



**Connected**  
A CONNECTED NATION Initiative

Addressing Your Community's Unique Needs

## Orange County, Texas Executive Summary

June 2022

**CONNECTED  
NATION**   
[connectednation.org](http://connectednation.org)

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This project is funded by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.



## Overview



**T**oday, 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, the Orange County Broadband Committee partnered with the Connected Nation Texas (CN Texas) 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 February and April 2022, Orange County conducted a comprehensive survey of broadband technology access and adoption across the community that collected responses from 1,409 households. CN Texas 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 Orange County. This document provides a summary of that assessment, as well as recommendations for improving broadband and technology access, adoption, and usage. Additionally, CN Texas created an interactive map. To access that map, please click [here](#).

## ORANGE COUNTY, TEXAS

### QUICK FACTS

Population

**84,808**

Households

**31,570**

Median Household Income

**\$63,488**

Poverty Rate

**12.4%**

Adults with a Bachelor's Degree  
or Higher

**16%**

Hispanic or Latino

**8.57%**

Households with  
Broadband Access<sup>1</sup>

**94.69%**

Source: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?q=0500000US48361>

<sup>1</sup>The current FCC definition of broadband is a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. These data are derived from Connected Nation Texas and last updated in January 2022. <https://connectednation.org/texas/planning/>



**49.1%** of households in Orange County report subscribing to fixed internet service

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

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***91.65%** of households in Orange County have access to internet service at speeds needed to run many modern applications (100 Mbps downstream and 10 Mbps upstream). Statewide, **93.55%** of households have internet access at these speeds.*

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*Just over 3 out of 5 employed survey respondents in Orange County (**60.9%**) report teleworking in some capacity. Of those, **25%** telework every day, and an additional **24%** telework several days per week.*

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***Nearly half of households (48.1%) and 74.1% of businesses** reported that they were dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were slow speeds, high prices, and unreliable connections.*

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*More than 9 out of 10 households (**91.6%**) said they would like to have improved or additional options for home internet service.*



**Infrastructure  
Results**



According to CN Texas broadband data initially released in January 2022, followed by additional public feedback, field validation, and provider input, 94.69% of Orange 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 Orange County is distributed throughout the county.

Below is the list of internet service providers (ISPs) in Orange County.

## BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE QUICK FACTS

Unserved Households (25/3 Mbps)  
**1,647**

Households Served (10/1 Mbps)  
**97.90%**

Households Served (25/3 Mbps)  
**94.69%**

Households Served (50/5 Mbps)  
**91.65%**

Households Served (100/10 Mbps)  
**91.65%**

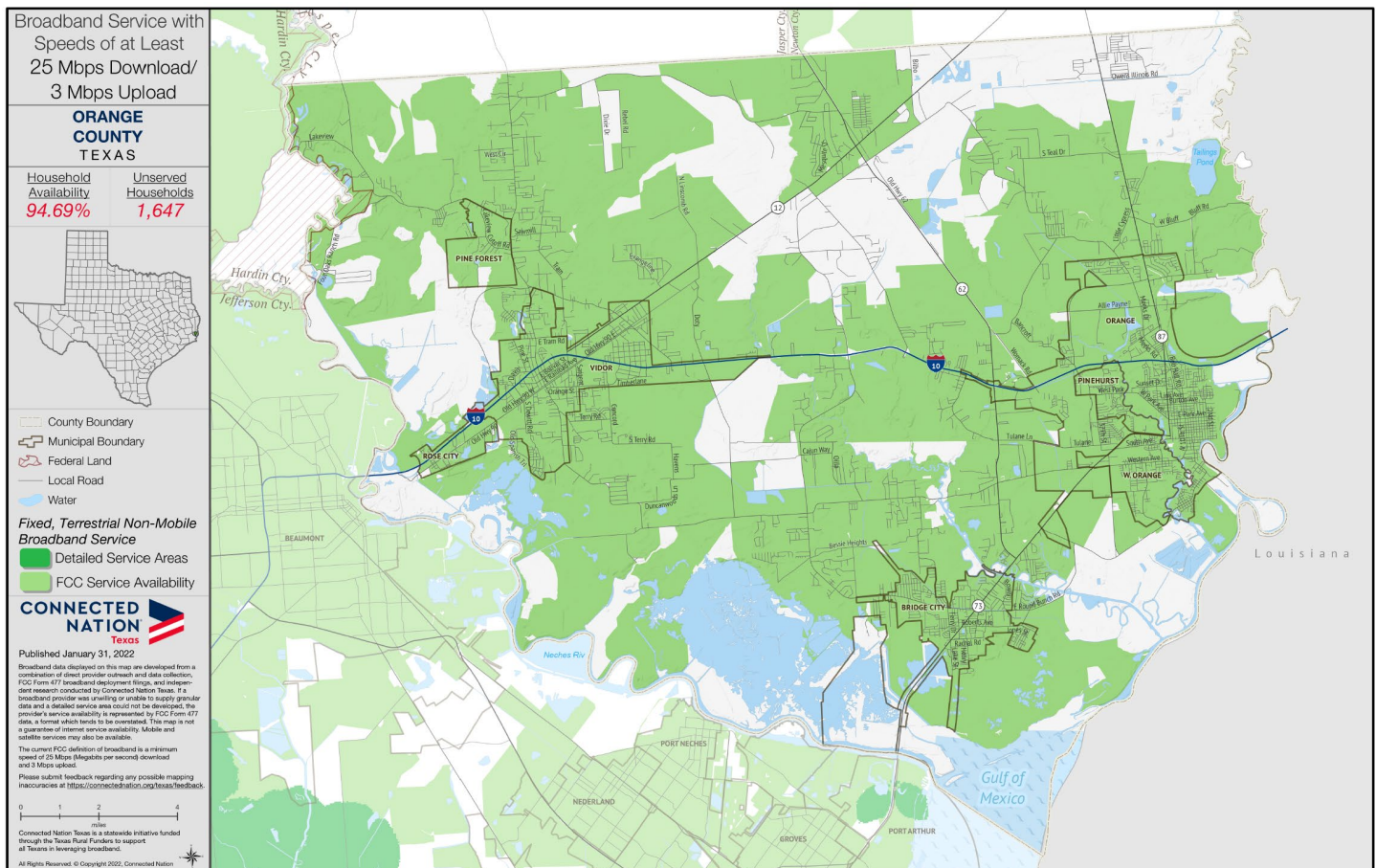
Broadband data released by CN Texas in January 2022:  
<https://connectednation.org/texas/mapping-analysis/>

