




Connected
A CONNECTED NATION Initiative

Addressing Your Community's Unique Needs

Foard County, Texas Executive Summary

September 2022

**CONNECTED
NATION** 
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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, the Foard 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 March and June 2022, Foard County conducted a comprehensive survey of broadband technology access and adoption across the community that collected responses from 36 households. CN Texas staff also met with county 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 Foard 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](#).

FOARD COUNTY, TEXAS QUICK FACTS

Population
1,095

Households
573

Median Household Income
\$39,306

Poverty Rate
12.0%

Adults with a Bachelor's Degree
or Higher
12.8%

Hispanic or Latino
17.99%

Households with
Broadband Access¹
99.66%

Source:

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US48155>

¹The 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/>



72.2%

of households in
Foard County
report subscribing
to fixed internet
service



For households that do not subscribe to home internet service, the top barrier is the **cost of internet service**.

99.66% of households in Foard 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.

Nearly 3 out of 5 employed survey respondents in Foard County (**58.3%**) report teleworking in some capacity. Of those, **17%** telework every day.

40% of households and 60% of businesses reported that they were dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were slow speeds and high prices.

86.7% 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 internet service provider input, 99.66% of Foard 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 Foard County is distributed throughout the county.

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

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE QUICK FACTS

Unserved Households (25/3 Mbps)
2

Households Served (10/1 Mbps)
99.66%

Households Served (25/3 Mbps)
99.66%

Households Served (50/5 Mbps)
99.66%

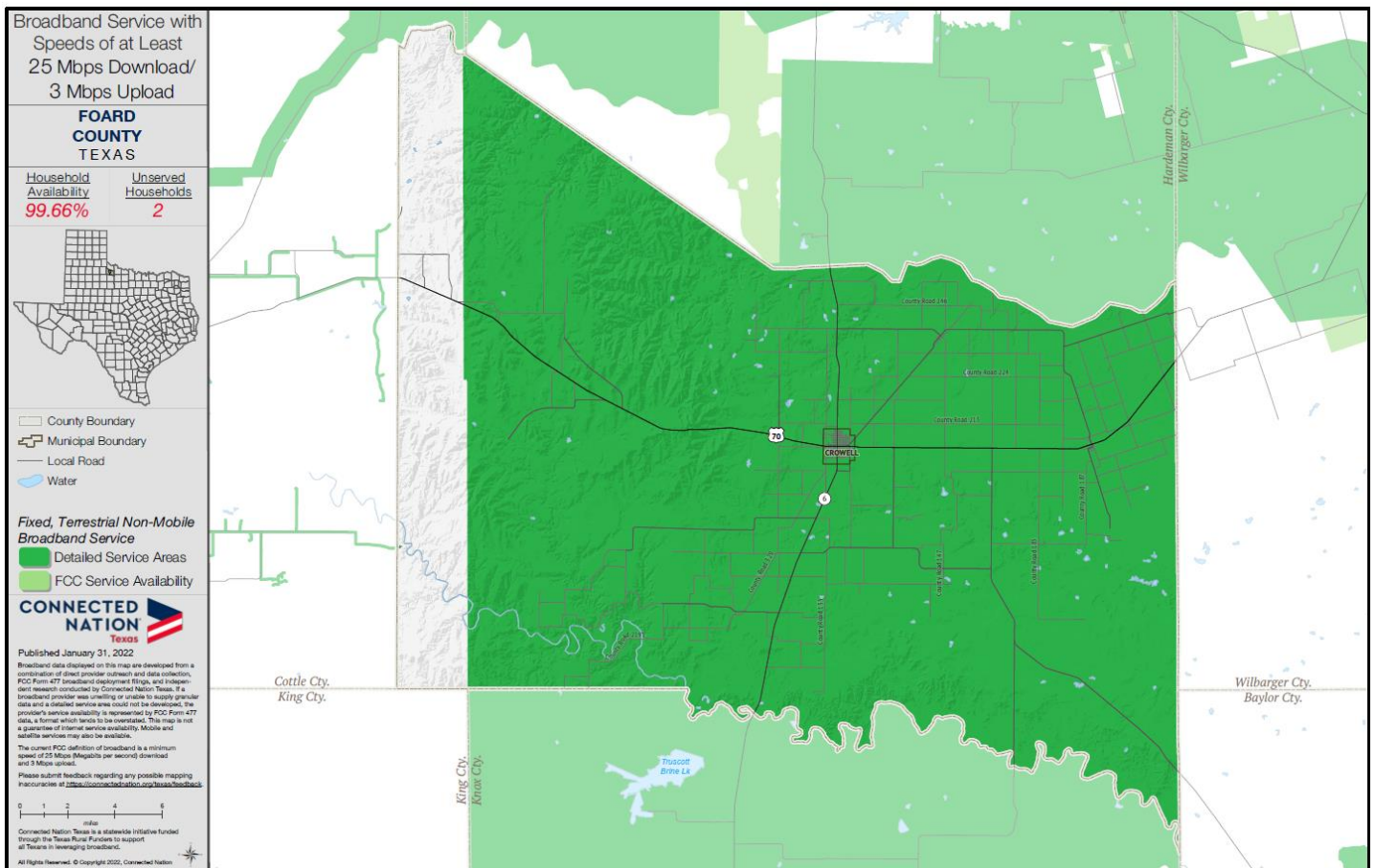
Households Served (100/10 Mbps)
99.66%

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)
AT&T Southwest	Fixed Wireless	10	1
Mid-Plains Communications	Fiber	200	100
Santa Rosa Telephone Cooperative Inc.	Fiber	1000	1000
	DSL	50	10
TGM Pinnacle Network Solutions	Fixed Wireless	50	5



Below is Foard County's (25/3 Mbps) map. To access the full map, go to <https://connectednation.org/texas/county-maps/> and select Foard 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 Foard 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](#).



