

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Technology Plan

DeWitt and Lavaca
Counties, Texas

November 2021



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OVERVIEW *01*

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 usage of online resources locally for business, government, and leisure.

The Connected Nation Texas (CN Texas) Connected Program partnered with the DeWitt and Lavaca County Broadband Teams to conduct a study designed to determine the availability of broadband infrastructure; how their residents are adopting and using broadband services; and what steps would have the greatest impact toward improving broadband access, adoption, and usage across every sector locally.

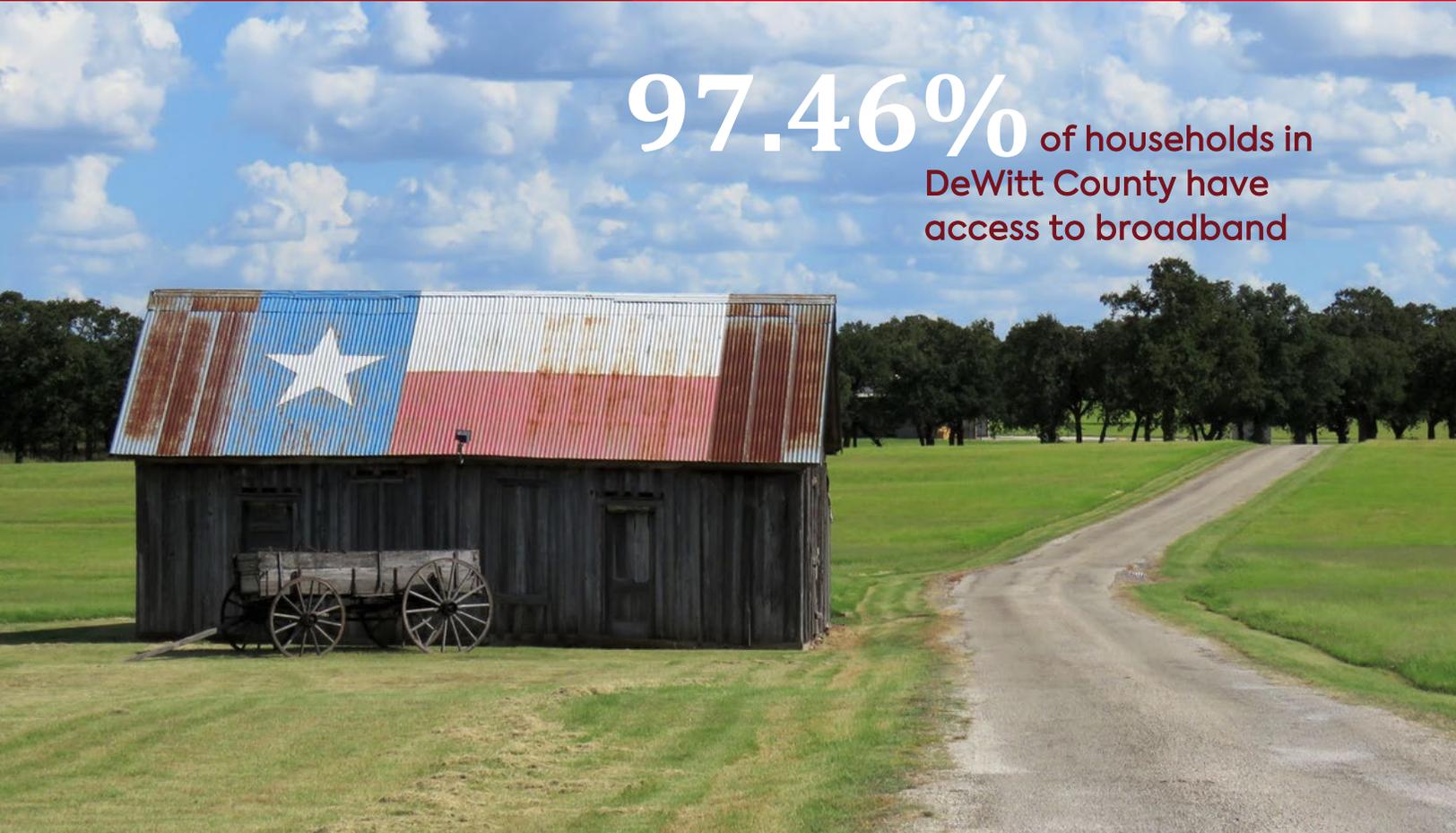
Pursuant of this goal, between January and May 2021, DeWitt and Lavaca Counties conducted a comprehensive survey of broadband technology access and adoption across the community. DeWitt County collected responses from 505 households, and Lavaca County collected responses from 725 households. CN Texas staff also met with local officials to determine community needs and gather qualitative data for consideration in the study. Overall, the assessment was designed to identify issues and opportunities to close the local Digital Divide.

The following provides a summary of that assessment, as well as recommendations for improving broadband and technology access, adoption, and usage.

DEWITT & LAVACA COUNTIES, TEXAS QUICK FACTS		
County	DeWitt	Lavaca
Population	19,824	20,337
Households	7,048	7,826
Median Household Income	\$55,357	\$54,403
Poverty Rate	16%	10.7%
Adults with a Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	12.6%	16.7%
Homeownership Rate	72.8%	74.3%
Hispanic or Latino	34.7%	19.4%
Households with Broadband Access ¹	97.46%	93.82%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (5-year estimate) and 2020 Decennial census:
<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?q=0500000US48123>
<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?q=0500000US48285>

¹ The current FCC definition of broadband is a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. This data is derived from Connected Nation Texas, Dec 2020. https://cn-maps.hatfield.marketing/US/TX/v4/tx_harrison-county_25x3.pdf



97.46% of households in
DeWitt County have
access to broadband

*For households that said they do not subscribe to home internet service, the top barrier is the **cost of internet service**, followed by **the lack of available service**.*

*Only **50.57%** of households in DeWitt County have access to internet service at speeds needed to run many modern applications (100 Mbps downstream and 10 Mbps upstream). Statewide, **92.05%** of households have internet access at this speed.*

*DeWitt County households **pay a little more** on average for access to the internet (**\$74.48**) than other Connected communities (\$71.05).*

***One-half of households (50%) and 51.4% of businesses** reported that they were dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were **slow speeds and unreliable connections**.*

93.82% of households in
Lavaca County have
access to broadband



For households that said they do not subscribe to home internet service, the top barrier is the **cost of internet service**, followed by **the lack of available service**.

Only **47.52%** of households in Lavaca County have access to internet service at speeds needed to run many modern applications (100 Mbps downstream and 10 Mbps upstream). Statewide, **92.05%** of households have internet access at this speed.

Lavaca County households **pay a little more** on average for access to the internet (**\$73.37**) than other Connected communities (**\$71.05**).

One-half of Lavaca County households (50%) and 53.7% of businesses reported that they were dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were slow speeds and unreliable connections.