PROVIDER	TECHNOLOGY	MAXIMUM DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAXIMUM UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
Astound Broadband (En-Touch Systems Inc.)	Fiber	1000	1000
	Cable	115	20
AT&T Southwest	Fiber	1000	1000
	DSL	25	2
	Fixed Wireless	10	1
Sparklight (Cable One Inc.)	Cable	1000	50
Spectrum (Charter Communications)	Cable	940	35
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	25	3

# Orange County Infrastructure



Below is Orange County's (25/3 Mbps) map. To access the full map, go to <https://connectednation.org/texas/county-maps/> and select Orange County from the list. Portions of the county are served by internet service providers (ISPs) offering slower advertised speeds, and those areas are not shown on this map.



Broadband data published by CN Texas in 2022: <https://connectednation.org/texas/mapping-analysis/>

The first step in understanding the status of broadband infrastructure in Orange County, and statewide, is having accurate maps. Accordingly, CN Texas works with providers to develop a variety of broadband maps at the state and county level. Data shown on this map are derived from a combination of direct provider outreach and data collection, FCC Form 477 broadband deployment filings, and independent research conducted by CN Texas. If a provider was unable or unwilling to supply granular data and a detailed service area could not be developed, the provider's service is represented by Form 477 data alone, a format that tends to overstate the service territory.

To access the map as a PDF, click [here](#).





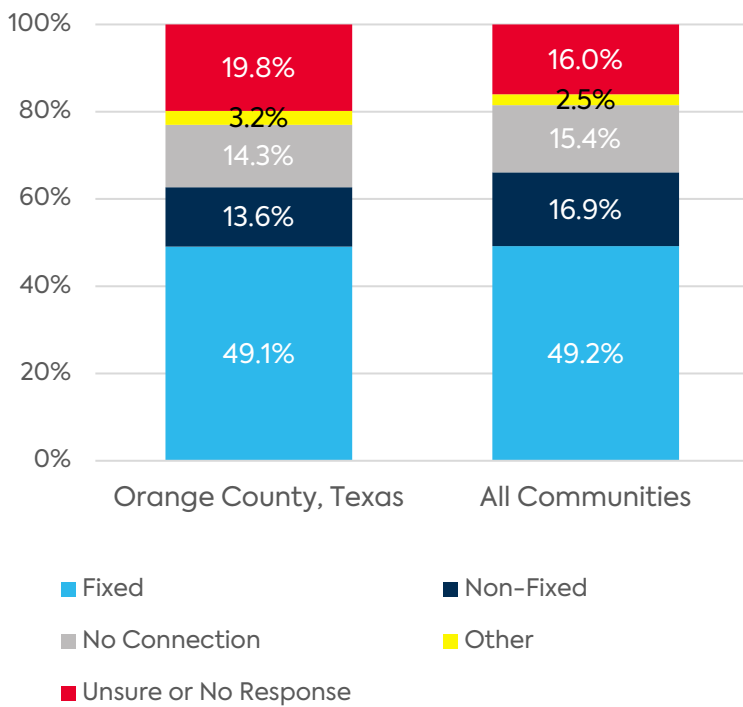
# Household Survey Results

# Household Survey Results



The following section provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Orange County between February and April 2022. Altogether, CN Texas received 1,409 completed surveys from households across the county; respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity or lack thereof. Data from Orange County are compared to data from hundreds of other rural Connected communities that participated in the program across Michigan, Ohio, and Texas to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

