products. Piscataquis County should consider exploring technology tools by offering classes and workshops that will assist businesses and residents in promoting tourism.

Axiom Education & Training Center's "National Digital Equity Center" (NDEC) can work with local organizations to train Piscataquis County's businesses and interested community members to leverage available technologies that increase and promote the county's tourism industry. NDEC can provide the community with trained educators. Businesses and community members can learn firsthand how to create and update websites, leverage the power of social media, as well as utilize apps for walking tours and points of interest.

Collaborating partners to consider are:

- Piscataquis County Chamber of Commerce www.piscataquischamber.com
- Northern Forest Center <https://northernforest.org>
- Maine Woods Consortium <http://www.mainewoodconsortium.org/mwtti/welcome-me>
- Maine Office of Tourism <https://visitmaine.com>
- Maine Invites You www.mainetourism.com
- Destination Moosehead Lake www.mooseheadlake.org

Business and/or Community Center

One of the questions posed in the Community Broadband Survey was “**Do you think a business center in your community would make sense?**” Over 40% of the residents responded “yes”. The towns with the highest response of “yes” were Abbot, Dover-Foxcroft, Greenville, Guilford, Milo, and Parkman. PCEDC could consider working with these communities to explore establishing Business/Community centers. 58% of businesses that completed the Business Survey state that they are either sole entrepreneurs or have less than five employees.

A Business/Community Center can be a place to offer classes and workshops that will assist sole-entrepreneurs, and small businesses, in the ever-changing technology world. Funding for the project should include installing a public computer center with multiple computers and videoconferencing capability. The Business/Community Center could also encourage new entrepreneurs and start-ups as a place to establish a new venture without committing to long-term overhead costs as they explore the viability of new business products or services.

The Business/Community Center can be a place for the community to gather for different types of activities. The following Weblinks are good resources to assist PCEDC and the communities in exploring establishing a center.

- <https://m.wikihow.com/Start-a-Community-Center>
- <https://bizfluent.com/start-community-center-5093.html>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_centre

Axiom Education & Training Center’s “National Digital Equity Center” (NDEC) can provide a budget for establishing a public computer center, as well as provide training to businesses and residents to leverage available technologies.

Collaborating partners to consider are:

- Foster Center for Student Innovation <https://umaine.edu/innovation>
- Maine Small Business Development Centers www.mainesbdc.org
- Top Gun Entrepreneurship Acceleration www.mced.biz/programs-services/top-gun-program

Business Growth and Support

Currently, there are 1,575 businesses included in the 2010 American Census Survey, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml. We suspect that there are many more unreported businesses in the region, including home-based and/or cottage-industry businesses. Although undocumented, it is estimated that 24% of businesses in Piscataquis County are micro-businesses - sole-entrepreneurs and less than five employees.

Of the businesses that responded to the Business Survey:

- **58% of businesses expect training will be needed** for new and existing staff over the next year
- 11% of businesses report that they currently offer training programs to their staff
- **56% state they are interested in offering computer skills classes** to their employees
- 18% of businesses do not have a website
- 32% of businesses would like to offer customer service training.

The Piscataquis County Community Survey reports that 3% of residents use the internet for both home and business, and 28% report that someone in the household works from home.

Axiom Education & Training Center’s “National Digital Equity Center” (NDEC) can organize training for Piscataquis County’s business community to leverage available technologies and industry specific instruction. NDEC can provide the community with educators to hold classes, as well as collaborate with local organizations to provide training. The business and community members can learn firsthand how to create and update websites, increase technical proficiency and industry specific knowledge.

Collaborating partners to consider are:

- Piscataquis Chamber of Commerce www.piscataquischamber.com
- Eastern Maine Development Corp. www.emdc.org
- Maine Small Business Development Centers www.mainesbdc.org
- Kiwanis Club of Dover-Foxcroft <http://www.doverfoxcroftkiwanis.org>
- Piscataquis County Adult Education Cooperative <http://pvaec.maineadulted.org>
- Welcome ME (Customer Service Training) www.welcomemetraining.com

Websites, Social Media and Domain Email

Within the region's communities, 18% of businesses report that they do not have a website, 55% report that they would like to learn social media skills for their business, and 70% state that they do not use a business domain for email addresses.