INFRASTRUCTURE
RESULTS *02*

According to CN Texas broadband data initially released in July 2021 — followed by additional public feedback, field validation, and provider input, most households in DeWitt County 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 DeWitt County is concentrated near Cuero, Yorktown, and to the northeast near Yoakum.

Below is the list of internet service providers in DeWitt County.

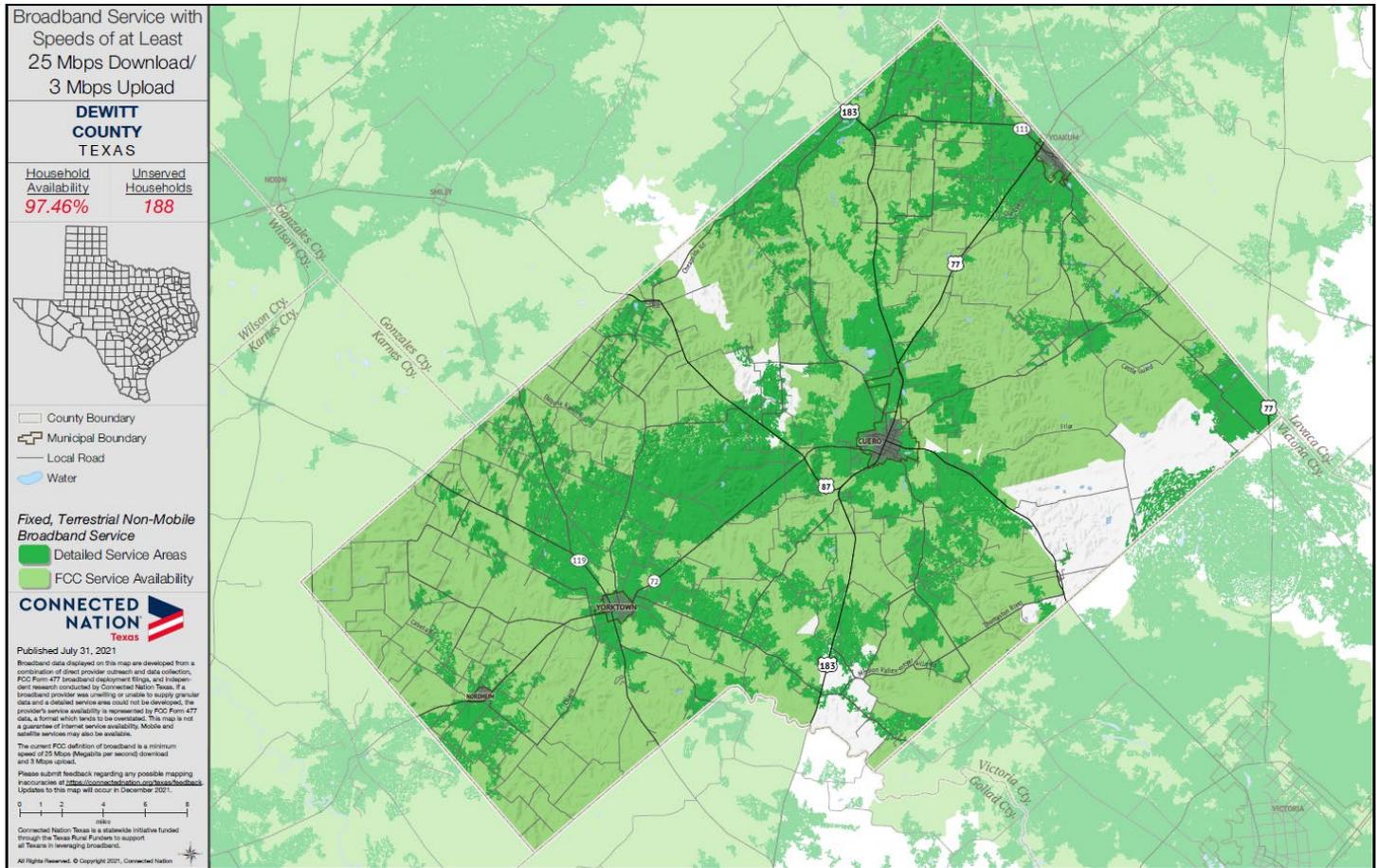
BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE QUICK FACTS	
Unserved Households (25/3 Mbps)	188
Households Served (10/1 Mbps)	99.67%
Households Served (25/3 Mbps)	97.46%
Households Served (50/5 Mbps)	50.64%
Households Served (100/10 Mbps)	50.57%

Broadband data released by CN Texas in July 2021:
<https://connectednation.org/texas/mapping-analysis/>

PROVIDER	TECHNOLOGY	MAX DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAX UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
AT&T Southwest	DSL	25	2
	Fixed Wireless	10	1
Charter Communications Inc.	Cable	940	35
GTEK Communications	Fixed Wireless	50	10
GVEC.net	Fiber	1000	1000
	Fixed Wireless	25	8
GVTC	DSL	12	1.5
Rise Broadband	Fixed Wireless	25	5
TISD Inc.	Fixed Wireless	25	5
VTXC	Fixed Wireless	25	4

INFRASTRUCTURE: DeWitt County

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



The first step in understanding the status of broadband infrastructure in DeWitt County and Texas as a whole is having accurate maps. Accordingly, CN Texas works with providers to develop a variety of broadband maps at a state and county level. Data shown on this map is 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, a format that tends to overstate the service territory.

According to CN Texas, broadband data initially released in July 2021 — followed by additional public feedback, field validation, and provider input — most households (93.82%) in Lavaca County 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 Lavaca County is concentrated near Hallettsville, Mouton, Shiner, and Yoakum.

Below is the list of internet service providers in Lavaca County.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE QUICK FACTS