## Home Broadband Adoption

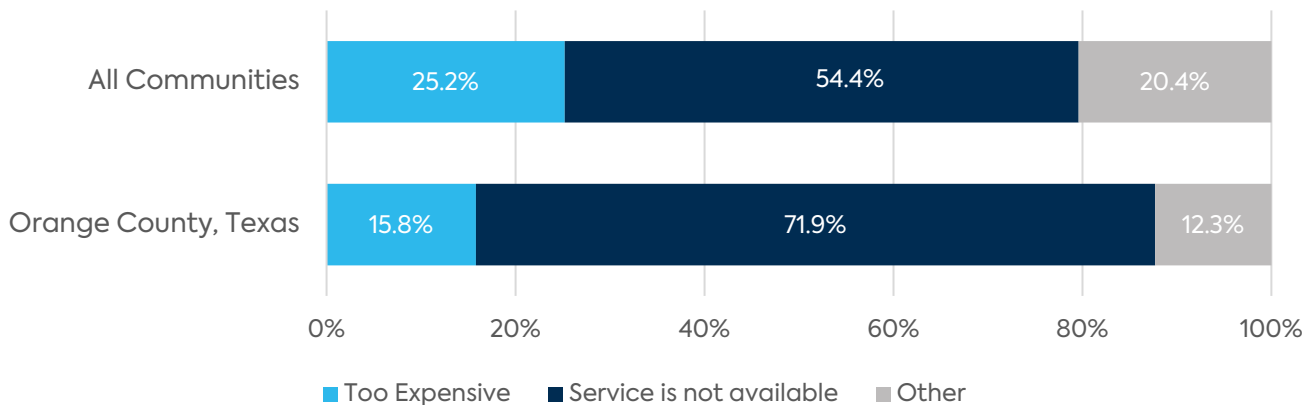


## ADOPTION

In Orange County, 49.1% of households that took the survey subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology; while 13.6% indicate they have internet service delivered via dial-up, satellite, or a mobile wireless service. This leaves 14.3% without internet and 19.8% of survey respondents unsure of what service they have.

Among those without a home internet connection, 15.8% said they did not have broadband because it was too expensive. An additional 71.9% say service is not available.

## Primary Barrier



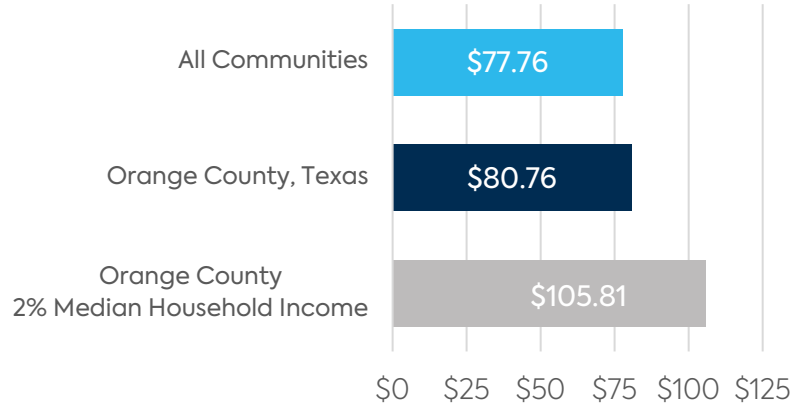
# Household Survey Results



## CONNECTION DETAILS

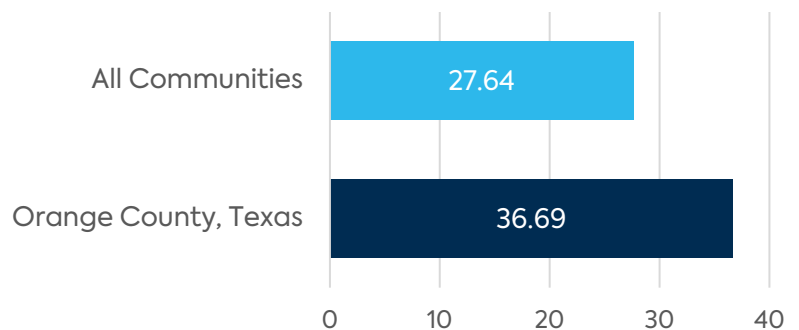
Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that, on average, their internet connection costs about \$80.76 per month. This is higher than the monthly cost paid in other communities (\$77.76). Two percent of the median household income in Orange County is \$105.81 per month.

Average Monthly Cost

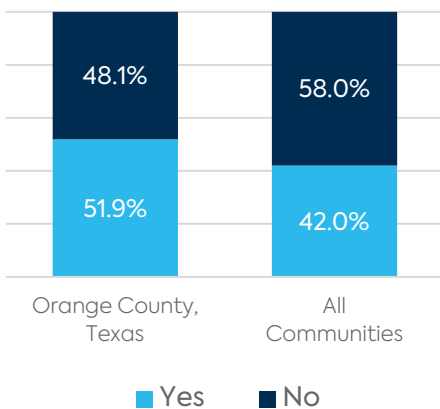


The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 25 Mbps and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps. On average, respondents indicate that their connection's download speed is 36.69 Mbps, which is above the minimum defined speed.