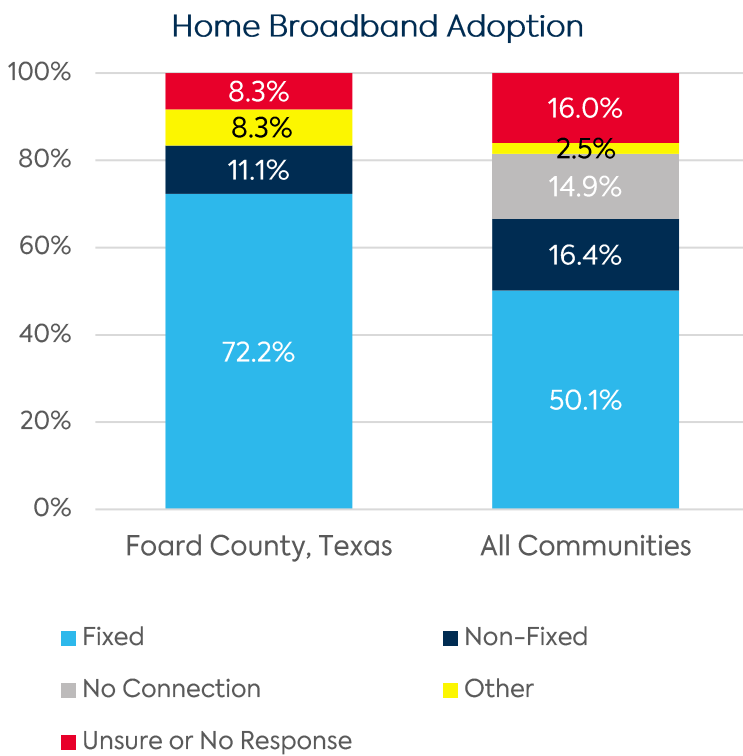
Household Survey Results

Household Survey Results



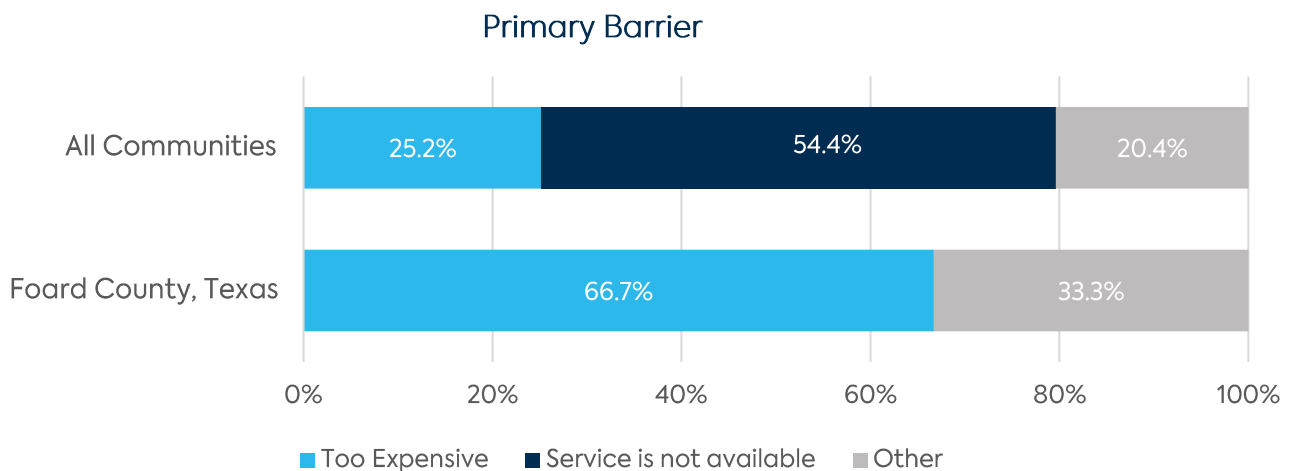
The following section provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Foard County between March and June 2022. Altogether, CN Texas received 36 completed surveys from households across the county; respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity or lack thereof. Data from Foard County are compared to data from hundreds of other rural Connected communities that participated in the program across Michigan, Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

ADOPTION



In Foard County, 72.2% of households that took the survey subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology, while 11.1% indicate they have internet service delivered via dial-up, satellite, or a mobile wireless service. This leaves 16.6% of survey respondents unsure of what service they have or provided no response.

Among those without a home internet connection, 66.7% said they did not have broadband because it was too expensive.