In addition to providing training to businesses, and coordinating with organizations in the county, Axiom Education & Training Center's "National Digital Equity Center" (NDEC) can provide a train-the-trainer program for PCEDC and the communities' businesses.

Digital Inclusion Plan

Digital inclusion is a national priority in the United States, and increasingly a priority in Maine. High-speed internet access is widely recognized as a necessity for full participation in today's society. Employers, educators, businesses, healthcare providers, and civic institutions expect people to have access to computers and broadband connectivity. However, accessible, reliable, and affordable broadband service continues to be out of reach for millions of Americans and thousands of Mainers, many of whom live in low-income, rural households. This gap in adoption of high-speed Internet and the lack of skills needed to use broadband-enabled tools in meaningful ways continue to be significant problems that policymakers, researchers, and practitioners need to focus on in the United States and in Maine.

The Digital Inclusion Program for PCEDC includes four components:

1. Affordable Internet – Cost continues to be a major barrier to broadband adoption. PCEDC and the communities should consider addressing “ability to pay”. The following providers in the PCEDC region offer low-cost broadband options:

- **Consolidated Communications (FairPoint Communications):**
 - Eligible low-income Consolidated Communication residential customers can qualify for a discount on qualified internet service at their primary residence under the Lifeline Program. The discount consists of federal monthly support of \$9.25.
 - Eligible Consolidated residential customers residing on tribal lands may qualify for an additional federal discount of up to \$25 per month and installation assistance.
 - Further information, including applications forms, can be found at: www.fairpoint.com/home/residential/phone/lifeline.html
- **Charter Communications (formerly Time Warner Cable):**
 - Charter offers “Spectrum Internet Access”, which is a low-cost broadband offering. www.SpectrumInternetAssist.com.
 - Plan includes:
 - \$14.99 for 30/4 Mbps with no data caps
 - Internet Modem Included
 - No Contracts Required
 - Add in-home WiFi for \$5.00 more per month
 - Customers must not have been a Charter Communications subscriber within 60 days of signing up for Spectrum Internet Assist.
 - Eligibility requires participation in one of the following:
 - National School Lunch Program (NSLP); free or reduced cost lunch
 - Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of NSLP
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (>age 65 only)
 - Residents may visit Charter Communication’s website or call 844-525-1574 to determine eligibility

- **TDS Telecom:**
 - Eligible low-income TDS residential customers can qualify for a discount on qualified internet service at their primary residence under the Lifeline Program. The discount consists of federal monthly support of \$9.25.
 - Further information, including applications forms, can be found at: <https://tdstelecom.com/content/dam/tdstelecom/pdfs/lifeline/LifelineApplication.pdf>
- **PCEDC/Local Community Technology Fund:**
 - A fund could be established to offer a discount to low-income families to address broadband adoption and take-rate.

2. Affordable Equipment Assessment – Low-cost or free computers are often just as important as having access to low-cost or free Internet options, particularly for people in low-income communities.

- **PC's for Maine** www.pcsformaine.org offers refurbished, used computers that are donated by businesses in Maine and are available to low-income families.
- **PC's for Maine** will consider installing a kiosk at a local business to sell low-cost computers locally. Axiom will work with local businesses in each community and facilitate a conversation with PC's for Maine, should the community or PCEDC decide to move forward.
- **Goodwill's "Good Tech"** program offers refurbished, used computers to low-income residents. <https://goodwillnne.org/stores/goodtech>
- **Lending Library of Devices**, laptops, desktops, iPads, etc., could be provided for residents to borrow on an "as-needed" basis. The devices might be donated or grant funds sought to purchase equipment.

3. Digital Literacy Training – Computer Skills Training plays a critical role in technology and workforce development training.