Unserved Households (25/3 Mbps)
482

Households Served (10/1 Mbps)
99.89%

Households Served (25/3 Mbps)
93.82%

Households Served (50/5 Mbps)
53.82%

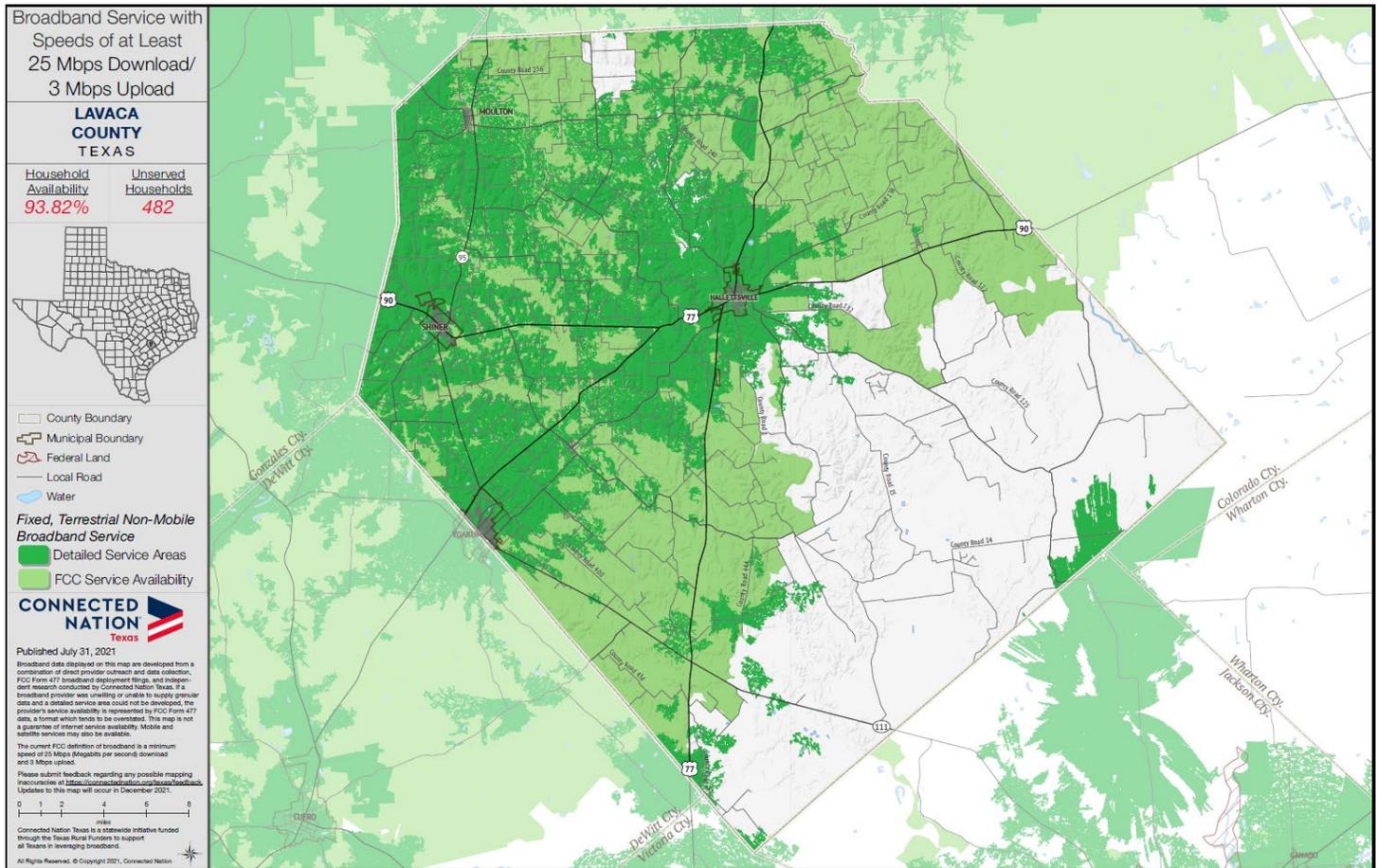
Households Served (100/10 Mbps)
47.52%

*Broadband data released by CN Texas in July 2021:
<https://connectednation.org/texas/mapping-analysis/>*

PROVIDER	TECHNOLOGY	MAX DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAX UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
AT&T Southwest	DSL	25	2
	Fixed Wireless	10	1
Charter Communications	Cable	940	35
Colorado Valley Communications Inc.	Fixed Wireless	25	3
	Fiber	100	100
GTEK Communications	Fixed Wireless	50	10
GVEC.net	Fiber	1000	1000
	Fixed Wireless	25	8
theSPECnet Inc.	Fixed Wireless	15	3
NewWave	Cable	300	10
TISD Inc.	Fixed Wireless	25	5
Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative Inc.	DSL	25	3
	Fixed Wireless	25	4
MyJEC.net Broadband	Fixed Wireless	25	5
Rise Broadband	Fixed Wireless	25	5
Particle Communications	Fixed Wireless	25	10
VTXC	Fixed Wireless	25	4

INFRASTRUCTURE: Lavaca County

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



Please note other portions of the county are served by internet service providers (ISPs) offering slower advertised speeds and are not shown on this map.

The first step in understanding the status of broadband infrastructure in Lavaca County and Texas as a whole is having accurate maps. Accordingly, CN Texas works with providers to develop a variety of broadband maps at a state and county level. Data shown on this map is 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, a format that tends to overstate the service territory.



188 Dewitt County households

&

482 Lavaca County households can't access broadband

Mobile Broadband

High-speed internet designed for use on-the-go with seamless connectivity from one location to another.

Fixed Wireless

Broadband service provided between towers and customers using radio waves. Primarily found in rural areas.

Satellite

Broadband service provided by satellites orbiting the earth. Satellite service can be impacted by line-of-sight and latency.

Cable

Internet provided by a cable television company over a mixed coaxial and fiber-optic network.

Fiber

Fiber-optic service uses transparent glass fibers to carry data across distances. Some customers can receive fiber connections directly to their home, but fiber is also used to transport data from communities to the broader internet.

DSL

Digital-subscriber line (DSL) is broadband delivered over a mixed network of fiber and traditional copper phone lines.



HOUSEHOLD
SURVEY RESULTS
03

HOUSEHOLD QUICK FACTS

Fixed Home Broadband Adoption
71.8%

Average Monthly Internet Cost
\$74.48

Average Download Speed
28.8 Mbps

Households Satisfied with Service
50%

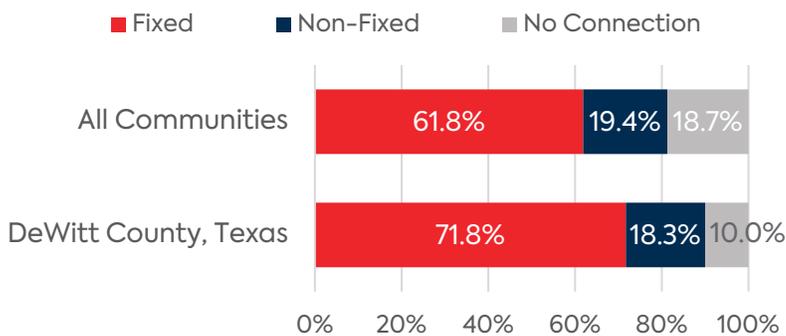
The following provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in DeWitt County between January and May 2021. Altogether, CN Texas received 505 completed surveys from households across the county, and respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity, or lack thereof. Data from DeWitt County are compared to data from hundreds of other rural, participating Connected communities across Michigan, Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

ADOPTION

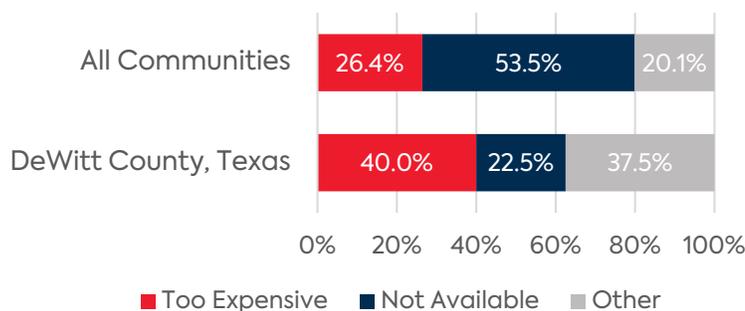
In DeWitt County, 71.8% of surveyed households subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology. Nearly one-fifth of respondents (18%) indicate they have internet service delivered via dial-up, satellite, or a mobile wireless service. This leaves 10% of survey respondents without internet access at home.