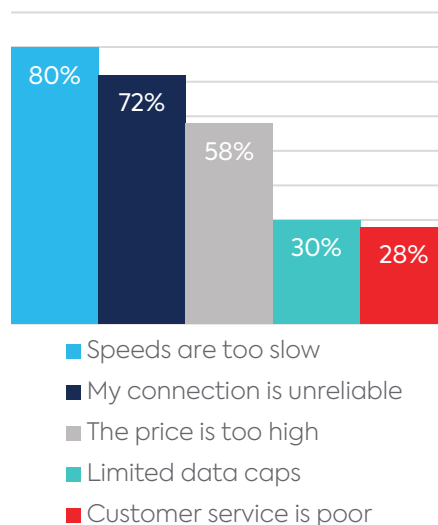
Average Speeds (Mbps)



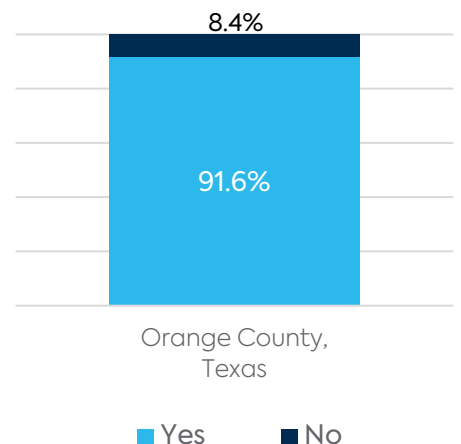
### Does Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



### Why Doesn't Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



### Are You Interested in More Choices at Home?



# 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. Just over half (51.9%) of responding households indicate that their internet connection meets their needs. This is a higher rate of satisfaction than among households in other communities (42.0%).

When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 80% of dissatisfied households indicate that their speed is too slow, 72% say their connections are unreliable, and 58% indicate that the price is too high. Respondents could choose more than one reason for dissatisfaction.

Finally, more than 9 out of 10 respondents (91.6%) indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

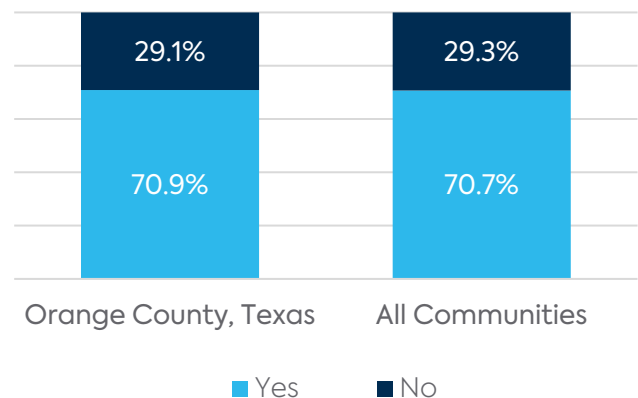


## MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

A little more than 7 out of 10 (70.9 %) households reported that they subscribe to mobile internet service, which they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is nearly identical to what is reported in other Connected communities (70.7%).

Additionally, 34.1% 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





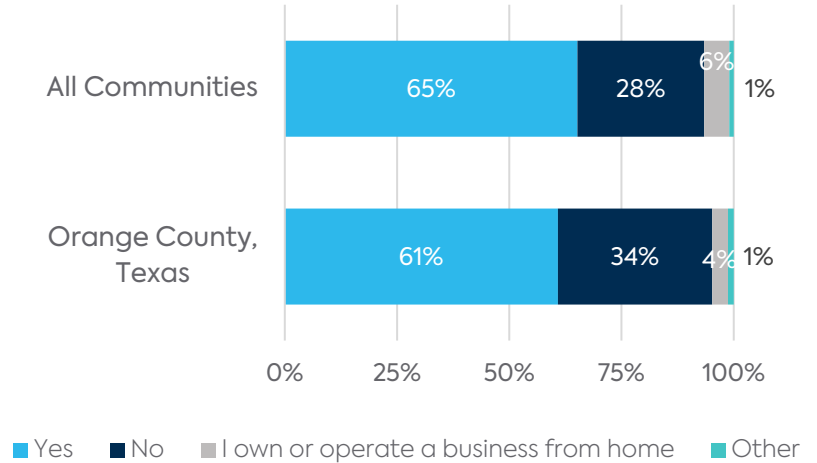
## TELEWORK

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.

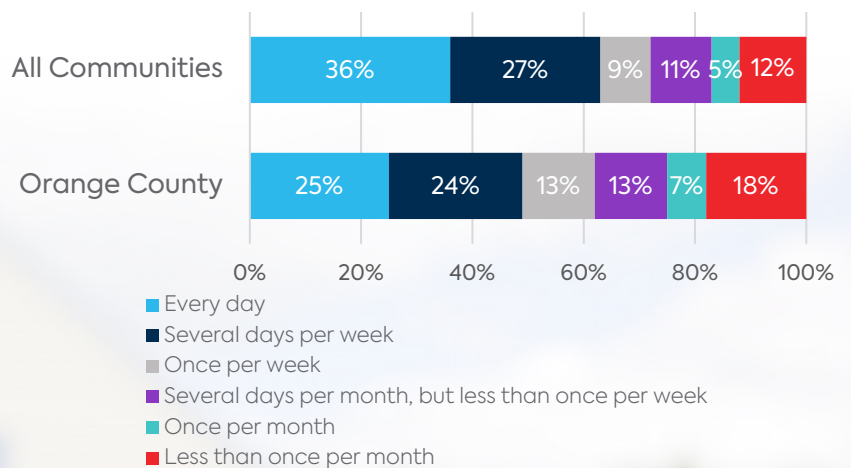
Teleworking is quickly becoming a critical part of growing a local economy because it represents an opportunity to attract and retain employees even when employees are not located in the same community as their employers. However, this only works if those employees have access to advanced broadband infrastructure.

Approximately 62% of employed respondents in Orange County telework in some capacity at least once per week. One-quarter (25% of this group) telework every day.