- **Axiom Education & Training Center's National Digital Equity Center** offer Digital Literacy classes for residents and businesses, and would be pleased to organize a Digital Literacy Program. The program will collaborate with Adult & Community Education programs, the region's CareerCenter, and local community programs.
- **Piscataquis Valley Adult Education Cooperative (PVAEC)**, located in Dover-Foxcroft and the only adult education program in Piscataquis County, offers digital literacy training. They serve MSAD 4 (Guilford); MSAD 41 (Milo); AOS 94 (Dexter) and MSAD 68 (Dover-Foxcroft).

Classes are held at all four locations. PVAEC incorporates digital skills/literacy into their workforce training; an example is their CNA training. They also encourage residents to come into their office for one-on-one digital literacy training, answering their questions, and assisting with online access.

A listing of available Business & Skills Training programs (including digital literacy classes) is available online at: <https://pvaec.coursestorm.com/category/business-skills-training>

PCAEC would be happy to increase digital literacy training, and collaborate with other organizations, if funding was available.

- Greenville Adult and Community Education (GACE), located in Greenville, is a small adult education program serving its residents. GACE has offered digital literacy classes in the past, and would like to offer classes again, pending funding opportunities. Currently, residents can request assistance on a one-on-one basis for digital literacy skills. GACE would be happy to increase digital literacy training, and collaborate with other organizations, if funding was available. <https://sites.google.com/site/greenvilleadultcommunityed>
- **Maine Department of Labor's CareerCenter** is committed to assist with workforce development skill efforts. www.mainecareercenter.gov

In rural communities, time, distance, travel is a barrier to educational attainment; holding classes that are in accessible locations that are familiar and not intimidating will increase participation. Geographic coverage throughout the designated service area ensures strong, widespread participation and good, measurable impacts.

We recommend offering residents of each community digital literacy courses over a 12-month period of time, one class per week in four towns, rotating the locations to multiple locations/towns in the county. This would ensure that the program has predictability over some period for full residential and business participation.

Recommended Classes include:

- Introduction to Computer
- Windows 8, 10
- Internet Safety
- Microsoft Word
- Microsoft Excel
- Microsoft Outlook
- Microsoft Publisher
- Microsoft PowerPoint
- QuickBooks
- PhotoShop
- Social Media including FaceBook for Business & Individuals, Twitter, etc.
- WordPress
- Video Streaming
- iPad
- Dropbox
- Gmail
- Google Docs, etc.
- Targeted classes:
 - Aging in Place
 - Tourism

- Business and/or Community Center
- Business Growth and Support
- Websites, Social Media and Domain Email
- Cutting the Cord

*See pricing below.

Axiom will work with the communities and PCEDC to pursue funding for digital literacy classes for residents and businesses.

4. Public Computer Access – Increasing public access computing allows residents to access technology in places they feel comfortable and supported is critical. If a business or resident cannot afford equipment or an internet subscription, and if broadband is not available at their location, Public Computer Access is essential.

- Below is a list of Public Computer Access in libraries in Piscataquis County; all libraries offer free WiFi:
 - **Thompson Free Library**, Dover-Foxcroft www.thompson.lib.me.us
 - 4 workstations, 4 laptops
 - **Cumston Public Library**, Monson www.facebook.com/cumstonlibrary
 - 3 workstations
 - **Harvey Memorial Library**, Parkman http://parkmanmaine.com/parkmanmaine_003.htm
 - 1 workstation
 - **Sangerville Public Library**, Sangerville www.sangerville.lib.me.us
 - 2 workstations, 1 laptop
 - **Milo Free Public Library**, Milo www.trcmaine.org/milolibrary
 - 5 workstations
 - **Shaw Public Library**, Greenville www.facebook.com/Shaw-Public-Library-in-Greenville-ME-175459582481540
 - 8 workstations, 4 laptops
 - **Brownville Public Library**, Brownville www.facebook.com/Brownville-Free-Public-Library-1462050547358925
 - 2 workstations
- **Community HotSpots** are open access networks that allow citizens in a downtown or other public spaces access to the Internet. This is a simple, straightforward way to help a downtown get more connected. It is an affordable, convenient solution to help visitors and residents easy, seamless connectivity. Several Community HotSpots are being recommended for the communities located in the PCEDC region.