Among those without a home internet connection, 22.5% said they did not have broadband because it was not available to them, while two-fifths (40%) indicate that it was too expensive. Like in many communities, cost and availability are the two primary barriers to home broadband adoption.

Home Broadband Adoption



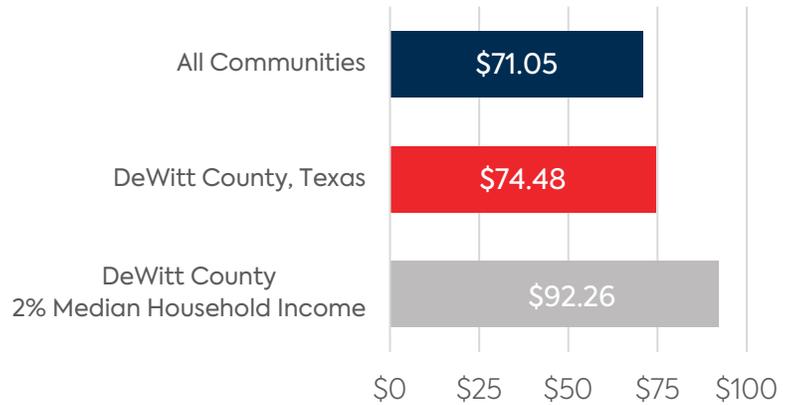
Primary Barrier



CONNECTION DETAILS

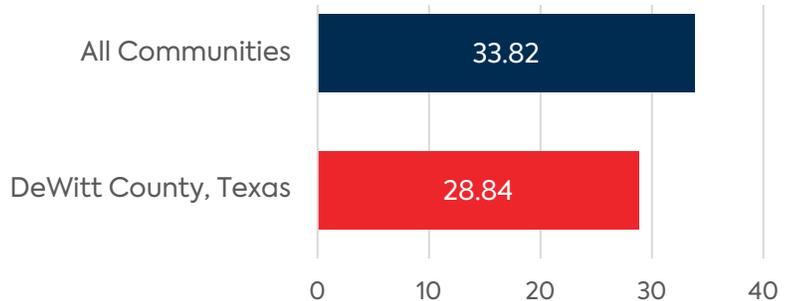
Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that, on average, their internet connection costs about \$74.48 per month. This is slightly higher than the monthly cost in other communities (\$71.05). Two percent of the median household income in DeWitt County is \$92.26 per month. These results show that the average cost of service is slightly higher than other communities.

Average Monthly Cost

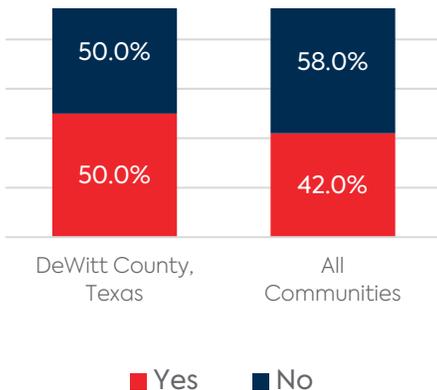


The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 25 Mbps and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps. On average, respondents indicate that their connection's download speed is 28.84 Mbps, which exceeds the minimum defined speed of broadband

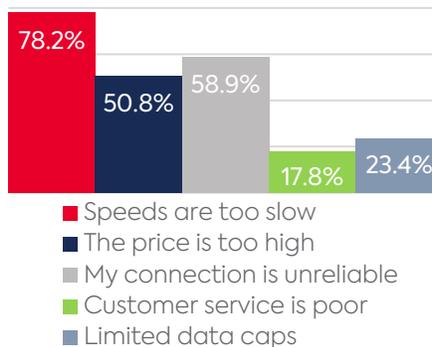
Average Speeds (Mbps)



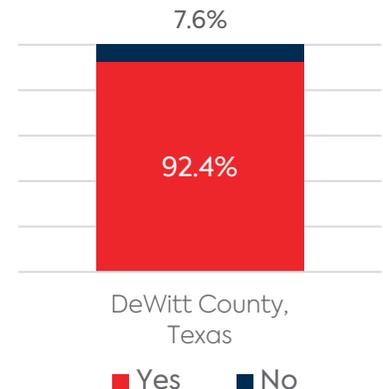
Does Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Why Doesn't Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Are You Interested in More Choices at Home?



HOUSEHOLD SURVEY RESULTS: DeWitt County

Competition provides residents with choices for service, allowing households the ability to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. One-half of DeWitt County respondents (50%) indicate that their internet connections do not meet their needs. This is a lower rate of dissatisfaction than among households in other communities (58%).

When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 78.2% of dissatisfied households indicate that their speed is too slow. Just over one-half (50.8%) say the price is too high, and nearly 3 out of 5 (58.9%) indicate that the connection is unreliable. (Respondents could choose more than one reason.)

Finally, nearly all respondents (92.4%) indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

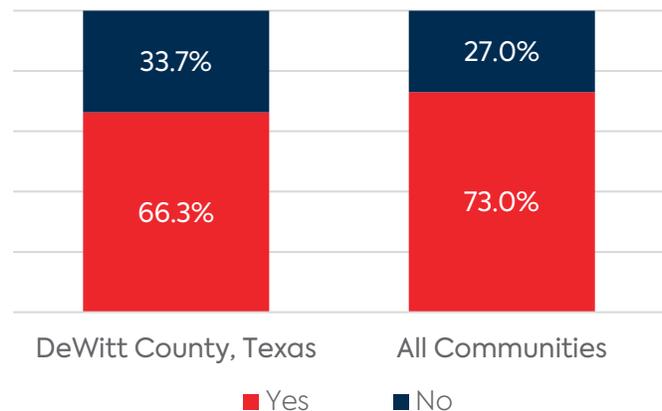


MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

A little over two-thirds of households (66.3%) report that they subscribe to mobile internet service, which they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is slightly lower than reported in other Connected communities (73.0%).

Additionally, about 30% of mobile-connected households report that they rely on their mobile service as their primary source of internet connectivity at home, or to connect other household devices to the internet.