### Do You Currently Telework?



### How Frequently Do You Telework?





Recommendations



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

Orange County broadband data illustrate a community with more than 91% of its households having access to broadband service at 100 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload but digging deeper into the numbers and speaking with the county leadership, chambers of commerce leaders, and residents, this percentage may be overstated. Nearly half (48.1%) of households say they are dissatisfied with their current internet service; of these, 72% report their connection is unreliable, while 80% say speeds are too slow. Orange County leaders should capitalize on state and federal funding opportunities, public-private partnerships, and local leadership to provide access to broadband that meets the needs of all residents. High-speed internet access is key to Orange County's economic growth, business retention, workforce and community development, academic achievement, public safety preparedness, and health care advancements.

## Goal 1: Promote broadband access for households and businesses by establishing central leadership as a tool for economic advancement and community development

### Objective:

Establish enhanced broadband access for Orange County residents and businesses by developing partnerships with local providers, taking advantage of federal and state funding as it becomes available, and developing a local broadband committee.

### Actions:

**Action 1 – Establish a broadband committee to oversee broadband information, deployment, and communication with providers and the community.**

Orange County has a well-established Economic Development Corporation that was established in 2003. The EDC is a natural fit to host a broadband team or committee overseen by Jessica Hill, Executive Director. Charging the local committee with specific duties will help ensure long-term success. The broadband team should have representation from all community sectors:

- **Health Care:** Local physicians or hospital staff from Baptist Orange Hospital, Golden Triangle Emergency Center-Orange, and Orange County Urgent Care
- **Government:** County Judge, County Commissioners, Mayors, City Councils, County IT Director



- **K-12 Education and Higher Education:** Bridge City ISD, Little Cypress–Mauriceville CISD, Orangefield ISD, Vidor ISD, West Orange–Cove CISD
- **Public Safety:** Orange County Sheriff’s Department, police departments, emergency management, and others
- **Libraries and Community Organizations:** Bridge City Public Library, Orange Public Library, and Vidor Public Library; Nelda C. and H.J. Lutcher Stark Foundation; Greater Orange Area Chamber, and others
- **Agriculture:** County Agriculture Extension Agent Fallon Foster, leading agricultural producers
- **Community at Large:** A resident who is interested in furthering the broadband agenda of Orange County

**Action 1A – Determine the long-term responsibilities of the broadband committee.** Tasking the committee with specific duties will help ensure long-term success. Duties should include:

- Deploying requests for quotes (RFQs) for services needed in Orange County related to broadband deployment and maintenance of owned broadband assets.
- Providing monthly updates to Economic Development Director, Jessica Hill, and the Commissioners Court regarding activities surrounding broadband.
- Establishing relationships with current providers and open communication with potential providers.
- Monitoring federal and state funding opportunities by attending workshops, webinars, meetings, and general training that discuss broadband specifically and telecommunications generally. This will ensure Orange County is prepared to take advantage of funding sources as they become available.
- Providing digital literacy and digital skills assistance to the community’s at-risk populations.
- Ensuring digital engagement in Orange County across all community sectors (telehealth, telework, online learning, Wi-Fi in businesses, etc.).
- Establishing a relationship with Orange County’s U.S. Congressman Brian Babin and his staff, who oversee broadband grants, subsidies, and loans available from the federal government. In addition, establishing relationships with state legislators to work together on broadband needs in Orange County. The current State Senator is Robert Nichols and the current State Representative is Dade Phelan, Speaker of the Texas House.
  - Contact information:
    - [Brian Babin, D.D.S.](#) – Current U.S. Congressman
    - [Randy Weber](#) – When redistricting takes effect, U.S. Congressman Randy Weber will pick up Orange County.





- [Robert Nichols](#)
- [Dade Phelan](#)

**Action 1B – Monitor state and national broadband policy.** The broadband committee should remain informed and up to date on any publications, events, and policy briefs published by the Governor’s Broadband Development Council ([GBDC](#)) and the Broadband Development Office ([BDO](#)). The local committee should consider the objectives laid out by the BDO for Texas’ broadband efforts, which can help align local priorities in a way that is complementary to those of the state.

**Action 1C – Stay current on funding opportunities.** The federal government continues to release new opportunities for funding at a rapid pace. [The Texas Broadband Development Office](#) is not far behind. Understanding how Orange County can benefit from the funding programs and how leaders can be prepared to apply for them is key to the build-out and digital equity of broadband for all.

Funding sources include:

- The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
  - A minimum of \$100 million will be allocated to the state of Texas. The state is responsible for developing and distributing these funds.
- Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
  - The U.S. Treasury Department issued its Final Rule on January 6, 2022, expanding the use of funds for broadband.
- Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CPF)
  - Under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the CPF provides \$10 billion to eligible governments to carry out critical capital projects that directly enable work, education, and health monitoring. The Texas State Legislature appropriated all the funding from the CPF for broadband purposes. The Broadband Development Office (BDO) plans to stand up a competitive grant process to support local broadband projects around the state. More information can be found on the BDO’s website (linked below). A recent publication found [here](#) can help answer questions about the CPF.