Digital Literacy Budget

Digital Literacy is the greatest opportunity to investing in the region's future. As more citizens' livelihoods, ability to obtain new skills, understanding of an emerging digital economy are tied to a broadband connection, regions with the forethought to face this new reality will outpace other regions in productivity, increased economic activity and sustained family attraction and wealth.

Axiom is committed to working with PCEDC, its regional, state and federal partners to deliver a world-class regional Digital Literacy program- customized to the region's businesses and citizens.

Teacher/Instructor (Fringe & Salary)	\$ 80,000
Travel	\$ 8,000
Survey Monkey (includes Annual Fee)	\$ 816
Supplies	\$ 4,000
Academic Services Group (curriculum)	\$ 3,184
Administration	\$ 24,000
Total Budget	\$120,000

- ❖ Budget based on 1-year program, 1 class per week in each of four towns
Budget based on 10 students per class

Workforce Development Skills Analysis

The Business Surveys included questions pertaining to workforce development skills and needs. Following is an overview of the results.

Business Survey Results

- **56% see a need for computer skills training for their employees**
- 39% see a need in training for specific software
- 33% of businesses report computer skills are “average”; 33% are “good”; 26% are “excellent”. Only 3% rates their computer skills as “poor”
- 48% of employees’ computer skills are “average”; 30% are “good”; 10% are excellent. Only 8% rate their employees’ skills as “poor”
- 80% of employees learn best “hands-on”, followed by 18% learn best by self-instruction
- 78% prefer on-site instruction
- Businesses are interested in offering the following computer skills (digital literacy classes):
 - Introduction to Computers
 - Windows 7,8,10
 - Microsoft Programs including: Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, Publisher, Office 360
 - QuickBooks
 - PhotoShop
 - Social Media including: FaceBook, Twitter, Skype, Instagram for Business & Personal
 - Internet Security
 - Video-Streaming
 - iPad
 - Google Docs, etc.
 - WordPress

Other classes:

 - Selling/Purchasing items online
- **22% are sole entrepreneurs; 36% have 2-5 employees; 17% have 5-10 employees; 5% 10-25 employees; 20% over 25 employees**
- Businesses requiring different skill levels include:
 - 39% Unskilled labor
 - 70% Skilled labor
 - 55% High School Diploma
 - 39% 2-year Associate Degree
 - 41% 4-year Bachelors’ Degree

- 18% Master Degree
 - 44% Special Licenses or Certification
- **58% expect training will be needed for new and existing employees over the next year.**
- **Businesses have difficulty recruiting new employees stating the following reasons:**
 - 48% Labor shortage supply
 - 35% Skills not adequate
 - 11% Compensation benefits
- The following training/workshops would be beneficial:
 - 36% Marketing
 - 2% Government Contracting
 - 32% Customer Service
 - 6% Becoming Bankable
 - 12% OSHA Training: Safety Works
 - 4% HACCP Training
 - 4% WorkReady (Soft-Skills) (Maine Certification) (National ACT Certification)
- 31% will be implementing new software programs in the next year
- 41% currently offer training programs to their staff including:
 - ServSafe
 - Title Insurance
 - Legal Training
 - Guide Licenses
 - CPR/First Aid
 - Generator & Pump Installation
 - Industry Specific/Certification

The results of the business survey in each community point to the need for an employer initiated workforce development program targeted at small businesses throughout the region. Pooling resources and working together, PCEDC should strongly consider focusing local and regional resources on employee training that enhances their skills and viability in the marketplace, while also adding value in their current employment situation.

Takeaway #1: Employers are interested in assistance based on the number of respondents to the surveys.

Takeaway #2: Employee training is needed to help employers become more proficient or efficient in the workplace

Takeaway #3: A strong workforce development-training program will begin to alleviate the difficulty in recruiting new talent as existing resources are pooled and directed to assist both employers and employees get the skills they need

Employers' Initiative Program

To address the outcome of the Business Surveys completed by regional businesses, an **Employers' Initiative Program (EIP)** is recommended. It is designed, and can be implemented, to strengthen businesses through enhancing the skills and knowledge of the workforce. It is centered on employer engagement and provisioning of business support services.