Households Subscribing to
Mobile Internet Service



HOUSEHOLD SURVEY RESULTS: DeWitt County

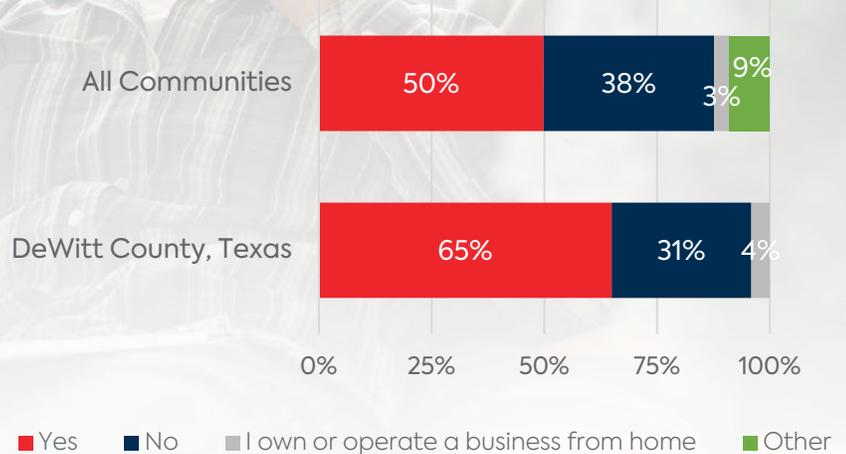
TELEWORK

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.

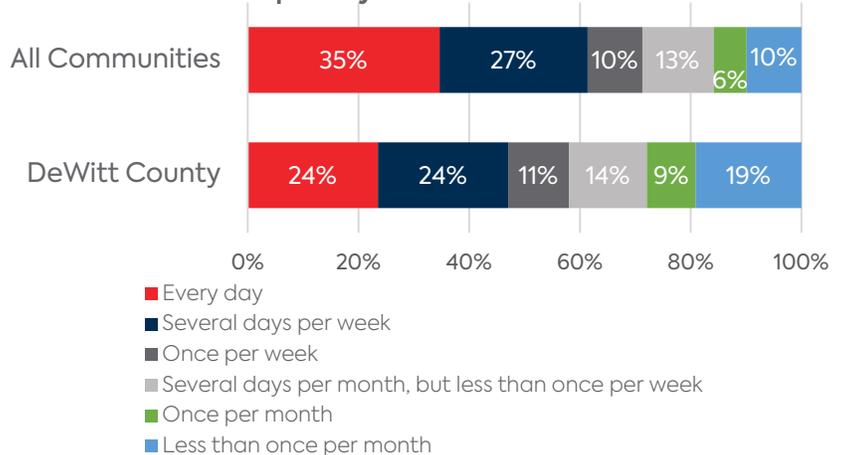
Teleworking is quickly becoming a critical part of growing a local economy because it represents an opportunity to attract and retain employees, even when employees are not located in the same community as their employers. However, this only works if those employees have access to advanced broadband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

Nearly 2 out of 3 employed respondents (65%) said they telework for their jobs. Nearly 3 out of 5 of those teleworkers (59%) do so at least once per week. This is less often than teleworkers in other communities.

Do You Currently Telework?



How Frequently Do You Telework?



HOUSEHOLD QUICK FACTS

Fixed Home Broadband Adoption
59.8%

Average Monthly Internet Cost
\$73.37

Average Download Speed
18.96 Mbps

Households Satisfied with Service
50%

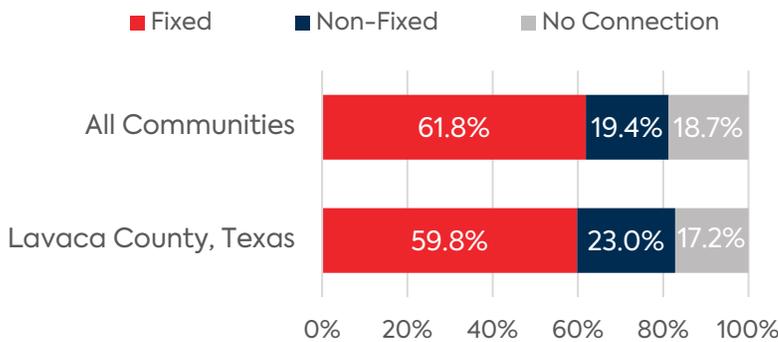
The following section provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Lavaca County between January and May 2021. Altogether, CN Texas received 725 completed surveys from households across the county, and respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity, or lack thereof. Data from Lavaca County are compared to data from hundreds of other rural, participating Connected communities across Michigan, Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

ADOPTION

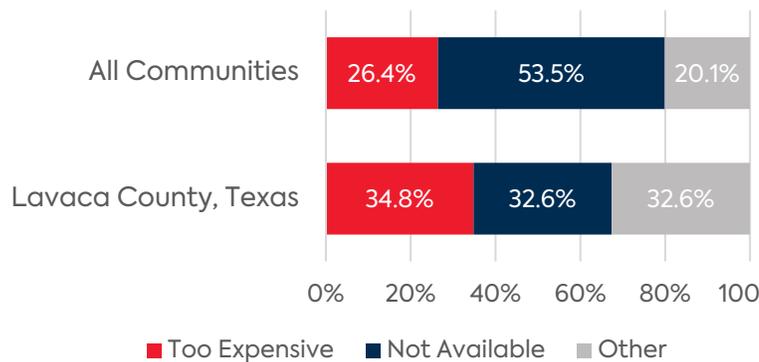
In Lavaca County, 59.8% of surveyed households subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology. Nearly one-quarter of respondents (23%) indicate they have internet service delivered via dial-up, satellite, or a mobile wireless service. This leaves 17.2% of survey respondents without internet access at home.

Among those without a home internet connection, 32.6% said they did not have broadband because it was not available to them, while more than one-third (34.8%) indicate that it was too expensive. Like in many communities, cost and availability are the two primary barriers to home broadband adoption.

Home Broadband Adoption



Primary Barrier



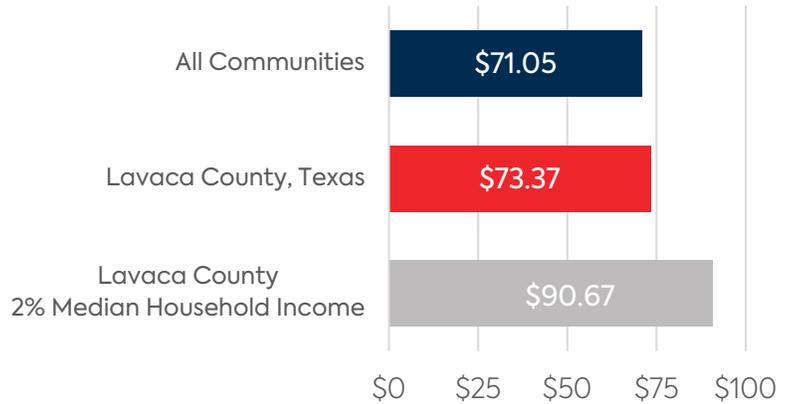
HOUSEHOLD SURVEY RESULTS: Lavaca County



CONNECTION DETAILS

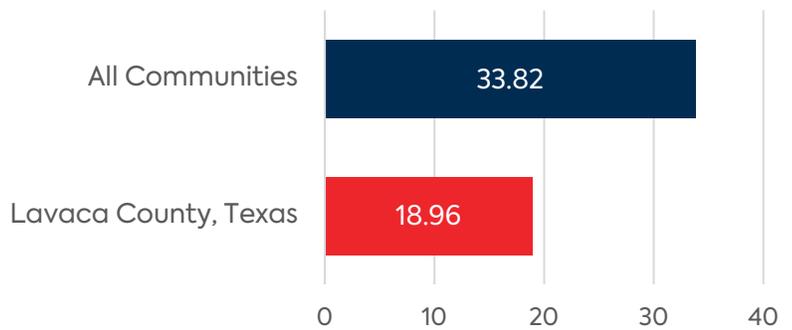
Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that, on average, their internet connection costs about \$73.37 per month. This is slightly higher than the monthly cost in other communities (\$71.05). Two percent of the median household income in Lavaca County is \$90.67 per month. These results show that the average cost of service is slightly higher than other communities.

