Connected
A CONNECTED NATION Initiative
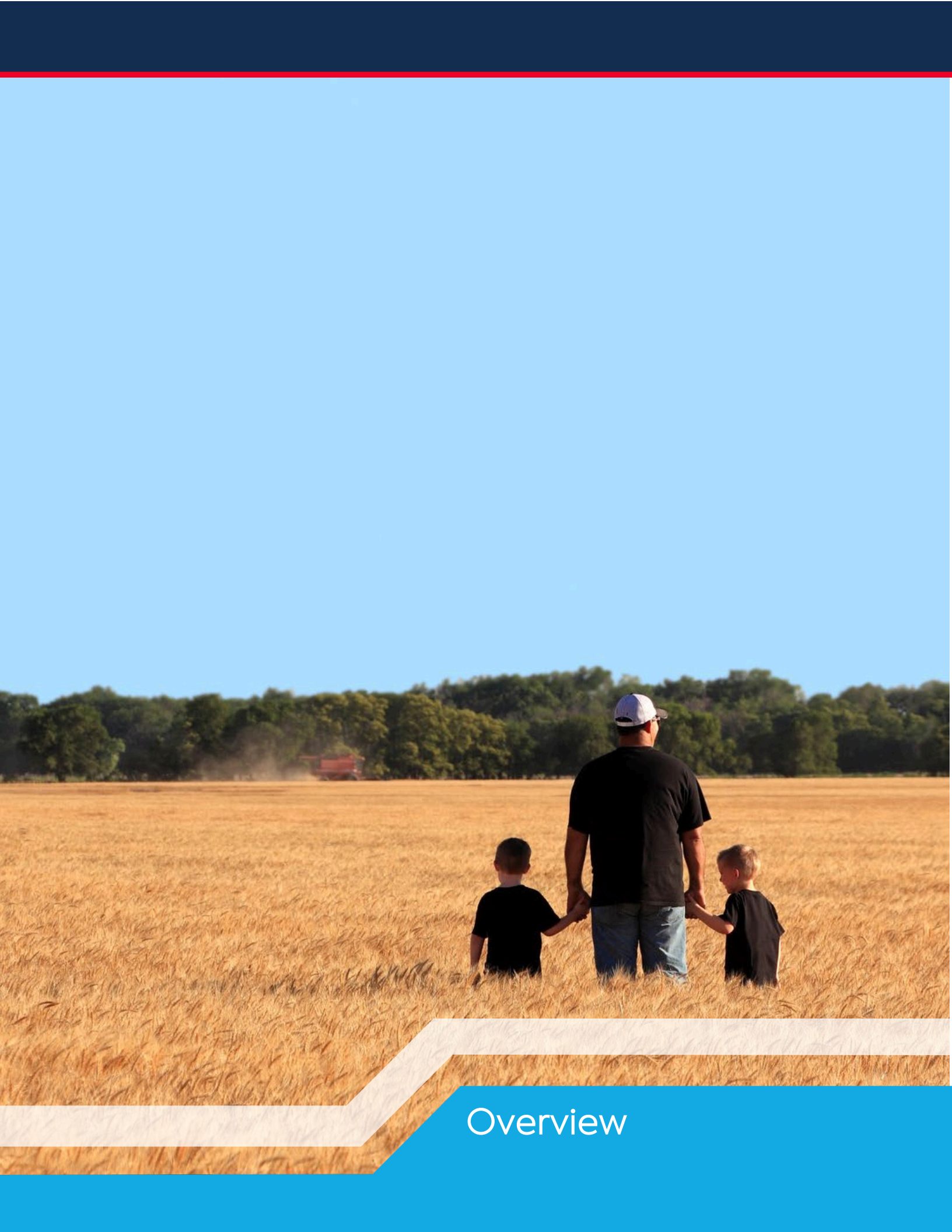
Addressing Your Community's Unique Needs

Comanche County, Oklahoma

Executive Summary

February 2023

Overview

Comanche County Overview

Today, technology plays a pivotal role in how businesses operate, how institutions provide services, and where consumers choose to live, work, and play. A community's success has become dependent on how broadly and deeply it adopts technology resources, which include access to reliable, high-speed networks, the digital literacy of residents, and the use of online resources for local business, government, and leisure.

As such, Comanche County stakeholders partnered with Connected Nation's Connected Community Engagement Program to conduct a study designed to determine the availability of broadband infrastructure, how county residents are adopting and using broadband services, and what action steps would have the greatest impact toward improving broadband access, adoption, and usage across every local sector.

Pursuant of this goal, between July and November 2022, Comanche County conducted a comprehensive survey of broadband technology access and adoption across the community that collected responses from 124 households. CN staff also met with community officials to determine community needs and gather qualitative data for consideration in the study.

This study approached broadband holistically – focusing on the quality of life offered when residents and community leaders alike access, adopt, and use broadband in a productive and meaningful capacity. With this approach, the assessment identified issues and action opportunities necessary to close the local Digital Divide.

Data collected as part of the engagement played an integral role in developing a unique, locally informed action plan for Comanche County. This document provides a summary of that assessment, as well as recommendations for improving broadband and technology access, adoption, and usage. Additionally, CN created an interactive map.

COMANCHE COUNTY, OKLAHOMA QUICK FACTS
Population
121,125
Households
44,822
Median Household Income
$49,325
Poverty Rate
20.1%
Adults with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher
24.3%
Hispanic or Latino
13.7%
Households with Broadband Access[1]
98.76%

Source: Comanche County U.S. Census Profile

[1] The current FCC definition of broadband is a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. These data are derived from the FCC's latest national broadband map, which can be found here.

