

Sara Nichols

Senior Planner- Energy and Economic Manager
Land of Sky Regional Council
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Sara Nichols is a passionate advocate for digital inclusion and a trailblazer who has been at the forefront of implementing transformational broadband projects throughout Western North Carolina. She is a public servant with more than 17 years of experience leading regional initiatives related to broadband, regional planning, and economic and community development.

In her current role as a Senior Planner at the Land of Sky Regional Council based in Asheville, North Carolina, Sara serves as the region's broadband program manager and is widely regarded as a respected technical expert for regional broadband project implementation. Prior to her current role, Sara served as Economic Development Director for the Madison County Department of Development Services in North Carolina, where she led initiatives focused on bringing broadband access to thousands of unserved citizens, facilitated business expansion, and oversaw the creation of the county's first public art program. Her professional background also includes nearly a decade of work experience in the environmental stewardship realm, overseeing projects related to stormwater management, transitions into alternative fuel, and the provision of technical assistance to community stakeholders to help them access and administer related grant funding.

Over the course of her professional career, Sara has helped secure more than \$40 million in broadband funding for the Western North Carolina region from a wide range of sources including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the state of North Carolina's Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) grant program, and many other sources. These investments are helping connect over 15,000 unserved residents and businesses in Western North Carolina.

Sara holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Mars Hill University. She has graced national stages as a speaker sharing insights on digital inclusion, the importance of broadband accessibility, and the intersection of technology and quality of life.