Average Monthly Cost

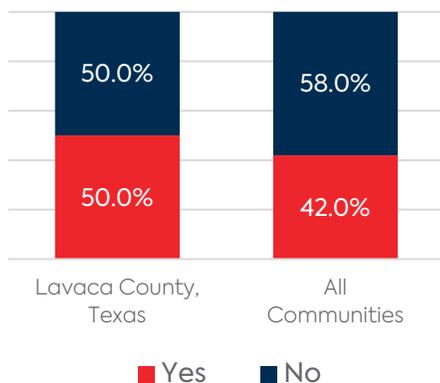


The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 25 Mbps and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps. On average, respondents indicate that their connection's download speed is 18.96 Mbps, which is below the minimum

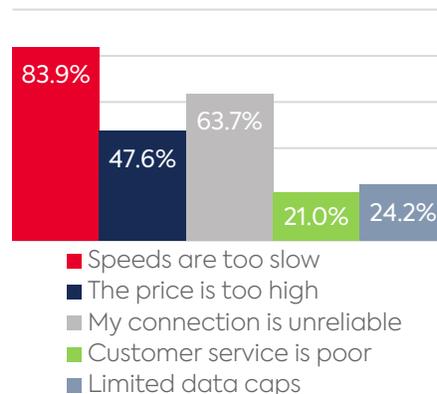
Average Speeds (Mbps)



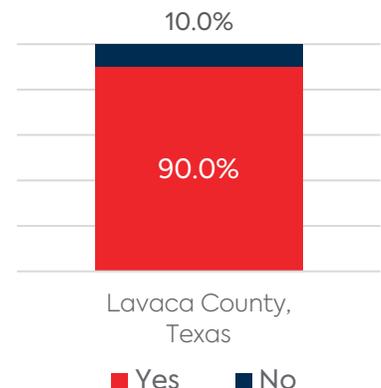
Does Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Why Doesn't Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Are You Interested in More Choices at Home?



HOUSEHOLD SURVEY RESULTS: Lavaca County

Competition provides residents with choices for service, allowing households the ability to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. One-half of Lavaca respondents (50%) indicate that their internet connections do not meet their needs. This is a lower rate of dissatisfaction than among households in other communities (58%).

When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 83.9% of dissatisfied households indicate that their speed is too slow. Nearly 48% say the price is too high, and nearly two-thirds (63.7%) indicate that their connections are unreliable (respondents could choose more than one reason).

Finally, 9 out of 10 households (90%) indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

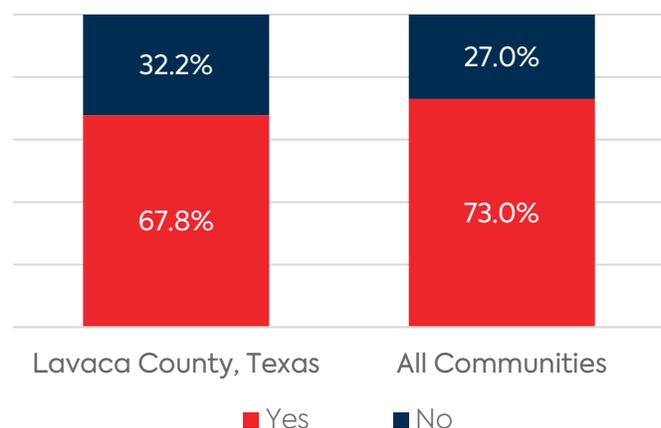


MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

Over two-thirds of Lavaca County households (67.8%) report that they subscribe to mobile internet service, which they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is slightly lower than reported in other Connected communities (73.0%).

Additionally, nearly one-third of mobile-connected households (32.8%) rely on their mobile connection as their primary source of internet connectivity at home, or use mobile service to connect other household devices to the internet.

Households Subscribing to Mobile Internet Service



HOUSEHOLD SURVEY RESULTS: Lavaca County

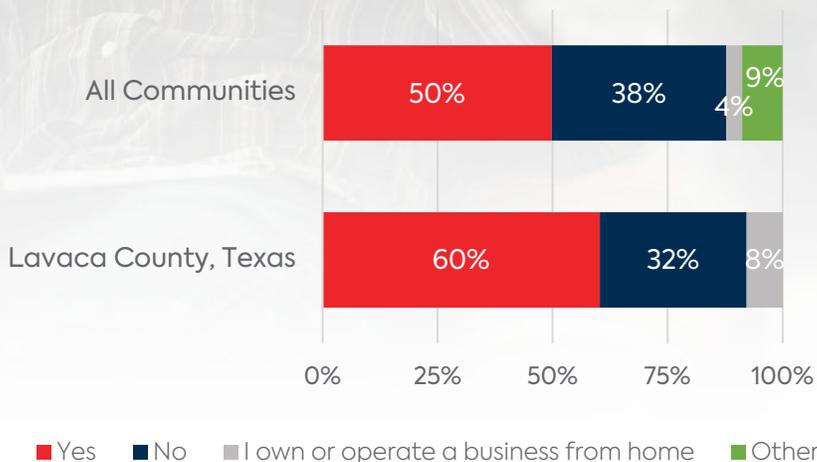
TELEWORK

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 staff to telework.

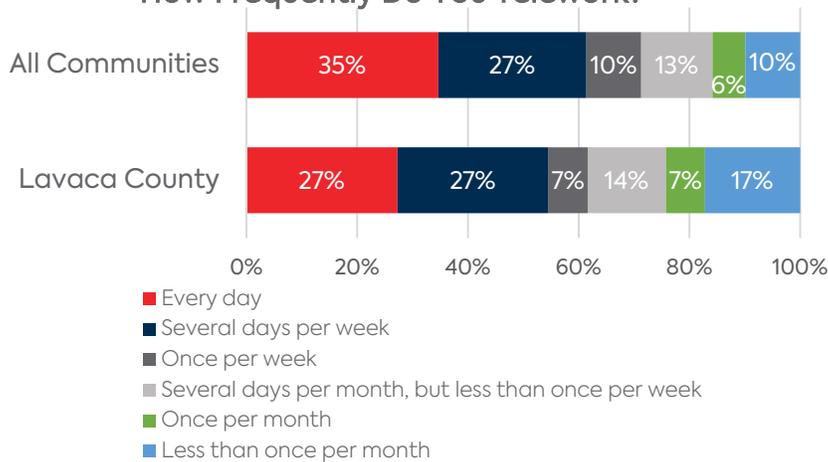
Teleworking is quickly becoming a critical part of growing a local economy because it represents an opportunity to attract and retain employees, even when employees may not be located in the same community as their employer. However, this only works if those employees have access to advanced broadband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

Three out of five employed respondents in Lavaca County (60%) report that they telework, and approximately 61% of those say they telework at least once per week. This is less frequently than residents in other communities.