62.1%

of households in Comanche County report subscribing to fixed internet service

For households that do not subscribe to home internet service, the top barriers are a **lack of broadband service availability** and the **cost of internet service**.

96.2% of households in Comanche County have access to internet service at speeds needed to run many modern applications (100 Mbps downstream and 20 Mbps upstream). Statewide, *85%* of households have internet access at these speeds.

2 out of 3 employed survey respondents in Comanche County (*66.7%*) report teleworking in some capacity. Of those, *31%* telework every day and an additional *23%* telework at least once per week.

Over half of households surveyed (*55.6%*) and nearly 1 out of 5 businesses (*16.7%*) reported being dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were slow speeds, unreliable connections, and high prices.

More than 9 out of 10 households (*93.5%*) said they would like to have improved or additional options for home internet service.

Comanche County Infrastructure

According to FCC broadband data updated in November 2022, 98.76% of Comanche County households have access to broadband of at least 25/3 Mbps – the current definition of broadband set forth by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Broadband service in Comanche County is distributed throughout the county.

Below is the list of internet service providers (ISPs) in Comanche County. Please contact your ISP for the most up-to-date information on speeds, prices, and service areas.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE QUICK FACTS

Unserved Households (25/3 Mbps)	555
Households Served (10/1 Mbps)	98.76%
Households Served (25/3 Mbps)	98.76%
Households Served (100/20 Mbps)	96.15%

These data are derived from the FCC's latest national broadband map, which can be found here.

PROVIDER	TECHNOLOGY	MAXIMUM DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAXIMUM UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
AT&T Inc.	Copper	10	1
HughesNet	Satellite	25	3
JAB Wireless Inc.	Fixed Wireless	100	20
Nextlink	Fixed Wireless	100	20
Pinnacle Network Solutions Inc.	Fixed Wireless	100	20
Sparklight	Cable	100	20
Sparklight	Fiber	1000	1000
Starlink	Satellite	100	10
TDS	Copper	100	15
TDS	Fiber	1000	1000
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	100	20
Viasat Inc.	Satellite	50	3

Household Survey
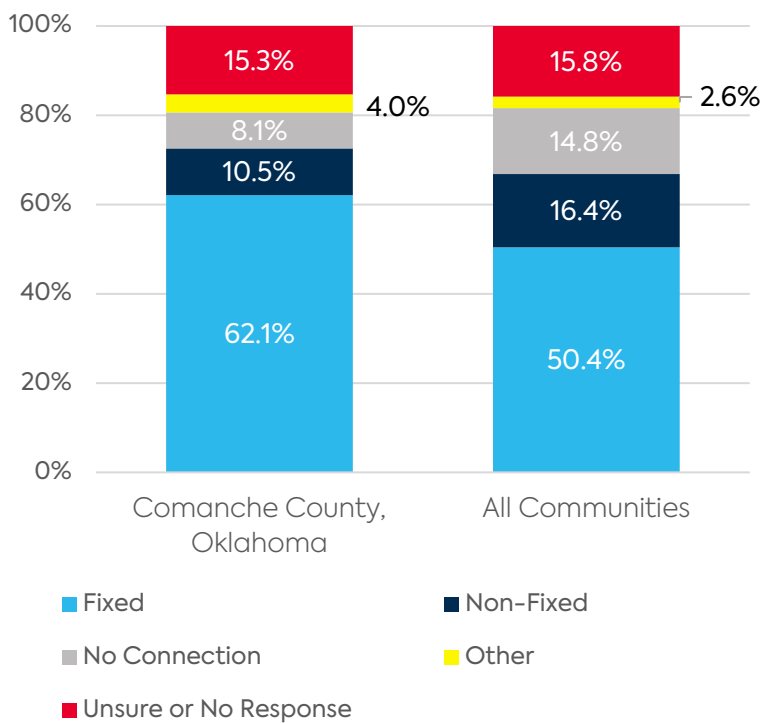Results

Household Survey Results

The following section provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Comanche County between July and November 2022. Altogether, CN received 124 survey responses from households across the county; respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity or lack thereof. Data from Comanche County are compared to data from hundreds of other rural Connected communities that participated in the program across Michigan, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

Home Broadband Adoption

Legend:
- Fixed
- Non-Fixed
- No Connection
- Other
- Unsure or No Response

ADOPTION

In Comanche County, 62.1% of households that took the survey subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology, while 10.5% indicate they have internet service delivered via dial-up, satellite, or mobile wireless service. This leaves 8.1% without internet and 15.3% of survey respondents unsure of what service they have or provided no response.

Among those without a home internet connection, 44.4% said they did not have broadband because it was too expensive. An additional 44.4% say service is not available.

