

# INNOVATION BRIEF

FROM THE GIA RURAL AGING INITIATIVE

## Getting Connected in Upper New York State

**Project:** Building a Broadband Adoption Ecosystem in New York’s North Country

**Challenge:** In some North Country counties in upstate New York, seniors make up more than a quarter of the total population, yet they are far less connected than their peers around the nation. Nationally, only one in three U.S. senior citizens has a broadband connection at home, part of a wider problem of isolation and marginalization.

**Objective:** To bring the benefits of digital inclusion to seniors in the North Country.

**Program Description:** A public-private funding partnership allowed Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) to make technology and training available to older adults by:



- Building a new Senior Planet Exploration Center in the Champlain Centre shopping mall in Plattsburgh (Clinton County, New York) to anchor training provided across six rural counties.
- Designing a digital technology “pod” for installation at partner locations to provide access to laptops, iPads, a large-format LCD with video-conferencing capability, audio and health devices, and a tele-presence robot. Installed a prototype at a senior center in Malone, NY.
- Outfitting a vehicular mobile lab to deliver training to communities scattered throughout the region.
- Developing “Senior Planet U,” a remote learning platform that allows seniors to connect to technology learning resources from home.
- Giving hands-on training courses for seniors at technology labs across the region.

**Outcomes:** Initial classes filled quickly at the Senior Planet Exploration Center, and 400 people enrolled. Attendees rated the program highly, with satisfaction scores in the 80s and 90s. Many bought devices, and 20 percent signed up for web access. Participants with low incomes considered using the internet for entertainment to save money, instead of paying for cable TV.

**Keys to Success:**

- Philanthropy dollars that go to projects with an opportunity to be sustainable—those with local and institutional readiness, government agencies willing to support long-term growth, and, if possible, corporate involvement.
- Funding for expenses, rather than just capital.

**Location:** Plattsburgh, New York, and six other North Country counties

**Lead Agency/Nonprofit:** OATS (Older Adults Technology Services)

**Funding:**

- Senior Planet Exploration Center: \$812,000 “Connect NY” grant from the New York State Broadband Program Office, as part of Governor Andrew Cuomo’s Statewide Broadband Initiative.
- Senior Planet U: \$450,000 grant from the Macquarie Group Foundation.
- Hands-on training courses: \$90,000 grant from the CEA Foundation.

**For More Information:**

OATS (<http://oats.org/>) and Project Information ([bit.ly/NYS\\_OATS](http://bit.ly/NYS_OATS)).



“When people think about technology, they think about building a lab and buying computers, and frankly that’s not sufficient ... The purpose of our efforts has very little to do with the actual machine and has a lot to do with developing a sophisticated model of change that helps older people adapt their security and quality of life in measurable ways.”

— Thomas Kamber, PhD  
Executive Director,  
Older Adults Technology  
Services (OATS)