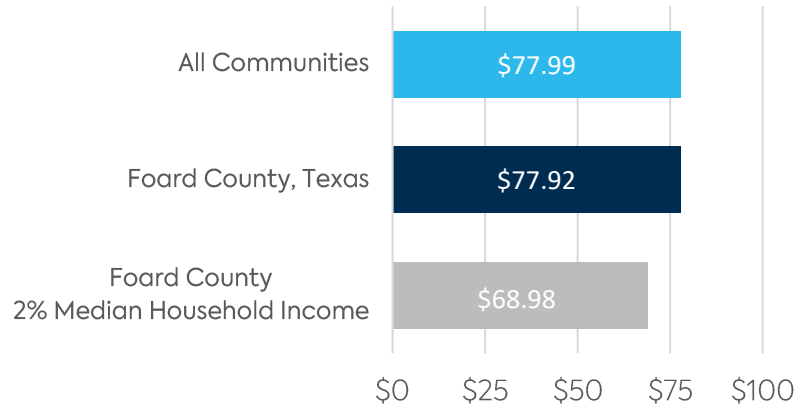




CONNECTION DETAILS

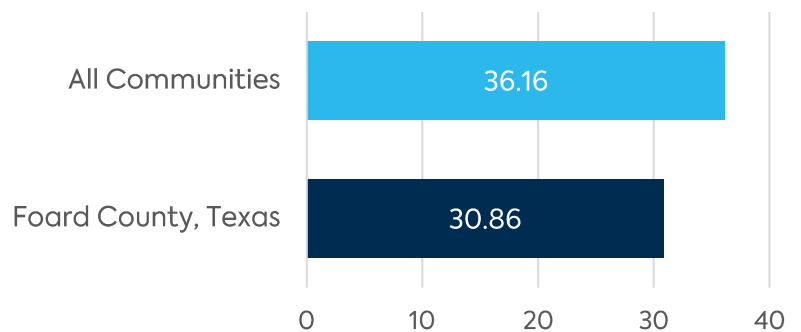
Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that, on average, their internet connection costs about \$77.92 per month. This is on par with other communities (\$77.99), but considerably higher than two percent of the median household income in Foard County, which is \$68.98 per month.

Average Monthly Cost

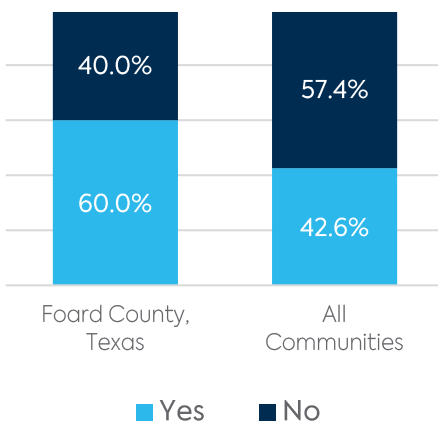


The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 25 Mbps and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps. On average, respondents indicate that their connection's download speed is 30.86 Mbps, which is above the minimum defined speed.

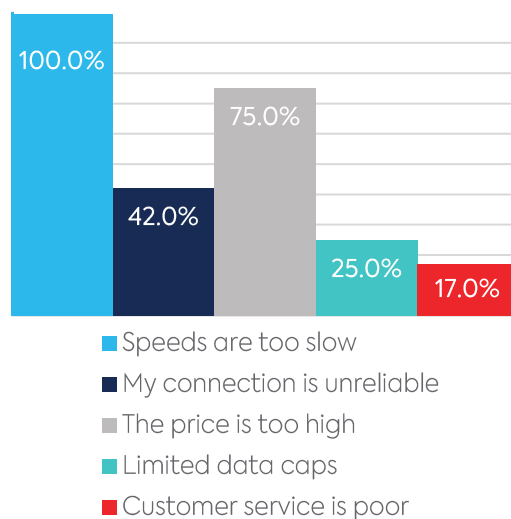
Average Speeds (Mbps)



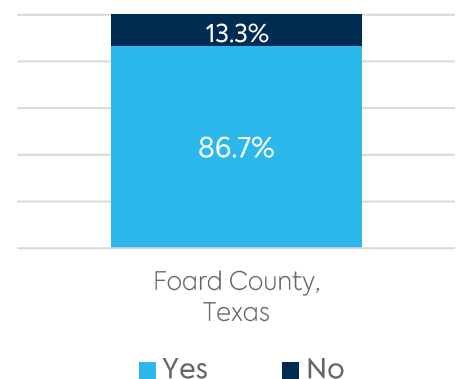
Does Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Why Doesn't Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Are You Interested in More Choices at Home?