Primary Barrier

Legend:
- Too Expensive
- Service is not available
- Other
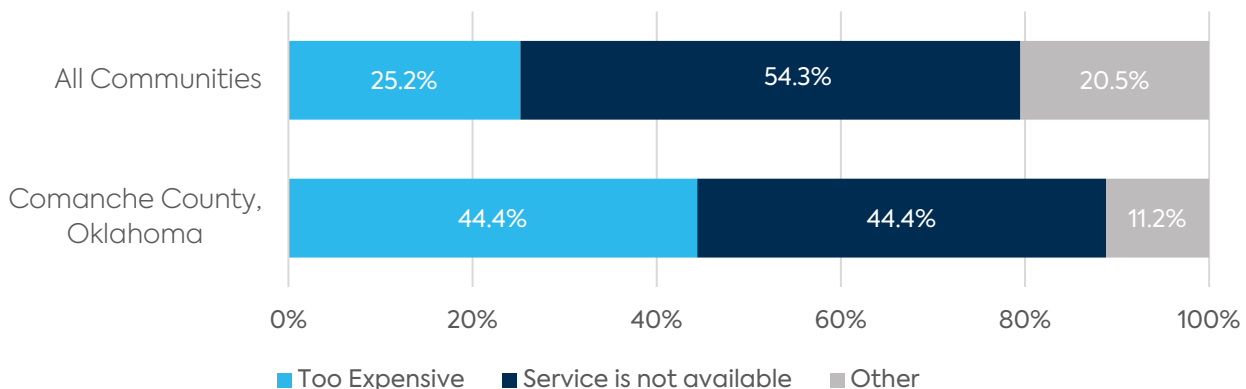
Household Survey Results

CONNECTION DETAILS

Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that, on average, their internet connection costs about $78.94 per month. This is slightly higher than the monthly cost in other communities ($78.17). Two percent of the median household income in Comanche County is $82.21 per month.

The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 25 Mbps and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps. On averag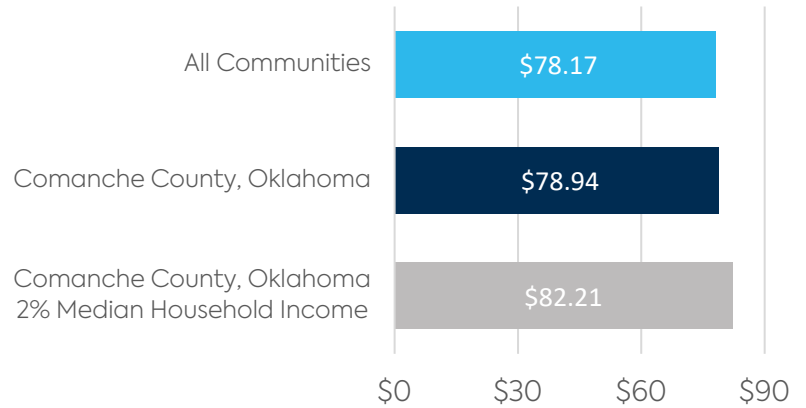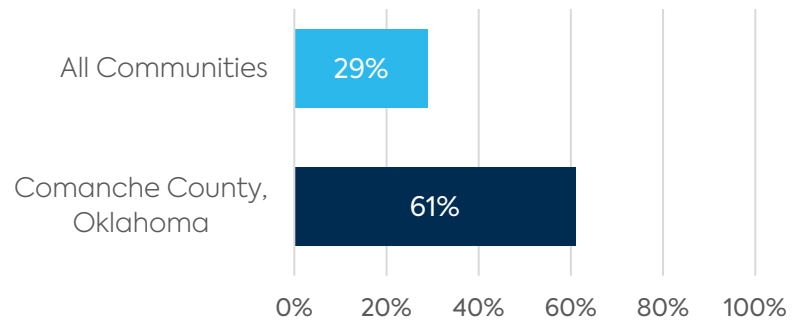e, respondents indicate that their connection's advertised download speed is 222.26 Mbps. In Comanche County, 61% of internet-connected households subscribe to download speeds faster than 25 Mbps.

Average Monthly Cost

All Communities	$78.17
Comanche County, Oklahoma	$78.94
Comanche County, Oklahoma 2% Median Household Income	$82.21

$0 $30 $60 $90

Percentage of Respondents with At Least 25/3 Mbps

All Communities	29%
Comanche County, Oklahoma	61%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Does Your Internet Meet Your Needs?

Comanche County, Oklahoma: No 55.6%, Yes 44.4%
All Communities: No 57.7%, Yes 42.3%

■ Yes ■ No
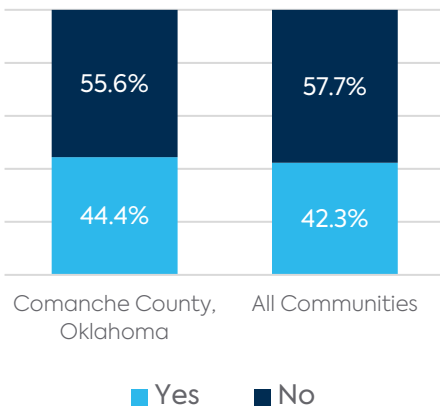
Why Doesn't Your Internet Meet Your Needs?

Customer service is poor: 27%
Data cap limitations: 9%
The price is too high: 51%
The connection is unreliable: 71%
Speeds are too slow: 73%

■ Customer service is poor
■ Data cap limitations
■ The price is too high
■ The connection is unreliable
■ Speeds are too slow
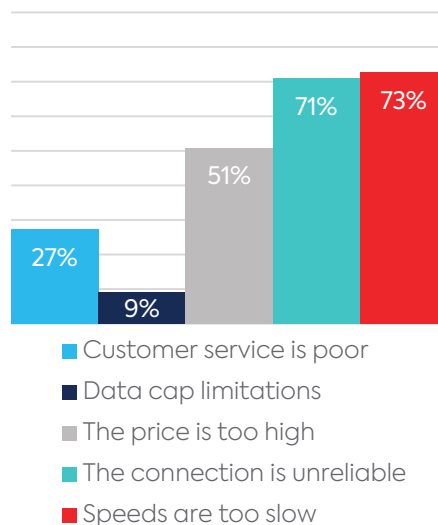
Are You Interested in More Choices at Home?