**Action 1D – Identify a grant writer to support the process and ensure opportunities are not missed.** Grant application windows are short and review processes competitive, making it essential for communities to have smart, well-written applications with supporting data ready to go. Should a grant opportunity be identified, Orange County should work with a reliable and trusted grant writer who can accurately capture the needs and wants of Orange County residents, businesses, and community leaders in writing. A regional solution could be helpful. The South East Texas Regional



Planning Commission ([SETRPC](#)) supports Hardin, Jefferson, Jasper, and Orange counties, and a regional grant writer could be housed under this organization.

**Action 2 – Establish a relationship with all local providers.** Orange County should arrange meetings with all internet service providers (ISPs) that offer service in the county to discuss plans for future expansion and associated costs. This includes the three Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) winners. Providers are more likely to engage in a community that is easy to work with as a partner. Removing red tape can speed up broadband deployment and attract new providers. Although RDOF will help, it will not eliminate the barriers for additional providers to close the Digital Divide and provide competition.

Connected Nation can provide a list of questions to ask ISPs to better understand their offerings. RDOF phase 1 winners and amounts follow:

- Charter Communications: \$1,156,683
- LTD Broadband LLC: \$347,574
- Windstream Services LLC, Debtor-In-Possession: \$32,238

All identified internet providers currently in Orange County:

- AT&T
- Charter Communications (Spectrum)
- En-Touch Systems Inc. (Astound Broadband)
- Cable One Inc. (Sparklight)
- T-Mobile

**Action 3 – Explore public-private partnerships between Orange County and internet providers.**

The advantage of P3 partnerships is that each party brings something important to the relationship that the other doesn't have or can't easily acquire. Orange County can offer assets (publicly owned building rooftops, light poles, towers, and other vertical assets for mounting infrastructure) for the deployment of a network, as well as committed anchor tenants, and possible funding sources. Private-sector partners bring network-building and operations experience.

Examine models of partnerships:

**Model 1: Private Investment, Public Facilitation:** Make available public assets, share geographic information, systems data, and streamline permitting and inspection processes. Offer economic development incentives to attract private broadband investment.



**Model 2: Private Execution, Public Funding:** Identify revenue streams that can be directed to a private partner. Funding may include appropriated payments from the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds established by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund, and Reconnect Loan and Grant Program, Emergency Connectivity Fund, and several others [here](#). New streams of revenue are becoming available from the FCC and/or state government.

**Model 3: Shared Investment and Risk:** Evaluate using assets to attract private investment, evaluate funding new assets to attract private investment, and evaluate building new broadband assets for businesses and/or homes for leasing to private ISPs.

**Action 4 – Understand key legal considerations and critical elements for localities looking to build a broadband partnership.** Hiring a knowledgeable and nonaffiliated legal consultant can help Orange County sort through what agreements, partnerships, and arrangements will or will not work in their county. This expertise can also assist the county with ways that they may make it easier for service expansions, while helping protect the integrity of current laws and regulations.

**Action 5 – Review and update local telecommunications policies and ordinances.** Through the broadband committee, the county should review and update ordinances and policies to minimize any barriers to broadband deployment and help facilitate faster broadband buildout in the county. Barriers may include unfair or burdensome rights-of-way negotiation and approval processes, deployment moratoria, leasing of pole attachments, and excessive fees for permits and other costs.

**Action 6 – Establish a central webpage for all broadband development resources including vendor information and electronic forms on the Orange County Economic Development website.** Developing a central website to support internet service providers on how to conduct business in the community can remove barriers and streamline processes. Include regulations that vendors must follow such as “dig-once policies.” A dig-once policy can require the county to coordinate with public or private contractors to install fiber or conduit whenever the ground is broken on a public right-of-way.

### **Responsible Parties:**

The County Judge, Commissioners, and Economic Development Director would be responsible for establishing the broadband committee and approving P3 contracts. Feedback from broadband providers, businesses, residents, and anchor institutions would be valuable.



## Timeline:

A broadband committee should be organized within three months of this plan. The first duty of the organized broadband team should be meeting with providers and discussing partnerships, where applicable.

## Resources:

[Connected Nation supports communities in broadband planning, deployment, and digital inclusion](#)  
[Becoming Broadband Ready](#)

[States consider a range of options to bring broadband to rural America](#)

[Public-private partnerships are key to providing broadband for all](#)

[Era of the broadband public-private partnerships](#)

[How to write an RFQ, RFI, or RFP](#)

[Texas has a generational opportunity to grow rural broadband](#)

[Will Texas apply for the federal money?](#)

[Broadband Development Office](#)

[Governor's Broadband Development Council](#)

[South East Texas Regional Planning Commission](#)

## Goal 2: Increase the broadband adoption rates in Orange County

### Objective:

Increase internet adoption rates in Orange County. Although providers with RDOF money will connect a large portion of the unconnected areas, it will not address the adoption rates throughout the county. The CN Texas survey reports that 14.3% of respondents do not subscribe to internet services. This percentage is in line with the U.S. Census Bureau, which states that 13.8% of Orange County households do not subscribe.

**Action 1 – Determine why the adoption rates are low across the county.** The survey highlights cost as one factor. The average price that Orange County residents reported paying for broadband is \$80.76 a month, whereas in other communities where CN Texas has performed technology assessments, the average cost is \$77.76.