Do You Currently Telework?



How Frequently Do You Telework?





RECOMMENDATIONS

04

The following recommendations are presented to assist DeWitt and Lavaca Counties in expanding broadband access and adoption throughout the community.

Goal 1: Increase broadband speeds in DeWitt and Lavaca Counties to meet today's needs

Objective:

Appoint a dedicated broadband director for DeWitt and Lavaca Counties to handle the business of broadband, specifically to increase internet speeds. Both Lavaca and DeWitt Counties report between 93–97% internet coverage at 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speed, which are the minimum speeds considered to be broadband by the FCC. However, most will agree this speed is no longer suitable for today's needs. A dedicated broadband director can work with the named incoming RDOF recipient, Resound Networks, and current internet providers to increase speeds. The Rural Development Opportunity Fund (RDOF) was awarded to internet providers in areas where speeds did not meet the FCC's definition of broadband. Resound Network was awarded \$925,878 for use in DeWitt County and \$428,061 for use in Lavaca County. Both county maps show a significant drop off at 100/10 Mbps— DeWitt County has 50.5% of the community covered, and coverage is centered around Cuero. Lavaca County has 47.52% coverage with the majority in Yoakum, Hallettsville, and Shiner.

Actions:

Action 1 – Establish a broadband director to handle the business of broadband in DeWitt and Lavaca Counties. Currently, there is no office or individual to call to discuss broadband issues. The director should have broadband knowledge and/or a passion to bring high-speed internet to DeWitt and Lavaca Counties. The counties may decide to share this position since their communities are very similar in needs.

Duties of the broadband director include:

- Deploying RFQs for services needed regarding broadband.
- Reporting to Judge Fowler, Judge Myers, and the County Commissioners updates of broadband activity in their counties. This includes activity generated from RDOF, America Rescue Plan funds, and other grants, loans, and subsidies sought by the counties.
- Establishing a relationship with current providers and negotiate for the services the counties need.
- Establishing a relationship with RDOF winner, Resound Networks.

- Establishing a relationship with DeWitt and Lavaca Counties' U.S. Rep. Michael Cloud and/or his staff. Federal legislators can be important advocates when applying for federal grants, loans, and subsidies. Jamie Baker, Director of Public Policy for Congressman Cloud, has a wealth of resources and knowledge surrounding broadband. His office line is (361) 884-2222.

Action 2 – Deploy a RFQ to understand the counties' assets and how they can be utilized by private broadband companies currently working in the counties. This is the beginning of establishing public/private partnerships, and the information obtained also can help the broadband director understand barriers faced by providers.

Assets include:

- Anchor tenants
- Antennas
- Building rooftops
- Light poles
- Towers the cities or counties may own

Barriers include:

- Road easements
- Pole owner leases
- County policies and regulations

Action 3 – Deploy a RFQ for field validation to determine if maps are overstated or understated for internet coverage.

Having more precise maps may help the counties with future grants and subsidies if it can be proven coverage is overstated in some areas. It also satisfies Lavaca County's goal of having more precise maps.

Action 4 – Recognizing that speed is a barrier to both DeWitt and Lavaca Counties' libraries, K-12, agriculture, businesses, and other sectors, the broadband director should work with local providers to increase the speed to better serve the community. Poor customer service was mentioned throughout sectors surveyed, particularly in Lavaca County. If the current providers are unwilling to improve their relationships with the counties, new providers should be given an opportunity to offer service in these areas.

Both DeWitt and Lavaca Counties report that a high percentage of their residents have 25/3 Mbps. RDOF money will be spent only in areas of lower speeds. Even if the maps are overstated, there will be no increases in speed for much of the population unless providers engage in the process.

DeWitt County is served by eight providers:

- Charter Communications, GTEK, GVTC, GVEC, Rise Broadband, AT&T, TISD, and VTXC. Both cable and fiber are being offered with 940/35 Mbps and 1000/1000 Mbps speeds by Charter and GVEC, respectively.

Lavaca County is served by 13 providers:

- Charter Communications, Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative, Rise Broadband, Colorado Valley Communications, GTEK, GVEC, Jackson Electric Coop., theSPECnet, AT&T, NewWave, Particle Communications, TISD, and VTXC. Both cable and fiber are being offered with 940/35 Mbps and 1000/1000 Mbps speeds by Charter and GVEC, respectively.

Example of some questions to ask providers include:

- Is there an installation fee for residential service and, if so, what is that fee?
- What are the maximum download and upload speeds offered on your network for residential service?
- Are the speeds guaranteed or “best effort?”

Connected Nation Texas can provide a series of questions at your request.

Responsible Parties:

The broadband director position should be established immediately by Judges Myers and Fowler, and the Commissioners Court. The counties may decide to hire or appoint their own broadband director. This should be their decision.

Once a broadband director is hired, he/she should deploy the RFQs and monitor all responses.

Resources:

Connected Nation supports communities in broadband planning, deployment, and digital inclusion: <https://connectednation.org/what-we-do-for-you/>

Governors Start 2021 by Expanding Access to Broadband: <https://www.nga.org/news/commentary/governors-expanding-access-broadband-2021/>

Becoming Broadband Ready:

<https://nextcenturycities.org/becoming-broadband-ready/>

Message from Congressman Filemon Vela:

<http://www.cuerodc.com/u-s-rep-filemon-vela-investing-in-americas-communities/>

Goal 2: Collaborate with local organizations to provide free Wi-Fi throughout DeWitt and Lavaca Counties.

Objective:

For low-income residents without the ability to purchase a home computer (or other device), a public computing center may be their only opportunity to access the internet. Further, public access to technology is necessary for community members who have little or no communication technology available in their homes, need assistance to effectively use technology, or need to supplement connectivity at home or in schools. A community should have sufficient, free access to computers, internet service, wireless networks, and other communication technologies to support the needs of its residents. In addition, public computing centers should be located in safe facilities, with adequate levels of privacy, security, and accessibility for people with disabilities. Information regarding the availability and location of public computing centers should be widely disseminated.

Actions:

Action 1 – Identify gaps and develop a plan to expand free and/or low-cost Wi-Fi in Lavaca and DeWitt Counties. Gaps may appear geographically or among various demographic groups. Organizations with institutional knowledge of the community are great partners for identifying groups that are impacted by a lack of public computer access.