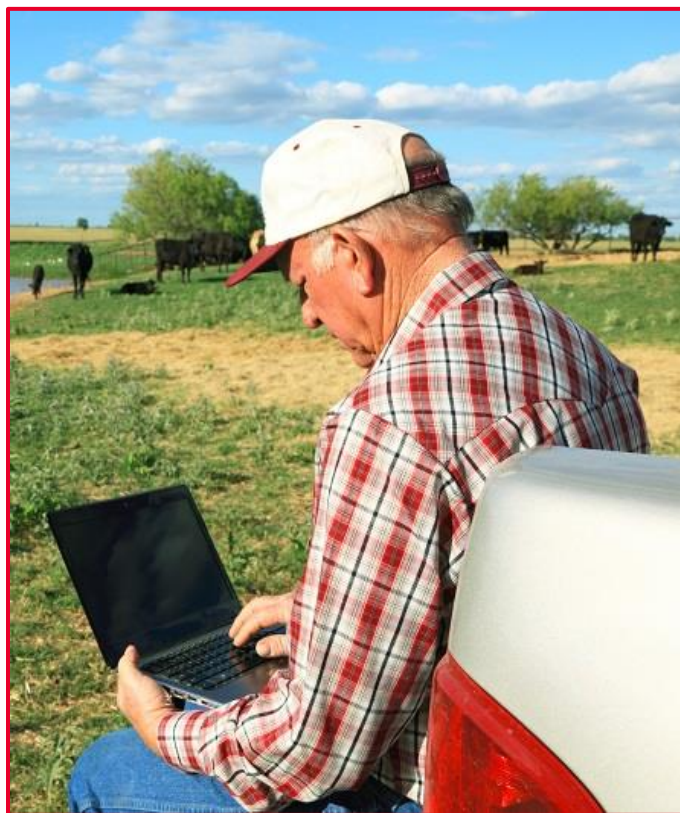
Household Survey Results



Competition provides residents with choices for service, allowing households the ability to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. Six out of 10 (60%) of responding households indicate that their internet connection meets their needs. This is a considerably higher rate of satisfaction than among households in other communities (42.6%).

When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 100% of dissatisfied households indicate that their speed is too slow, 42% say their connections are unreliable, and 75% indicate that the price is too high. Respondents could choose more than one reason for dissatisfaction.

Finally, 86.7% indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

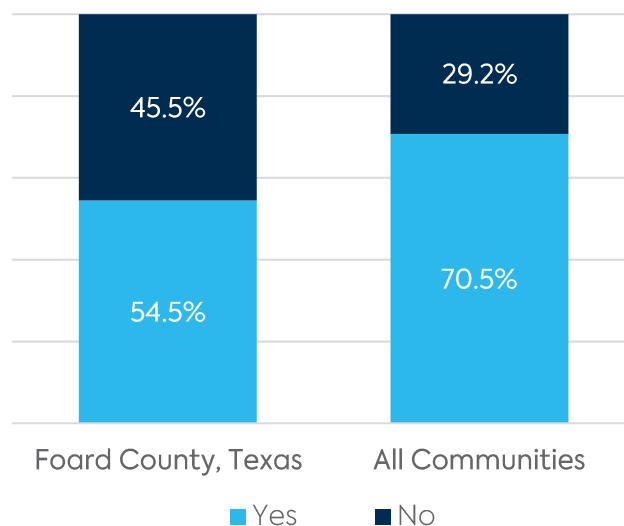


MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

A little more than half (54.5 %) of households reported they subscribe to mobile internet service that they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is much lower than what is reported in other Connected communities (70.5%).

Additionally, 38.9% 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





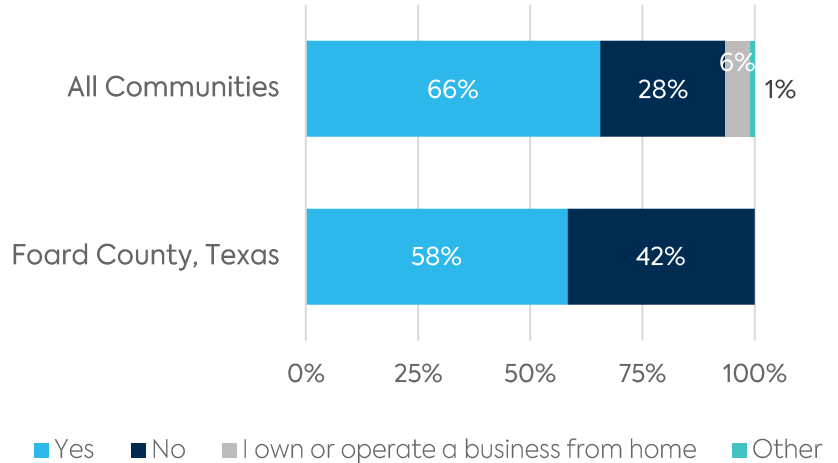
TELEWORK

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.

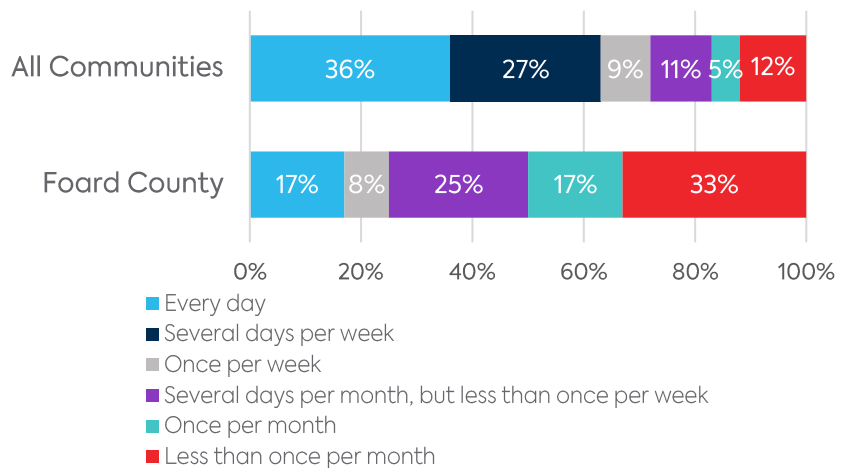
Teleworking is quickly becoming a critical part of growing a local economy because it represents an opportunity to attract and retain employees even when employees are not located in the same community as their employers. However, this only works if those employees have access to advanced broadband infrastructure.