**Action 2 – Promote and share information about programs that help residents overcome the affordability barrier to broadband adoption.** The county should work with community leaders and institutions to publicly promote programs and opportunities designed to reduce the cost of broadband service. This can be done by sending notices in water bills, posting in the newspaper or



monthly school newsletters, through discussions at Commissioners Court and City Hall meetings, or advertisements at frequently visited community buildings and businesses.

Below are some programs and resources that are available to residents:

- **Locate affordable internet service or computers:** Using online resources, Orange County residents can identify local and national providers who offer special, low-cost services for vulnerable populations, older adults, and low-income families with children. Such resources include [EveryoneOn](#), which helps residents locate low-cost internet services and affordable computers by ZIP code and need, based on their participation in assistance programs.
- **Low-cost internet services offered by providers:** In Orange County, AT&T offers the *Access from AT&T* program for \$10 per month or less based on the maximum speed available at the subscriber's address, with speeds up to 25Mbps. Charter Spectrum also offers discount broadband if at least one person in the household is a member of the SSI (Supplemental Security Income) program and is over 65 years of age. *This is subject to household eligibility and service availability at a specific address.*
- **State and federal low-cost programs:** There are two critical programs\* that offer discounts for broadband to eligible households.
  - **Lifeline** is a federal assistance program run by the Public Utility Commission of Texas that provides a discount to qualifying low-income customers who subscribe to voice telephone service or broadband internet access service. The Lifeline discount for qualifying low-income customers may be up to \$12.75 (\$3.50 state discount and \$9.25 federal Lifeline discount) depending on the services a resident subscribes to and the customer's eligibility. Lifeline service is non-transferable and is limited to one discount per household.
  - The **Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB)** was created during the COVID-19 pandemic to help families and households that were struggling to afford internet service. On December 31, 2021, it was replaced by the **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)**, which provides a \$30 a month credit toward internet coverage (\$75 a month for qualifying residents on tribal lands) and up to \$100 for the purchase of a device. Households 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 providers offering ACP discounts in Orange County include some providers listed on the CN Texas service map:



AT&T, Spectrum (Charter Communications), Sparklight (Cable-One), En-Touch Systems (Astound), and T-Mobile. For a full list of all providers offering this service, go [here](#).

\*The programs and prices are subject to change over time.

## Responsible Parties:

The broadband director, broadband committee, and the county and cities' IT directors should coordinate to include important information on their websites. The County Judge and Commissioners should set local telecommunication policies, with input from the broadband director or broadband committee. The county broadband director or committee should meet with local providers to discuss their service offerings.

## Timeline:

The broadband director should notify residents immediately of available discount programs. The broadband committee and/or director should meet with providers within the first three months of acceptance of this plan.

## Resources:

[Specific challenges in rural America to providing internet](#)

[It is a matter of economic growth for rural America](#)

[Social and economic effects of lack of broadband in rural America](#)

[The Affordable Connectivity Program is designed to supplement internet services to households who qualify](#)

[Lifeline Program designed to help with monthly phone and internet cost](#)

[Ideas to reduce your monthly billing.](#)

[En-Touch Systems website for the ACP](#)

[Spectrum discount programs](#)

[AT&T discount broadband programs](#)

[Sparklight ACP website](#)

[T-Mobile ACP website](#)

## Goal 3: Increase internet speeds throughout Orange County

### Objective:

Increase internet speeds throughout the county to run modern-day applications.

Orange County, like its neighbors, needs to increase internet speeds to run modern-day applications. The county needs more accurate information to understand advertised speeds versus actual speeds. Most of the information that is currently available was gathered from the FCC Form 477, which can be unreliable when trying to assess how many households truly have access to advertised speeds.



**Action 1 – Orange County has hired CN Texas to assess the existing capacity for connectivity throughout the county.** Outcomes include performing the necessary testing, data collection, and mapping to develop a complete broadband assessment of the county. CN Texas will integrate data gathered through the assessment and provide a report of findings to the county. Finally, Cn Texas will implement strategy and recommendations in collaboration with county leaders

**Action 2 – To begin addressing slow internet speeds, the broadband committee, in partnership with community leadership, should meet with internet service providers (ISPs) in the community.** This includes meeting with those providers who have been allocated funding through the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF). It is important to know and understand where new or improved infrastructure is being built around the county, and how it will affect broadband speeds and delivery to residents.

When meeting with providers, the broadband team should address the survey results, highlighting the need for affordable, reliable, and fast service. Providers need to understand the consumer base to provide the best customer service experience. Poor customer service can discourage people from subscribing to broadband. The survey illustrates that 48.1% of households say their internet service does not meet their needs, while 74.1% of businesses say their internet needs are not being met.

**Action 3 – Advise businesses, residents, and public safety entities on how to test their speeds to determine if advertised speeds match the actual speeds.** Present the results of these tests to providers to make sure subscribers are receiving stated services.

#### **Responsible Parties:**

The broadband committee, Economic Development Director, County Judge, and providers.

#### **Timeline:**

Meetings with providers should be scheduled as soon as the committee is established.

#### **Resources:**

[Rural America needs better access and speed for digital equity](#)

**Goal 4: Bring awareness and promote free public and private Wi-Fi throughout Orange County**



## Objective:

Make Wi-Fi access available throughout Orange County to ensure that all residents have access to the internet.