The program has four primary components:

- ✓ Employer outreach & recruitment
- ✓ Business assessment
- ✓ Education and training programming
- ✓ Evaluation & assessment

Through these program components, an Employers' Initiative Program will:

Support local employer business development by focusing and enhancing education and skills training

- Provide business development needs assessments focused on technology and learning needs
- Based on individual and organizational assessments, provide training that meets employer preferences and business development needs while considering individual employee aspirations and strengths
- Leverage local partnerships and educational resources, regional business development and learning services

Decrease the barriers for continued and advanced educational attainment for adult learners:

- Increase awareness of educational resources and opportunities
- Create pathways to access educational resources
- Bring the educators and trainers to the place of employment

Enhance relevance of local educational training programs and support services to better meet the needs of employers:

- Engage employers to support, inform, and utilize local career pathways programming
- Create opportunities through customized resources and training that are a "win-win" for both the employer and employee

Program Components:

Employer Outreach

- **Goals:** Increase employer engagement in businesses and educational support services
- **Objectives:** Enroll 100+ businesses into the Employers' Initiative Program
- **Outcomes:** Employers support and encourage employee education and advancing their workforce

Business Needs Assessment

- **Goals:** Strengthen relationship between employers and educational providers
- **Objectives:** Determine what the employers' needs are, evaluate their current employees, and match training and educational programming that addresses both employer needs and individual employee aspirations
- **Outcomes:** Business develops short-term and long-term technology plan and education plan

Education and Training Program

- **Goals:** Increase skill levels of incumbent workers strengthening the ability of businesses to adapt to industry changes, expand operations, and, ultimately increase the value of their business
- **Objectives:** Provide customized training solutions based on employer needs and employee skills levels
- **Outcomes:** Create a more skilled workforce enabling an employer to grow and sustain their business

Evaluation & Assessment

A **PCEDC Employer Initiative Program** should include a robust **Evaluation & Assessment** component throughout the program to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the employer and the employee, and can be adjusted as needed.

- **Goals:**
 - For Adult Learners:**
 - Transferable skills that can be applied to other employment opportunities
 - Potential higher wages for skilled workforce
 - Increased skill levels and productivity in current employment position
 - For Employers:**
 - Enhanced ability to communicate current and future employment needs to educational and community partners
 - Better trained workforce for employers
 - Less turnover and more opportunity to receive a position with more responsibility
 - More opportunity to attract quality employees
 - For Educational Institutions (K-12, higher education, and training providers):**
 - Inform programming by providing real-time data on current job opportunities, growth industries, and the skills sought by employers
- **Objectives:**
 - Establish regular reporting system focused on increasing awareness of job opportunities and skills training among target audiences
 - Translate data into meaningful action steps that meet the unique needs of employers, employees, and educational partners
 - Provide information on specific skills needed regionally and affecting the local economy
 - Connect real-time job opportunities data to prior learning assessment (PLA) paths - PLA is a key component to degree completion and has benefits to the individual and employer. A PLA decreases the time it takes to receive a degree, validating past learning, and further emphasizing the connections between industry needs, adult learners' life experiences, and degree completion
- **Outcomes:**
 - Assess newly acquired technical skills**
 - Design and create an unbiased methodology of gathering and measuring newly acquired skills
 - Measure the skills that have been learned through an assessment that will provide effective instruction to students

Instruction Effectiveness

- Review effectiveness of instructional methodologies for students throughout the project. This assessment will be ongoing from the onset of the project
- Address changes made if certain instructional applications are demonstrated to challenge students as well as instructional methods showing signs of significant success