Comanche County, Oklahoma: No 6.5%, Yes 93.5%

■ Yes ■ No
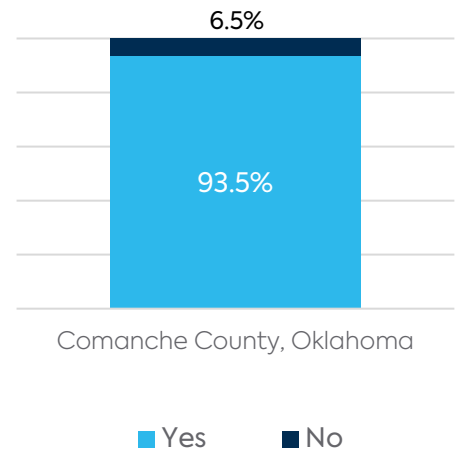
Household Survey Results

Competition provides residents with choices for service, allowing households the ability to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. Over two-fifths (44.4%) of responding households indicate that their internet connection meets their needs. This is a slightly higher rate of satisfaction than among households in other communities (42.3%).

When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 73% of dissatisfied households indicate that their speed is too slow, 71% say their connections are unreliable, and 51% indicate that the price is too high. Respondents could choose more than one reason for dissatisfaction.

Finally, over 9 out of 10 respondents (93.5%) indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

More than 3 out of 5 households (61.1%) reported that they subscribe to mobile internet service they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is less than what is reported in other Connected communities (70.3%).

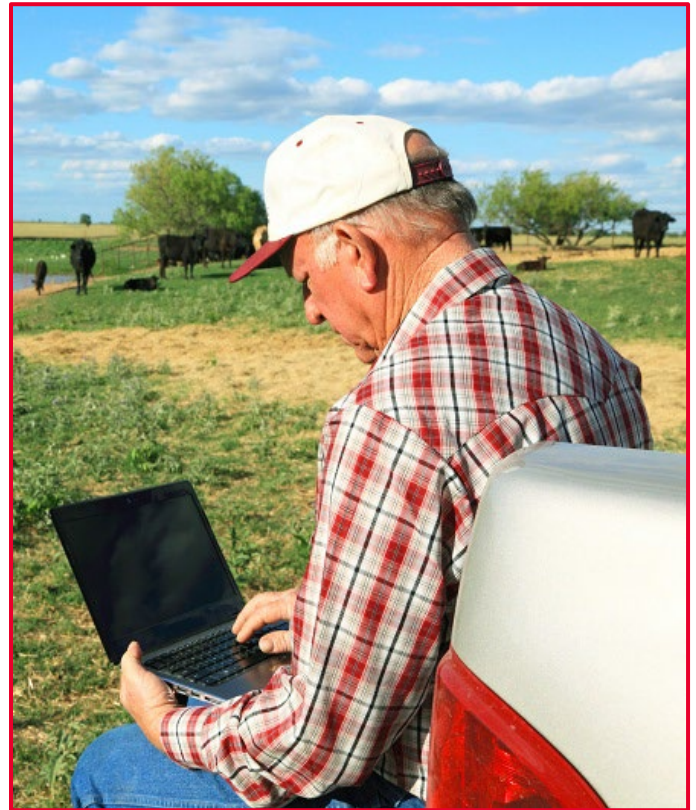Additionally, 31.8% of mobile-connected households report that they either rely on those mobile connections as their primary source of home internet connectivity or use mobile service to connect other household devices to the internet.

Households Subscribing to Mobile Internet Service

	Comanche County, Oklahoma	All Communities
Other	5.6%	
No	33.3%	29.1%
		0.6%
Yes	61.1%	70.3%

Yes ■ No ■ Other ■
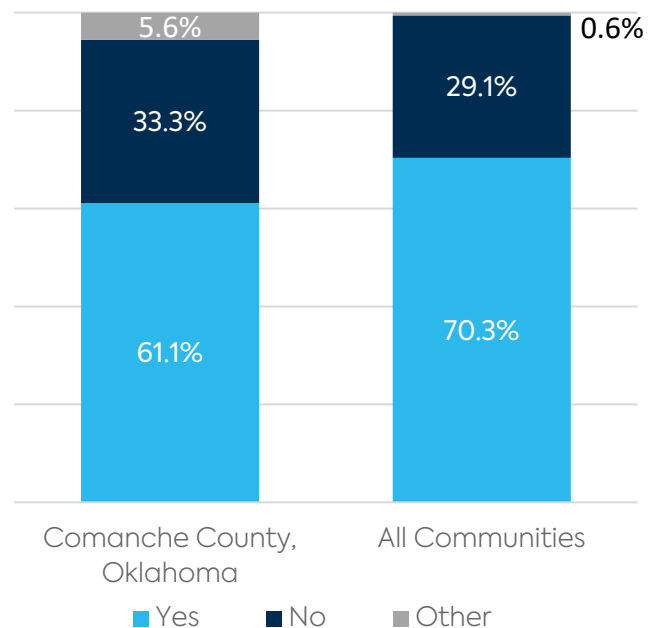
Household Survey Results

TELEWORK

Teleworking, or telecommuting, refers to working outside of the conventional workplace by way of telecommunications or computer-based technology. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many organizations to allow their staff to telework.