Approximately 58.3% of employed respondents in Foard County telework in some capacity. Fewer than 2 out of 10 (17% of this group) telework every day.

Do You Currently Telework?



How Frequently Do You Telework?





Recommendations



The following recommendations are presented to assist Foard County in expanding broadband access and adoption throughout the community.

Goal 1: Increase access to affordable high-speed internet within city limits and across Foard County.

Objective: Improve access to higher internet speeds in Foard County by increasing community engagement and working with internet service providers (ISPs) to address access and affordability.

The FCC currently defines broadband (high-speed internet) as speeds higher than 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload (25/3). However, the speeds necessary to run most modern applications, and use more than a few devices at a time, are 100 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload (100/10). According to the most recent data, 99.6% of Foard County households have access to internet service with 100/10 Mbps speeds, yet survey data indicates that the average reported download speed in Foard County is 30.86 Mbps. Additionally, only 28% of responding households subscribe to the internet with speeds faster than 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. This implies that most respondents are not subscribing to the highest available speeds. Low adoption rates are often related to the affordability of internet service or devices, or a lack of digital skills or a low value placed on internet access by residents.

Internet affordability is a chief concern for Foard County residents. Among households without a home internet connection, 66.7% said they did not have broadband because it was too expensive.

Addressing internet affordability concerns with area ISPs and promoting subsidy programs to residents can encourage more people to sign up for internet. For those who do not have internet at home, libraries are a great resource to fill the gaps. They are community hubs. They are sources of information, education, and community engagement. Libraries are also one of a community's main resources for technology services and internet access.

Action 1 – Establish broadband leadership and maintain community buy-in among stakeholders.

Building on the work of the Foard County community broadband team, the County Commissioners Court should establish a permanent broadband committee or council to act as advisors to the county and appoint a broadband liaison to lead the effort. Government planning and long-term community



development strategies require community buy-in and participation. Establishing leadership is essential. Whether paid or volunteer, part-time or full-time, this person will be the point of contact for broadband in the county. They will be the person who stays up to date on all things broadband, new construction projects in the region, new laws, and funding opportunities, as well as maintains a local presence to keep the community interested and engaged in the process.

Broadband advisory council members should include representatives from a wide variety of community stakeholders, such as:

- **Health care:** Local physicians or hospital staff
- **Government:** County Judge, County Commissioners, Mayor, City Council, County IT Director
- **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 Agriculture Agent, leading agriculture producers
- **Business:** Local chamber of commerce, economic development centers
- **Community At-Large:** A local resident who is interested in furthering the broadband agenda of Foard County.

Broadband council responsibilities should include:

- Keep abreast of state and national broadband policy initiatives and notable broadband news. Stay up to date on any publications, events, and policy briefs published by the (1) Governor's Broadband Development Council (GBDC) and (2) Broadband Development Office (BDO), 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.
- Apply for applicable state and federal grant programs.
- Ensure digital engagement in all community sectors (telehealth, telework, education, commerce, etc.).



- Attend workshops, webinars, meetings, and general training that discuss telecommunications, and broadband specifically.
- Provide digital literacy and digital skills assistance to the community's at-risk populations.
- Hold regular meetings. The council should meet at least once a month. Meetings can be held virtually, in person, or in a hybrid capacity to accommodate members' needs. 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.

Timeline: Establish an official broadband council and select a countywide liaison within six months. The broadband council should meet with ISPs immediately to begin to understand the barriers to expansion and offer lower-cost packages.

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

Action 2 – Maintain open communication and foster relationships with area internet service providers (ISPs) to address speed and affordability gaps.

Foard County community stakeholders indicate a high level of satisfaction with area ISPs. This provides a great foundation to continue working with existing service providers in the area, to understand and encourage their expansion plans for the region, discuss survey results, and address community concerns of affordability and access to higher speeds.

Foard County, through its broadband council, should strive to maintain open communications and positive relations with area service providers. This should include regular check-ins to stay abreast of construction and expansion progress or changes in plans, to identify any obstacles or challenges ISPs are facing, and to communicate community goals and objectives. Open communication allows for providers to better understand community needs, and for communities to better understand the obstacles and barriers providers face. This understanding can encourage creative problem solving, which can lead to finding solutions through public-private partnerships.

