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## Public Can Help Expand Broadband Access to Lyon County by Using New Mobile App

**Marshall, MN (April 9, 2019)** – With the simple push of a button on a smart phone screen, residents of Lyon County can help extend broadband coverage to rural areas, bridging the digital divide. The National Association of Counties (NACo), the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) and Rural LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) have partnered to address the critical need for affordable high-speed internet for rural communities across the country. Together, the three organizations developed a mobile app that gives mobile phone users the power to accurately identify areas with low or no internet connectivity and share that information to push for change. Armed with that data, the organizations will advocate for adequate funding for broadband infrastructure across the country. Lyon County is a member of the National Association of Counties.

“TestIT” (available for iOS and Android) uses an open-source sampling tool developed by Measurement Lab ([MLab](#)) to aggregate broadband speeds from mobile device users across the country. Accurate data ensures that broadband infrastructure receives the investments needed to provide internet access to rural communities. This partnership between NACo, RCAP and Rural LISC shows how organizations working together for rural communities can have a greater impact.

“Reliable, speedy internet is increasingly important for work, education, social connections, and even health care,” said Gary Crowley, Chair of the Lyon County Board of Commissioners. “I encourage Lyon County residents to download the TestIT mobile app to help accurately identify areas with low or no internet connectivity in the County. The information gathered will help guide advocacy for adequate broadband funding and help inform decision-makers at federal, state and local levels.” Information about the TestIT mobile app is on the county website – [www.lyonco.org](http://www.lyonco.org).

“Access to affordable, high-speed internet is essential to connect people and places and compete in today’s economy,” said NACo Executive Director Matthew Chase. “Outdated broadband

mapping techniques limit Congress' ability to accurately identify and allocate broadband resources across much of America. This mobile app will help identify gaps in broadband coverage and help guide federal, state and local decision-making.”

Lack of reliable broadband is a major economic barrier and an issue of socioeconomic equality. Our lives and futures have become inextricably tied to technology. Without access to high-speed internet, many of our rural communities are becoming increasingly isolated and left behind. A 2018 study conducted by Microsoft concluded that 19 million rural Americans do not use broadband, largely due to a lack of access. For these small communities, broadband can serve as a lifeline, connecting students to online degrees and connecting sick patients to medical consultation locally unavailable.

“Rural LISC’s work is grounded in supporting and amplifying the voices of our grassroots partners. They have consistently raised the connectivity gap as a major economic barrier. The TestIT app provides a platform to amplify not only their voices, but also the voices of every rural resident,” said Suzanne Anarde, LISC Vice President and Rural LISC Director. “It is our hope that through our partnership with NACo and RCAP, we are empowering users to advocate for the future of their families and their communities.”

High-speed internet is also consistently voiced as a top challenge facing small businesses in rural America and stifles entrepreneurship by limiting the ability of individuals to take on independent work. In this economy, broadband is critical to building resilient and future ready rural communities.

The app allows users to be active participants in the national effort to bring awareness about the lack of high-speed internet connectivity in communities across the country. Within the app, users can test their broadband speed from anywhere. Snapshots of individual tests will be collected within a database, allowing partners to analyze connectivity data across the country. This data will bridge the gap between rural residents’ everyday experience and connectivity data provided by internet service providers, which is often inaccurate and inflated.

“This app is an exciting opportunity for us to help provide insight into true accessibility of broadband in rural communities. Partnering with NACo and LISC allows us to build a network of users from across the country, as well as showing the critical importance of building partnerships to affect change at the local level,” said RCAP Executive Director Nathan Ohle. “This initiative will shed light on communities that are often overlooked or underserved and identify opportunities to better leverage critical federal resources.”

#### **ABOUT RCAP**

RCAP is a national non-profit network providing opportunity, assistance, and practical guidance to small communities in all fifty states, U.S. territories, and tribal lands to ensure access to safe drinking water, sanitary wastewater disposal, and economic prosperity for all rural America. To learn more about RCAP, visit [www.rcap.org](http://www.rcap.org).

#### **ABOUT NACo**

The National Association of Counties (NACo) strengthens America’s counties, including nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Founded in 1935, NACo unites county

officials to advocate for county government priorities in federal policymaking; promote exemplary county policies and practices; nurture leadership skills and expand knowledge networks; optimize county and taxpayer resources and cost savings; and enrich the public's understanding of county government. [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).

#### **ABOUT RURAL LISC**

Launched in 1995, Rural LISC is the rural component of the largest community development support organization in the country, called LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation). For 24 years, Rural LISC has partnered with rural communities, helping to forge innovative solutions that lead to prosperity and opportunity. Rural LISC provides a wide range of services, investing in the grassroots efforts of its 87 partner community-based organizations, Rural LISC is committed to making rural communities good places to live, work, do business and raise children. Learn more at [www.lisc.org/rural](http://www.lisc.org/rural).