Teleworking is quickly becoming a critical part of growing a local economy because it represents an opportunity to attract and retain employees even when employees are not located in the same community as their employers. However, this only works if those employees have access to advanced broadband infrastructure.

Two out of 3 employed respondents in Comanche County (66.7%) telework at least part of the time. Nearly 1 out of 3 teleworkers (31%) work remotely every day, while approximately 23% telework at least once a week.

Do You Currently Telework?

	Yes	No	I own or operate a business from home	Other
All Communities	66.1%	27.6%	5.5%	0.8%
Comanche County, Oklahoma	66.7%	25.9%	3.7%	3.7%
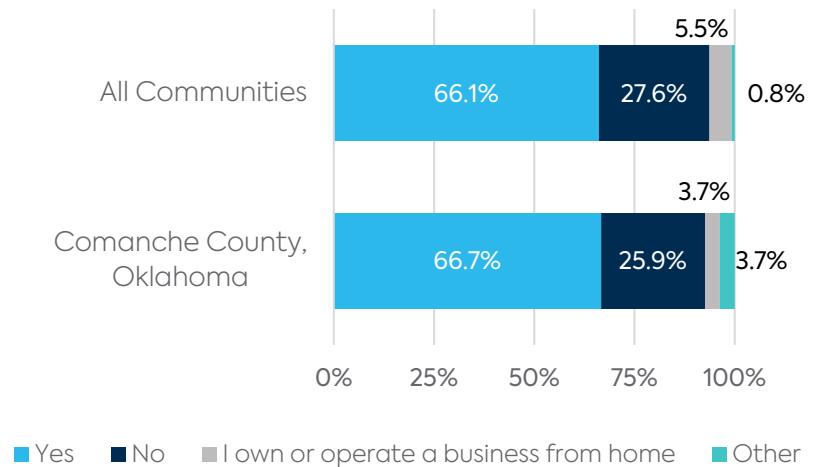
How Frequently Do You Telework?

	Every day	Several days per week	Once per week	Several days per month, but less than once per week	Once per month	Less than once per month
All Communities	36%	27%	9%	11%	5%	12%
Comanche County, Oklahoma	31%	17%	6%	8%	14%	25%
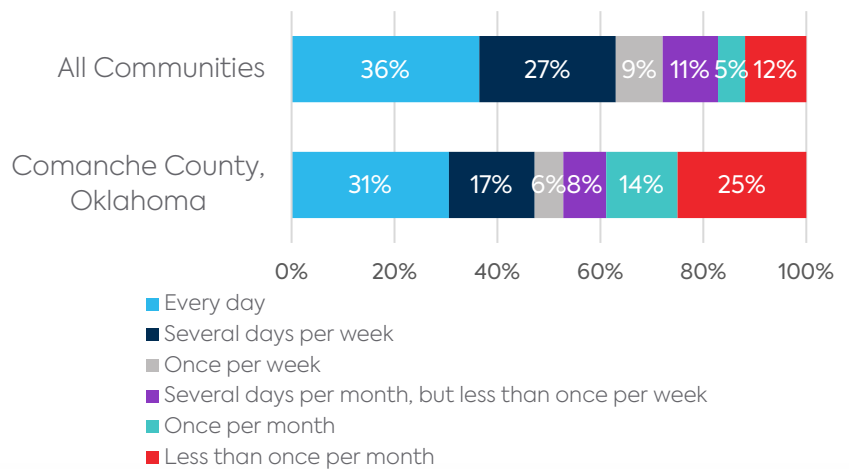
Recommendations

T he following recommendations are presented to assist Comanche County in expanding broadband access and adoption throughout the community.

Goal 1: Improve internet speeds and digital equity in Comanche County through greater education, participation, and planning.

Objective: Establish broadband leadership and increase buy-in among community stakeholders.

The FCC released a pre-production draft of the [National Broadband Map](#) on November 18, 2022. This map includes coverage data for the entire country at the address level. The data indicates that 98.21% of Comanche County has access to broadband at 25 Mbps upload speed and 3 Mbps download speed across all technology types, including wired, terrestrial, and wired and licensed fixed wireless. Comanche County is 96.15% served at 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. These maps are currently undergoing a challenge process in which residents, and local and state governments can challenge the validity of speed and coverage data on the map. To learn more about the challenge process, visit the [FCC Broadband Data Collection Help Center](#).

The Comanche County Connected Community Engagement gathered data over four months in 2022 from nine industry sectors: residents, agriculture, business, government, health care, higher education, K–12 education, libraries, and public safety.

Comanche County households reported an average download speed of 222.3 Mbps, with 61% of households indicating they subscribe to services with download speeds faster than 25 Mbps. The current federal definition of broadband is 25/3 Mbps. Still, many of the new federal grant programs, including those in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the CARES ACT, require higher speeds of 100/20 Mbps or 100/100 Mbps, respectfully.

When understanding a community's connectivity, it is important to look holistically at broadband access, adoption, and usage. This includes a focus on whether a physical internet connection is available at residences or businesses, but also whether people can afford the service, have a high-quality device, and have the skills to leverage their connection to use their preferred applications.

Our findings determined that Comanche County is fortunate to have good access with fiber-to-the-home available in many areas, but not all. County leaders should focus broadband expansion efforts on areas that do not have equitable access. To address this, we recommend the following actions.

Action 1 – Establish a permanent Broadband Council to act as county advisors and appoint a Broadband Liaison to lead the effort.