CN data shows Foard County is 99.6% served at 100 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload, leaving only two households unserved. CN map data also show that fiber infrastructure has been deployed in many parts of the county. The broadband council should strive to understand what can be done to encourage expansion of higher-speed infrastructure within the city limits and in more parts of the



county. Additionally, CN data and survey responses indicated that even where higher speeds are available, subscription rates remain low. This is most likely due to the high cost of higher-speed packages, or a lack of understanding about the value of the internet — 66.7% of non-subscribing respondents list cost as the barrier to adoption, answering “internet service is too expensive,” as the primary reason they do not subscribe. These issues can be addressed by working with ISPs to offer more affordable options, and with the community to improve digital literacy and community buy-in.

Internet Service Providers currently working in Foard County:

PROVIDER DOING-BUSINESS-AS NAME	TECHNOLOGY	WEBSITE	MAX.DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAX. UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
AT&T Southwest	Fixed Wireless	http://www.att.com	10	1
Mid-Plains Communications	Fiber	http://www.midplains.coop	200	100
Santa Rosa Telephone Cooperative Inc.	Fiber	https://srcaccess.net/	1000	1000
Santa Rosa Telephone Cooperative Inc.	DSL	https://srcaccess.net/	50	10
TGM Pinnacle Network Solutions	Fixed Wireless	http://pinnaclenetworksolutions.com	50	5

Action 3 – Share information with the community about internet subsidy programs and low-cost internet packages available to combat obstacles to internet affordability.

There are programs to assist low-income residents with the cost of internet, but ISPs need to participate in them for residents to benefit. In cases where ISPs do not participate in federal subsidy programs, the broadband council should find out why not and what can be done to encourage them to do so.

There are two main federal internet subsidy programs, and ISPs often have their own low-cost programs as well:

[Lifeline](#) is a federal program administered through the FCC Universal Service Administrative Co. that



lowers the monthly cost of phone or internet services. 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.

The [Affordable Connectivity Program \(ACP\)](#) was created to help households struggling to afford internet service. The ACP provides a \$30-per-month credit toward internet service (\$75 a month for qualifying residents on tribal lands) 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 ISP will provide the discount to the consumer. The [ACP Tool Kit](#) is a resource that communities can use to promote the program to residents.

Internet service providers often offer their own low-cost options or subsidized programs to consumers at a greatly reduced cost, so customers should always ask what might be available to them. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021, now called the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), requires ISPs that receive federal grant money to offer low-cost service to eligible low-income households.

Free or low-cost internet programs available in Foard County by ISPs are:

- AT&T: [Access from AT&T and ACP](#).
- Mid-Plains Communications: [Lifeline](#).

Action 4 – Increase funding for Foard County Library to expand programs and services.

Libraries are a great community resource, and Foard County Library is underutilized. Only 22.2% percent of survey respondents indicated that they interact with the Foard County Library online, daily, or at least once a week. The library has an active social media presence, regularly posting online with new offerings, which is a great way to actively engage residents. However, additional services or resources could be included online as well, such as regular website updates or ensuring the library's Google business listing is updated to include current hours of operation.

Survey respondents indicated that the average reported internet speed among libraries and community organizations was 16.38 Mbps. The library should research and pursue the best available internet service in the area. Libraries, like schools, need to have the fastest speeds because they are often where those without internet at home go to get online, where children come to study, where people come to apply for jobs, and where many people are online at the same time.



Foard County Library would greatly benefit from additional community support and funding to increase programming and expand hours of operations. Investing in the Foard County Library could improve access to broadband and devices for Foard County's low-income residents and provide additional options to any resident without a good internet connection at home.

The FCC has special funding for schools and libraries to help pay for internet costs, called [E-rate](#). In Texas, most accredited public libraries are eligible for an 80% discount, with more than a quarter eligible for a 90% discount. Foard County Library is not utilizing E-rate. The broadband council should help the library assess E-rate opportunities to maximize the funds and bring greater services to the library through the E-rate program.

In 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) gave state, local, and tribal governments Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF). Foard County is the recipient of \$224,345.00 in ARPA SLFRF funds. If any funds remain unallocated by the county, broadband investments are an allowable use of these funds. Additional support should be sought from Foard County, the City of Crowell, grant opportunities, and the community at large to expand library service hours and offerings, as this would be of great benefit to the residents of Foard County.

Action 5 – Foard County Library should increase the number of public computers and publicize their availability. The public library, area businesses, and city and county buildings should offer free public Wi-Fi.

Computers are as important as books in a library because they provide direct access to knowledge. U.S. Census data shows that only 86.6% of Foard County households have a computer at home, as compared to 92.7% of households statewide (ACS 2016–20). Survey results also indicate that 22.2% of surveyed households use their smartphone as their only way to get online, and 16.7% of respondents use their mobile service to connect other devices. Only 20% of responding businesses offer public Wi-Fi. No public city or county building offers public Wi-Fi.

This shows a need for publicly available devices and free public Wi-Fi. Encouraging local businesses to offer Wi-Fi and allowing visitors to use Wi-Fi at city and county buildings can help alleviate this need. Setting up mobile hotspots at parks or other gathering spots in the community is another easy way to expand community access to the internet. Another resource could be the Crowell Independent School District, whose campus has the fastest internet in the area, at 3,000 Mbps, but does not offer public Wi-Fi.