Survey participants report that 17.2% of businesses allow free Wi-Fi for their patrons and 23.1% of K-12 schools offer free Wi-Fi. These percentages are below other counties surveyed by CN Texas. By promoting and increasing the number of businesses and local organizations that offer Wi-Fi, the county can expand opportunities for residents to connect. This is important because not all households can maintain and/or afford the level of internet access they may need.

**Action 1 – Make public Wi-Fi locations available throughout Orange County.** The broadband committee should document and promote an inventory of public Wi-Fi locations in the community, focusing on institutions that are frequented by residents. This can be done by working with the community anchor institutions, such as the public libraries, to identify the number of Wi-Fi hotspots and public computers available. Additionally, compiling community hotspot availability in public places, such as parks and other recreational centers, and developing plans to create hotspots in areas where people attend recreational activities, such as tourist attractions, can significantly expand public access.

**Action 2 – Convene community anchor institutions such as libraries, community centers, and senior centers that host public computing centers to discuss their important role in providing open, public internet access to residents in downtown areas or other public spaces.** This is a simple, straightforward way to encourage the community to participate in bridging the Digital Divide. Other opportunities may exist with religious facilities, schools, local government offices, RV parks, restaurants or various social service providers that offer services in English, Vietnamese, and Spanish.

**Action 3 – Improve the online presence of libraries in Orange County.** Libraries should use social media more frequently, distribute electronic surveys asking residents what broadband needs they may have, develop instructional videos for upload to YouTube, and livestream library events. Increasing the libraries' presence in the community will help promote digital literacy, and help residents become more comfortable with receiving information via the internet.

Libraries in Orange County include Bridge City Public Library, Orange Public Library, and Vidor Public Library. Each library has a website, and some list the hours Wi-Fi is available, but there are no listings of available digital learning programs. Several open sources to teach digital learning could be added to the libraries' services and are listed under resources at the bottom of this goal.





## Responsible Parties:

The broadband director, broadband committee, and librarians should meet and discuss a strategy to increase the presence of libraries in Orange County. The broadband director and the broadband committee should meet with chambers of commerce, churches, community organizations, and others to discuss how they increase Wi-Fi availability in Orange County.

## Timeline:

An inventory of library offerings should be performed within three months of acceptance of this plan.

## Resources:

[Should cities offer free Wi-Fi?](#)

[Benefits to small businesses offering free Wi-Fi](#)

[How one city provided free Wi-Fi to their businesses](#)

[Keeping Communities Connected spotlights creative library broadband services during the pandemic](#)

[Filling the gap Wi-Fi hotspots how one rural community deployed hotspots](#)

## Goal 5: Increase opportunities for digital literacy in Orange County

### Objective:

Improve digital literacy for all Orange County residents by developing strategies for enhancing the offerings of digital literacy programs.

Digital literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information. It requires both cognitive and technical skills. A lack of digital skills can create a wider gap between those with access to the internet and those without. In the CN Texas survey, Orange County residents give themselves high marks for digital literacy.

**Action 1 – Identify regional and community partners who possess resources and expertise in producing free digital literacy and digital skills workshops.** This may include the chambers of commerce (Greater Orange Area COC, Vidor COC, or Bridge City COC). [The American Red Cross](#) has a significant presence in Orange County and works closely with leadership due to the weather disasters the Texas gulf region often experiences. The American Red Cross offers training and certification courses in Orange County and could be an ideal partner for offering digital literacy courses. It is critical that residents know how to use the internet during emergencies, including telehealth resources. The American Red Cross could host digital skills programs, provide volunteers to teach the courses, and be able to reach those who are most in need.



**Action 2 – Implement digital literacy and digital skills workshops in the community, with an emphasis on social media and website skills/training, to ensure all residents and community leaders can access and use digital devices and services.** Websites and social media are an integral component of modern communication and real-time updates. For government entities, public safety institutions, K-12 schools, community organizations, and businesses, an online presence is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Furthermore, community workshops should strive to ensure community officials and leaders have the digital know-how and confidence to engage online.

**Action 3 – Consider applying for the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) grant to train digital navigators in rural communities.** Libraries, as well as other anchor institutions, could be a natural fit for this grant. The grant will support the hiring of a community-based digital navigator along with programmatic and technical support.

**Action 4 – Offer online digital literacy skills in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese to attract more patrons to the libraries.** The U.S. Census Bureau states that 93% of Orange County residents speak English, but a small population also speaks Spanish and Vietnamese in the area. Many online open resources in these languages can be added to the libraries' services to allow patrons to learn and improve their internet skills. Several open sources are listed under resources at the bottom of this goal.

## **Responsible Parties:**

The broadband committee and librarians should work together to offer anyone who needs a digital learning course access to resources. Other community businesses, nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, and providers should offer free courses in digital learning when they can.

## **Timeline:**

Strategy workshops should begin as soon as this plan is accepted.

## **Resources:**

[American Library Association - PLA, AT&T team up to bring digital literacy training to families](#)

[AARP - AARP Joins with nonprofit to teach tech to older adults](#)

[Connected Nation Initiative](#)

[Telehealth information](#)

[Public Library Association](#)

[NDIA grant](#)

[Training the trainers under NDIA](#)



Three organizations that offer digital literacy in English and Spanish:

- Goodwill Foundation: [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
- Public Library Association: [DigitalLearn.org](#)
- Google: [Grow with Google Google](#)