To foster better community participation in broadband planning and increase digital equity, a permanent Broadband Council should be formed, composed of community stakeholders. Maintaining a broadband focus and establishing leadership is essential. Having a coordinated group of stakeholders representing the county's diversity meet regularly will ensure that broadband remains a priority and that participants are sharing opportunities in a timely manner. This sharing of opportunities will allow for increased collaboration and efficiencies, as stakeholders work together. Many priority areas for local communities, including housing, health care, education, and economic development, depend on broadband adoption, access, or use.

Additionally, the Broadband Council needs a key leader, a champion who understands how broadband can support the community. This person will be the county's point of contact for broadband, which will be especially important in 2023 as Oklahoma begins its Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) and Digital Equity Act (DEA) planning and implementation work. This person will stay up to date on broadband policy news, new construction projects in the region, new laws, and funding opportunities, as well as maintain a community presence to keep residents educated and engaged in internet adoption and expanded internet deployment.

Once this point person is selected, the full Broadband Council should be coordinated and activated. Members should include representatives from a wide variety of community stakeholders, such as:
- Health Care: Local physicians, health care providers
- Government: County Judge, County Commissioners
- Education (K-12): Superintendents, School IT Directors
- Education (Higher-Education): University, community college, trade schools, or workforce training
- Public Safety: County Sheriff's Office, Police Department, Fire and Rescue and surrounding Volunteer Fire Departments, Emergency Medical Services
- Agriculture: County Ag Agent, leading ag producers

- Business: Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development, business owners, managers
- Library: Library Director, Librarian
- Tribal Leaders
- Community At-Large: Someone from the community who is interested in broadband

The Broadband Council should set its own strategies and goals for connectivity. This Technology Action Plan provides key data and recommendations, based on survey analysis, mapping data, and conversations with community leaders, and can be a foundational document for the work to follow in the coming months. Additionally, the council should:

- Keep abreast of state and national broadband policy initiatives and notable broadband news. Stay up to date on publications, events, and policy briefs published by the Oklahoma Office of Broadband, as well as monitor notable broadband developments via industry newsletters and focused research.
- Keep the community informed of projects and progress, and invite community participation to maintain buy-in and high adoption rates. Getting community buy-in is essential to the long-term success and sustainability of community initiatives. Success of local initiatives requires community support, transparency, and engagement. Not only will this help keep the momentum going but will show ISPs there is true interest for expanded service in the area, which will encourage greater investment in the region.
- Stay up to date on state and federal broadband legislation.
- Ensure digital engagement in all community sectors (telehealth, telework, education, commerce, etc.).
- Attend workshops, webinars, meetings, and general training that discuss telecommunications generally, and broadband specifically.
- Hold regular meetings. The council should meet at least once a month. These meetings should provide updates on community activities, allow time for guest speakers and presentations, and offer an open forum for discussion about broadband advancements in the county.

Because there is so much work happening in broadband at the local, regional, state, and federal level, tracking updates and announcements is critical.

Key federal agencies involved in broadband grants, administration, and regulation include the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In Oklahoma, the [Oklahoma Broadband Office](#) (OBO) is responsible for implementing the state broadband plan. The [Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board](#) provides oversight to the office. Additionally, the [Oklahoma Broadband Expansion Council](#) (formerly the Oklahoma Rural Broadband Expansion Council) provides recommendations to improve, expand, and reduce the cost of internet. Both entities hold monthly public meetings and share updates on their work.

Action 2 – Create and maintain a connectivity resource list on city and/or county website to promote and encourage citizens to use these resources.

Having a centralized set of county broadband resources will allow residents easy access to resources that match their needs. This list can include public Wi-Fi availability by location, public access computers, library hours and technology offerings, community-based organizations that support digital skills training or online education opportunities, affordability programs, and more. Several of the recommendations that follow also include references to online promotion of resources – this website can be a key part of that strategy. Additionally, the Broadband Council should consider downloadable posters and flyers that list these resources so that schools, libraries, and community-based organizations can download and post them in their buildings, or distribute them to their clients.

Action 3 – Pursue grants that advance local community development using broadband technologies (e.g., workforce development, telehealth, digital literacy, etc.).

Identifying funding opportunities for programs and projects using broadband and related technologies could be a core function of the Broadband Council. There are many sources of local, state, and federal funding for broadband-related work, including key broadband adoption and usage activities that support affordability of services, high-quality device access, digital skills training, and workforce development.

In conjunction with the countywide Connected Community Engagement, Comanche County has been allocated funding to pursue applicable grant applications, if identified. For specifics, contact your Connected Nation Broadband Solutions Manager.

Timeline: Establish an official Broadband Council and select a countywide liaison immediately.

Responsible parties: County Judge, Commissioners Court, community broadband team

Resources
- [Oklahoma Broadband Office](#)
- [Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board](#)
- [The Oklahoma Broadband Expansion Council](#)
- [Oklahoma State Broadband Map](#)
- [HB 3363 Oklahoma State Broadband Expansion Act](#)
- [Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, County Allocation](#)
- [Final Rule](#)
- [CN's list of Current Broadband Funding](#)
- [BroadbandUSA: Federal Funding Guide](#)
- [Guide to Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities in the U.S.](#)
- [The Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF)](#)

Broadband readiness
- [Smart Cities Readiness Guide](#)
- [Next Century Cities Becoming Broadband Ready Toolkit](#)
- [Municipal Boards: Best Practices for Adoption Technology](#)

Broadband leadership
- [Ector County TX forms taskforce to set up broadband office](#)
- [City of Memphis: Broadband Project Manager, Senior](#)
- [Letter: Do your part on broadband](#)
- [The Anatomy of a Community Broadband Manager](#)
- [TARA Leadership: Rondella Hawkins](#)

Goal 2: Continue to work with internet service providers (ISPs) to improve internet access and speeds for all Comanche County residents.