American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLRF) were allocated to each county and can be used for water, sewer, and broadband. Allowable uses include broadband infrastructure, public Wi-Fi infrastructure, and the purchase of devices. Additional support should be sought from Foard County, the City of Crowell, state or federal grant opportunities, public or private grants, and the community at large.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, 2016–20

Timeline: Broadband council should begin work on library funding and affordability issues within six months.

Responsible parties: Libraries and library boards, schools, broadband providers, local and county governments, Foard County Broadband Advisory Council, area internet service providers, area businesses

Resources

- [Lifeline](#)
- [Affordable Connectivity Program \(ACP\)](#)
 - [ACP Consumer Outreach Toolkit](#)
 - [ACP Participating providers](#)
- [Texas State Library and Archives Commission – E-rate overview](#)
- [E-rate resources page](#)
- [Governor’s Broadband Development Council](#)
- [The Texas Statute](#)
- [The 2021 Governor’s Broadband Development Council’s Report](#)
- [The 2020 Governor’s Broadband Development Council’s Report](#)
- [The Texas Broadband Development Office](#)
- [The Texas Broadband Plan 2022](#)
- [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.](#)

Broadband Readiness

- [Texas Broadband Providers by County](#)



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

Goal 2: Increase broadband adoption to improve business and economic development outcomes in Foard County.

Objective: Improve digital skills and broadband internet adoption rates by encouraging greater digital literacy and advocating for the community to address residential and business internet concerns.

Foard County residents who responded to the survey are active online, they engage with businesses, both local and non-local, they do business online, and they show a good amount of digital literacy skills. Foard County businesses understand the importance of technology skills in the workplace and value their employees with advanced skills. This offers opportunities to increase and maintain digital skills in the community, and to expand opportunities for local businesses by increasing their online presence. Additionally, the business community would benefit from higher speeds and more options for service.

Action 1 – Offer website and social media classes for local businesses.

Sixty-six percent of survey respondents indicated that they interact online with non-local business daily or at least once a week, and 59.2% interact with local business online daily or at least once a week – yet only 40% of responding local businesses have a website. This shows that many local companies are not taking advantage of the benefits of doing business online. The broadband council should partner with the public library, chamber of commerce, industrial commission, Crowell ISD, or other local entity to offer website classes for local businesses.

Classes should encourage local businesses to develop websites, to update and maintain them regularly, and to use social media, e-commerce, and other advanced uses of broadband and technology more often and with greater community impact. Classes should also promote digital awareness and the value of connection to the online world. A 2018 study commissioned by Google found that the main reason businesses were not engaging online was not lack of access, but lack of an understanding of the value it brings. According to the study, “Amongst the least digitally engaged small businesses, 40% believe that digital tools are ‘not relevant for my business,’ and 38% believe that ‘they are not effective for my business.’ This indicates that less digitally engaged businesses may be



unaware of the benefits associated with digital tools” (Deloitte 2018). To boost local business in Foard County, the broadband council should encourage local business owners to become more digitally literate and comfortable online. Better technology skills in the business sector can provide entrepreneurial support, eliminate the knowledge gap, promote business growth and workforce development, lower business startup costs, and assist in accelerating business development.

Action 2 – Offer digital literacy training to residents for workforce development and increased internet adoption rates.

Workforce development — According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), fully one-third of working-age Americans lack basic digital skills. One in 6 are unable to use email, search the internet, or use other basic online tools (Ezell 2021). Foard County survey respondents show a good amount of digital literacy skills, but Foard County employers indicated that 20% of their employees are “basic” users. Survey responding Foard County businesses understand the importance of technology skills in the workplace and value their employees with advanced skills: 60% of responding Foard County employers believe tech training among employees is important, and 40% require their employees to pursue continuing education. Additionally, 100% of responding businesses indicated that they use email, text, and social media daily in their business; 100% use the internet for work, 96% use a computer for work. This shows a workforce interest in continuing technology training and a need to maintain a high level of digital skills in the community. The broadband council can achieve this by partnering with the public library, chamber of commerce, industrial commission, Crowell ISD, or other local entity to offer regular community-based digital literacy classes. Classes should also promote the value of internet adoption to improve workforce readiness, increase access to services, education and health care, and improve quality of life.

Internet adoption — According to CN and U.S. Census data, 68–72% of Foard County households subscribe to the internet. This is a much lower adoption rate than the nation as a whole (85.2% of Americans subscribe to the internet), and statewide (85.1% of Texans subscribe to the internet). It is not much lower than some of the surrounding counties: 70.1% of households in Hardeman County subscribe to the internet, 68.4% in Cottle, 70.2% in Wilbarger; but it is much lower than other surrounding counties: 77.6% of households in Childress County subscribe to the internet, Knox (78.8%) and Baylor (78.6%). This means that even where internet is available, people are not signing up for it. Based on CN research, this generally has two causes: people do not see the value in it, or they cannot afford it.

In Foard County, 66.7% of non-subscribing respondents answered, “internet service is too expensive,”



as the primary reason they do not subscribe. Digital literacy training can help people understand the value of being connected, how it can offer access to skills, knowledge, education and entertainment, improved outcomes in health care, and positively impact their lives. Communities with higher adoption rates not only reap more benefits of connectivity, but they are more desirable markets for ISPs and more likely to attract infrastructure expansion projects.