Impacts to Business: Financial and Operational

- Conduct a complete survey of the business and employees' post-instruction to best assess near-term impact of the acquisition of new skills - increased effectiveness and efficiencies in performance of individual and companywide tasks
- Measure the potential and actual impact on company's revenues - measuring company's use of technology to enhance sales, reach new markets, and better penetrate existing markets
- Increase efficiencies to internal operations as a result of newly acquired tech skills - sales, inventory controls, supply chain relationships, and increase abilities re financial controls
- Measure effectiveness of decisions involving capital and technological upgrades
- Increased employment and employment effectiveness opportunities - inducing New employee hires as a result of tech instruction

Conclusion

As part of a Digital Inclusion and **Regional Workforce Plan**, a strong Employers Initiative Program can work hand in hand to align resources, focus on small business capacity and job growth and most importantly invest in giving people the tools and skills they need to succeed in an increasingly digital economy. **Any or all of these plans can be developed into fundable projects and Axiom and the Axiom Education & Training Center stand ready to work with you to bring these programs to life.**

Grant Funding Resources

State Grant Funding Resources

The **ConnectME Authority** offers two types of grants - Infrastructure and Community Broadband Planning Grants. For the purposes of this report, the planning grant is not a consideration. We would recommend looking toward Infrastructure grants, details can be found here:

<http://maine.gov/connectme/grants/>

Axiom has extensive knowledge of these grants, and has received over \$1Million in funding.

- Grant proposals must meet the state standard of 10/10Mbps
- Grant limits are suggested, but typically \$100,000, which must be matched 1 to 1 with a combination of cash and in-kind services
- Area targeted must be unserved or severely underserved (service that is less than 1.5Mbps download)

Typically, ConnectME grants open for applications in the March- April timeframe, but is not clear when grants may be available in 2018.

The **Maine Community Foundation** has regional grants that can support initiatives up to \$10,000. <http://www.mainecef.org/GrantsNonprofits/AvailableGrantsDeadlines/CommunityBuildingGrantProgram.aspx>

- Grants available up to \$10,000
- Local decision makers by county
- Various criteria that needs review
- Deadline February 15th of each new year

Northern Border Regional Commission Grants, <http://www.nbrc.gov>. The Commission accepts grant applications from across the northern border regions of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York.

- Requires at least a 1 to 1 cash match
- Must be tied to quantifiable job creation
- Very competitive

Contact: Andrea Smith at (207) 624-9813 or andrea.smith@maine.gov for information on deadlines and program parameters.

Federal Grant Funding Resources

U.S. Department of Commerce- **Economic Development Administration (EDA)** provides funding for economic development projects across the state of Maine. Maine projects are reviewed and administered by EDA's local representative, Alan Brigham at (215) 316-2965 or abrigham@eda.gov. Programs and eligibility can be found at www.eda.gov

- Various funding programs
- Guidelines encourage regions to incorporate BB investments in their regional strategies (CEDs)
- Funding requires match

U.S. Department of Commerce- **Broadband USA** is helping communities nationwide ensure they have the broadband infrastructure, digitally literate workforce and engaged citizens to thrive in the Digital Economy. Details can be found here: <https://www2.ntia.doc.gov/>

- Provides direct (one-to-one) assistance to communities
- Resource rich website- no direct grants
- Building a self-assessment tool for communities

U.S Department of Agriculture- **Rural Development** has a number of grant programs worth investigating. Local office in Bangor, contact Tommy Higgins, Acting State Director, (207) 990-9160. More information on programs in Maine can be found here: www.rd.usda/me

- Rural Broadband Access Loans and Loan Guarantees Program
 - 2017 Program has not been announced
- Several other competitive grant programs to explore eligibility and criteria

U.S. Department of Treasury- **New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC)** has recently clarified the eligibility of broadband infrastructure and related activities are eligible for NMTC provided they meet certain criteria located here:

<https://www.cdfifund.gov/Documents/2015%20NMTC%20Application%20QA%20FINAL.pdf>

- Axiom is exploring the potential of NMTC funding
- Eligible census tracts are being reviewed
- It's unclear without investigation if PCEDC or parts of PCEDC may be eligible

Broadband Opportunity Council Funding Report- **U.S. Dept. of Commerce and USDA** released a report in January 2017 listing all federal broadband funding resources - See Addendum 3.