Objective: Ensure all residents have access to internet and speeds that meet their needs for work, education, telehealth, and quality of life purposes.

Comanche County is fortunate to have reliable internet in many parts of the county. Maintaining good relationships with internet service providers (ISP)s should be a priority. By continuing to engage with ISPs, Comanche County can work to address the gaps in service that remain.

Community satisfaction rates are not high in Comanche County, with 57.7% of residents indicating that their internet service does not meet their needs. This is similar to other

Connected communities, which have a 55.6% dissatisfaction rate. Of the survey respondents who are unsatisfied with their current internet service, 73% say that speeds are too slow and 71% indicate the connection is unreliable.

Several survey respondents address broadband infrastructure in their comments. One respondent notes that, while they "understand many places do not have adequate internet options, our rural community has four high-speed (fiber-optic) choices, and I am tired of more companies always wanting to run more lines."

Others noted the speeds or lack of options as concerns, with comments including:
- "I would love to see Lawton get faster internet. The speed of Fidelity is disappointing. There are many times that I will use my phone because it is faster than what I get through Fidelity."
- "My neighborhood has no high-speed internet. Lived here for seven years and nothing. Been told for years someone or something is coming, but nothing. We have to use our phones as hotspots. It's becoming more and more of a problem the older the kids get."

With uneven access across the county, partnering with ISPs to learn about planned and potential future builds to connect every household is critical, especially as BEAD planning and program implementation ramp up with the goal of connecting everyone in Oklahoma.

Action 1 – Maintain open communication and positive relations with internet service providers currently working in the county, those with plans to work in the county, or those that have received federal funding to begin work in the county.

ISPs are an important partner for the county when it comes to increasing broadband access, adoption and use. Maintaining communication with ISPs should include regular check-ins to stay abreast of construction and expansion progress or changes in plans, to identify obstacles or challenges they are facing, and to communicate community goals and objectives. The council should reach out to area ISPs with connectivity concerns and to identify opportunities.

Open communication allows for ISPs to better understand community needs and for communities to better understand the obstacles and barriers ISPs face. This understanding can encourage creative problem solving, which can lead to finding solutions through public-private partnerships. Public-private partnerships are arrangements between public entities, such as local governments, and private entities, such as service providers, to achieve a

common goal. They are often, but not always, funding arrangements. Additionally, the county should strive to be an environment that is amenable to business. This means having easy-to-use websites that allow ISPs and vendors quick access to relevant information, as well as fostering a business environment that rewards open communication and timely resolution of concerns.

Action 2 – Catalog ongoing and planned broadband infrastructure projects, as well as upcoming federal, state, and private funding opportunities.

As indicated in many conversations with local leaders, a lot is currently happening in Comanche County to increase broadband infrastructure. The Broadband Council should ensure leaders have a comprehensive list of all the projects in progress, funded by both ISPs and federal broadband programs. This list will help the council understand what, if any, gaps in access remain in the county, and help identify potential partners in expanding access to those areas. This catalog will also ensure that the council can regularly check in on active projects.

Additionally, there are several upcoming federal funding opportunities — most notably the BEAD funding that will be available through the Oklahoma Broadband Office. Oklahoma will receive at least $100 million (and likely much more) to expand internet at speeds of 100/20 Mbps to all residents of the state, starting with areas that are unserved. Knowing where the unserved areas are, as well as areas that are already on track for buildout, will help the council target its efforts.

Timeline: The Broadband Council should reach out to ISPs for an initial meeting with community stakeholders and decision makers as soon as council leadership is established.

Goal 3: Ensure that Comanche County residents are able to access broadband internet, regardless of income level.

Objective: Assist Comanche County's low-income residents in accessing the internet by utilizing subsidy programs to make high-speed internet more affordable at home and offering resources about the availability of public computers and free Wi-Fi at area libraries.

U.S. Census data indicates that 87.2% of Comanche County residents subscribe to the internet. The Connected survey indicates 72.6% of residents subscribe to fixed or non-fixed wireless. For Comanche County residents who do not subscribe to broadband services, 44.4%

indicated that internet service is too expensive, compared to about 25.2% of residents in other Connected communities who indicate that price is a barrier to adoption. Even for those who do subscribe to service, 51% expressed dissatisfaction with their service as it relates to pricing.

Additionally, 61.1% of residents noted that they have a mobile broadband subscription. Of these residents, 13.6% use their mobile internet services as the only way they go online at home.

Survey respondents also addressed key affordability challenges in their qualitative responses, including:
- "I have researched options for other internet service providers outside of our current slow satellite service. I have looked for options multiple times over the last three years, and there have been no updates or new services available. Our satellite service is expensive and does not meet our needs."
- "Compared to other industrialized nations, residential Internet costs in the U.S. are much higher than they should be. I welcome any effort to change that for the better."

Action 1 – The Broadband Council should share resources about internet subsidy programs to residents to address affordability concerns.

Many residents have physical access to an internet connection but are unable to afford the monthly payment and/or the high-quality device needed to get online. There are two key federal affordability programs:
- The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) was created to help households struggling to afford internet service. The ACP provides a $30 a month credit, $75 a month for qualifying residents on tribal lands, toward internet service, and up to $100 for the purchase of a device. Households can qualify based on income or participation in federal or tribal assistance programs. To receive the connected device discount, consumers must enroll in the ACP with a participating provider that offers connected devices. The internet company will provide the discount to the consumer, then seek reimbursement.