Action 3 – Broadband council should advocate on behalf of residents and businesses to address affordability concerns with ISPs and increase broadband adoption.

Per CN data, 99.6% of Foard County households have access to internet speeds of 100/10, yet only 28% of survey respondents subscribe to internet with speeds over 25/3.

Residential — Data collected in CN’s Connected Community Engagements are compared across other communities nationwide that have undergone the same process. The average reported download speed among responding residents in Foard County is 30.86 Mbps, which is just above the FCC’s current minimum standard of broadband (25/3), and below that of other Connected communities (36.16 Mbps).

Higher speeds seem to be available across the entire county. CN data indicate that 99.6% of Foard County has access to internet speeds of 100/10, and fiber deployment is in multiple parts of the county. Why are people not signing up?

- 66.7% of non-subscribing respondents list cost as the barrier to adoption, answering, “internet service is too expensive,” as the primary reason they do not subscribe.
- 86.7% of residents responded they would like to have improved or additional options for home internet service.

The average monthly cost for residential internet among respondents was \$77.92. Using the standard 2% of median income as a metric to determine affordability puts the affordable cost of internet for Foard County at \$68.98 a month. Internet packages exist at that price, but they offer below-broadband speeds. Internet packages available in the area with broadband speeds of 25 Mbps download cost around \$90 a month, and cost \$100 to \$200 for 50 Mbps and faster, well above the affordability metric for the county. This indicates a real need for lower cost broadband packages or subsidized programs to encourage more residents to sign up for internet, and for faster speed packages. Access to faster speeds will allow the community to reap the true benefits of connectivity.

Business — The average reported download speed among responding businesses in Foard County was 17.13 Mbps, which does not meet the FCC defined threshold for broadband (25/3) and is much



slower than the average in other Connected communities (45.02 Mbps). The average monthly cost of internet service for responding businesses was \$106.25, which is higher than other Connected communities (\$97.28).

- 60% of Foard County business respondents indicate being satisfied with their internet service, but where dissatisfied:
 - 100% of them report speeds being too slow as the primary reason.
 - 75% say price is too high.

Timeline: Digital literacy training, website building, and social media classes should be offered to businesses within six months. Residential and business concerns about high-cost/low-speed internet should be addressed immediately.

Responsible parties:

- Chamber of commerce/economic development organizations
- Libraries
- Broadband providers
- IT/technology organizations

Sources:

[Deloitte, *Connecting Small Businesses in the US*, Google, 2018.](#)

[Ezell, Stephen. "Assessing the State of Digital Skills in the U.S. Economy." *Information Technology & Innovation Foundation*, November 29, 2021.](#)

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](#)
- [On-Site Technology Training for Small, Rural Michigan Businesses](#)
- [Importance of Tech for Small Businesses](#)

Goal 3: Ensure that the 3 Rivers Foundation Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus (CSAC) has access to internet that meets its needs.



Objective: Support the 3 Rivers Foundation Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus (CSAC).

Foard County is fortunate to be the home of the 3 Rivers Foundation for the Arts and Sciences Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus (CSAC). Located on nearly 6,000 acres outside of Crowell on Farm to Market Road 654, it is a tourism draw to the region, and a great educational resource for area residents and students. Foard County is ideally suited to have an astronomical observatory due to its low light pollution and very dark skies. People come from all over the globe to use 3 Rivers Foundation's observatories, which house one of the largest refractors in Texas and offer some of the largest and most advanced telescope equipment available to amateur astronomers and students. It hosts school field trips, educational courses, events for students of all ages, workshops for teachers, and free "star parties" for the public. In addition to the astronomical studies, the campus offers wildlife observation and education, with hiking trails and overnight camping.

Action 1 – Include 3 Rivers Foundation's objectives and concerns in future broadband planning.

3 Rivers Foundation for the Arts and Sciences is an asset to the county, drawing tourism and benefiting residents. While astronomical observatories benefit from being in remote locations, due to low light pollution, they also have technology and connectivity needs. Cell phone service at the campus is limited, and landline phones are available for emergency use. Internet access exists across most of the campus, but costs are high. The broadband council should investigate what solutions exist and the cause of service issues, whether that is access, affordability, or adoption. The county should strive to keep 3 Rivers Foundation in mind when making decisions and keep foundation leaders informed of projects, plans, and activities that could impact them.

Timeline: 3 Rivers Foundation should be invited to participate in the broadband council as soon as it is formed.

Responsible parties:

- Local and county governments
- Foard County Broadband Advisory Council
- Area internet service providers
- 3 Rivers Foundation for the Arts and Sciences

Goal 4: Identify funding opportunities for programs and projects using broadband and related technologies that benefit Foard County.



Objective: Ensure that Foard County utilizes all available resources to improve quality of life and economic outcomes through technology.

Action 1 – Pursue grants that advance local community development using broadband technologies (e.g., workforce development, telehealth, digital literacy, etc.).

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

Timeline: Community should identify grant opportunities within one year.

Responsible parties:

- Local and county governments
- Foard County Broadband Advisory Council