    The ACP tool kit is a great resource that communities can use to promote the program to residents.

- Lifeline is a federal program administered through the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) Universal Service Administrative Co. that lowers the monthly cost

of phone or internet services for eligible consumers. Eligible consumers can get up to $9.25 off the cost of phone, internet, or bundled services each month. Households can qualify based on income or participation in federal or tribal assistance programs.

These programs assist low-income residents with the cost of internet, but ISPs must participate in order for residents to benefit. Where ISPs do not participate in federal subsidy programs, the Broadband Council should find out the reasons why not, and what can be done to encourage them to do so.

ISPs often have their own low-cost options or subsidized programs offering internet for consumers at a greatly reduced cost, so customers should always ask. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) of 2021 requires internet providers that receive federal grant money to offer low-cost service to eligible low-income households.

Action 2 – Encourage increased broadband adoption by promoting digital literacy training and technology events.

Higher adoption rates will allow the community to reap the benefits of connectivity. The Broadband Council should share resources and information about the benefits of technology to encourage greater participation in the digital space.

Digital literacy training is an excellent way to get community members interested in technology and up to speed on the latest advancements. Having the skills to navigate the internet, whether to attend online education programs, see a doctor for a telehealth appointment, or video chat with family far away, increases people's use of technology applications that can support key interests in their lives.

The county's libraries can play a pivotal role in increasing internet usage among these underserved populations by increasing their online resources and offering digital literacy classes. Connected Nation offered a series of digital literacy classes in basic computer skills at the Lawton Public Library in January 2023. The library can continue to teach these classes using CN's curriculum. If public interest in these classes continue, the library could offer more advanced digital skills training as participants grow more confident in their skills and want to level up.

Action 3 – Include digital inclusion strategy as part of regular Broadband Council conversations.

Digital inclusion should be on the agenda at each of the Broadband Council meetings to ensure that conversations are holistic about the county's work to close the Digital Divide. Efforts to support digital inclusion are often ongoing in community- and faith-based organizations, as well as health care, education, and workforce development. A doctor's office may teach digital skills to a patient to ensure they can access their online health portal or attend a telehealth appointment, while a job placement program may support participants in setting up and using email. Understanding all the digital inclusion work in the community and ways to support organizations that are integrating this work is important for the Broadband Council.

Timeline: Broadband Council should share information about affordability programs immediately and begin offering digital literacy or technology events within six months.

Responsible parties: Library, ISPs, Broadband Council, K-12 schools

Resources
Many free resources exist for digital literacy training, including:
- [Digital Learn – Free courses to learn anything about computers](#)
- [Digital Literacy Curriculum for K-12](#)
- [Free Applied Digital Skills – Google for Education](#)
- [Live, Virtual Classes for Seniors](#)
- [Importance of Tech for Small Businesses](#)

Goal 4: Ensure Comanche County residents have the skills they need for the jobs of the future.

Objective: Prepare Comanche County residents for technology jobs and position Comanche County to capitalize on the workforce needs of broadband deployment.

Through the BEAD program alone, over $42 billion will be going out across the United States over the next five years, primarily for telecommunications infrastructure expansion and construction. To make the most out of this funding, communities should develop workforce readiness.

Industry experts and ISPs expect that labor shortages will affect their ability to meet deployment goals. A recent [newspaper article](#) written by Kevin Smith, CEO of Ditch Witch, a manufacturer of underground utility construction equipment, listed the challenges facing

Oklahoma, which is ranked 47th in the nation for both the number of residents connected and average internet speed. The article noted that one principal concern is building a robust pipeline of skilled workers for rural infrastructure projects. Communities, regions, and states can start now on developing or expanding current telecommunications infrastructure workforce development programs to train the skilled workforce necessary for deployment.

Action 1 – Partner with higher education, technology centers, and/or industry for technology workforce development.

Not only are tech skills needed for almost all the jobs of the future, they are also needed to build the infrastructure to deploy broadband across America, and there is a real shortage of those workers. This is an opportunity for any area that can train and deploy telecommunications workers, to benefit.

Comanche County is fortunate to have the Great Plains Technology Center as a workforce development partner. The Great Plains Technology Center or other technical training programs could offer focused curricula to capitalize on the current workforce opportunities related to telecommunication infrastructure deployment. Examples of technical colleges and government partnering to offer training programs, including Northwood Technical College in Wisconsin, can serve as a model for the types of program offerings.

The Broadband Council should explore partners that can offer credentialed programs to train the skilled workers need to build out these networks. The networks will also require ongoing maintenance and upgrades, necessitating the continuing education of this workforce. This work could include coordination and convening of industry stakeholders to determine appropriate opportunities for the county. The council can also engage with other counties or the state to support the development of a regional or statewide approach to workforce development.

NTIA has prioritized workforce development as part of the BEAD program, requiring each state to develop a workforce plan. Oklahoma will include workforce planning as part of its BEAD five-year action plan, and communities should share with the office how their local work can support these workforce development goals.

Timeline: Broadband Council should engage in conversations immediately.

Responsible parties: Broadband Council, industry, higher education, technology centers, training programs

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Recommendations

Resources
- [NTIA Internet For All: Workforce Planning Guide](#)
- [Creating and Expanding a Diverse Broadband Workforce with Good Jobs and Career Pathways: Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program Playbook for Eligible Entities](#)