These groups include:

- **Community and senior centers:** In DeWitt County, this could include Alzcare of DeWitt County–Memory Care and Assisted Living; and in Lavaca County, S.P.J.S.T Nursing Community, Broadway Senior Activity Center, Hallettsville Rehabilitation and Nursing Center, Shady Oak Nursing and Rehabilitation, and Shiner Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. Organizations include Boys & Girls Club of DeWitt County, Cuero Lions Club, Bluebonnet Youth Ranch, etc.
- **Schools:** Public schools found in responsible parties below.
- **Libraries:** Public libraries found in action 2 below.

Action 2 – Expand Wi-Fi access to under-resourced populations at a discounted rate or free of charge. Survey results from both counties suggest there is not enough free public Wi-Fi.

Expanding access to public Wi-Fi can be done at:

- Libraries: Cuero Municipal Library, Yorktown Public Library, Friench Simpson Memorial Library, Hallettsville Library, Shiner Public Library, and The Carl & Mary Welhausen Library. Some public Wi-Fi is available in these libraries; however, expansion is needed. For example, expand the times and days Wi-Fi is available.
- Public schools are the heart of a community. The survey responses indicate not all schools offer public Wi-Fi.
- Coffee shops
- Public government buildings, including the economic development centers of several of the cities: Yorktown Economic Development Corp., GVEC Economic Development, Cuero Economic Development.
- Chambers of Commerce: Lavaca County Chamber of Commerce, Cuero Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture, Hallettsville Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture, Moulton Chamber of Commerce, Shiner Chamber of Commerce

Responsible Parties:

The broadband director, Judges Myers and Fowler, along with the Commissioners Court, should organize the initiatives. Other parties include local providers and the RDOF recipient. School superintendents from both counties should review their policies allowing their community to use school resources: DeWitt County ISDs include Cuero ISD, Meyersville ISD, Nordheim ISD, Westhoff ISD, and Yorktown ISD. Lavaca County ISDs include Ezzell ISD, Hallettsville ISD, Moulton ISD, Shiner ISD, Sweet Home ISD, and Vysehrad ISD.

Resources:

Connected Nation supports communities in broadband planning, deployment, and digital inclusion: www.connectednation.org:

<https://connectednation.org/current-broadband-funding/>

<https://connectednation.org/what-we-do-for-you/>

Examples of one Texas town meeting residents' broadband needs:

<https://ilsr.org/how-mcallen-texas-quietly-built-residents-a-free-wi-fi-network-over-the-summer/>

Governors Start 2021 by Expanding Access to Broadband:

<https://www.nga.org/news/commentary/governors-expanding-access-broadband-2021/>

Removing barriers to broadband expansion:

<http://www.connectmycommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Local-Policy-Guide.pdf>

Examining state broadband programs:

<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2020/02/how-states-are-expanding-broadband-access>

Becoming Broadband Ready:

<https://nextcenturycities.org/becoming-broadband-ready/>

An introduction to effective public-private partnerships for broadband investments:

https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/bbusa_effective_public_private_partnerships.pdf

Goal 3: Increase the online presence of libraries in the community, and encourage greater usage of those resources by residents and businesses.

Objective:

Libraries provide vital access to information, resources, and digital tools. The survey responses suggest local public libraries could improve their visibility in DeWitt and Lavaca Counties and build awareness of digital resources that can be used by residents and businesses.

Actions:

Action 1 – Assess the current state of digital resources, social media, and community awareness of these digital resources among all libraries in DeWitt and Lavaca Counties. Reviewing the survey responses under the Libraries and Community Organizations sectors will provide insight on how the community is using the local libraries, as well as how the libraries are communicating with residents. For example, the survey responses show little interaction digitally between the libraries and the community. This is a missed opportunity to promote library services to the patrons.

Action 2 – Improve the online presence of libraries.

This could include building community awareness by social media visibility. Build the libraries' unique social media pages. Update page content daily to develop a following in the community. This includes Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc. Updates include library events, special books or other collections, summer programs, digital learning programs, other digital programs, and more. Of note: The Carl and Mary Welhausen Library in Yoakum has a presence on social media, and a webpage and has been awarded hotspots through the Tocker Foundation. French Simpson Memorial Library and Shiner Public Library also have websites and Facebook presences. See the

recommendations for additional services in Action 3 below to increase library usage by the community.

Action 3 – Offer digital learning skills trainings at libraries with public computers and Wi-Fi.

Offering digital learning skills trainings online, both in English and Spanish, can attract more library patrons. This activity also promotes broadband adoption in the community, allowing for further inclusion in the digital economy, especially for under-resourced populations and seniors. It is important to note DeWitt County has a 34.7% Hispanic/Latino population, with 19.4% of the population speaking a language other than English at home. Lavaca County has a 19.6% Hispanic/Latino population, with 16.3% of the population speaking a language other than English at home. Therefore, all materials pertaining to broadband workshops, affordability, and accessibility should be available in English and Spanish. Online resources include:

- <https://www.driveyourlearning.org/> — offered by Connected Nation
- <https://www.digitallearn.org/> — digital curriculum offered by the [Public Library Association](#)
- [AARP](#) — AARP Joins with Nonprofit to Teach Tech to Older Adults:

Responsible Parties:

- Libraries and library co-ops (if applicable): Cuero Municipal Library, Carl and Mary Welhausen Library, Yorktown Public Library, Shiner Public Library, and French Simpson Memorial Library
- Local and county governments: Both, DeWitt and Lavaca Counties need to promote and support local libraries by budgeting for needed resources to expand services.

Resources:

- Libraries are posting but is anyone listening: <http://bit.ly/1zTjCe5>.
- How libraries are using social media: <http://bit.ly/2dgWHS8>.
- Use of social media by the library: <http://bit.ly/13VTNeS>.
- Building library community through social media: <http://bit.ly/2cNTbPR>.
- The Drive digital learning hub provides ready access to a variety of digital literacy training programs: <http://driveyourlearning.org/>.
- Online portal to digital literacy training: www.digitalliteracy.gov.

- Harbor Inc. launches digital training: <http://bit.ly/2daluG1> : Older resource, but good example.
- Gigabit Libraries Network: <http://giglibraries.net/LEOLibraries>
- Pew: Expanding broadband access: <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2020/02/how-states-are-expanding-broadband-access>

Goal 4: DeWitt County and Lavaca County should identify and increase access to wireless hotspots in the community for student use.

Objective:

DeWitt County survey responses show 62% of households without an internet connection either do not have access to internet service at their address, or the internet service is too expensive. In Lavaca County. This number represents 66% of households. Community leadership must be prepared for the school year, especially if the pandemic forces kids back into remote learning. Identifying and expanding wireless hotspots will be key for DeWitt and Lavaca Counties.

Actions:

Action 1 – Develop an inventory of current wireless hotspots, and publish this list in the local papers and online. Notifications can be listed in The Victoria Advocate Newspaper under public notices and news online at <http://www.co.dewitt.tx.us/>, and on all the schools' websites.

Action 2 – Identify key locations for new hotspots.

These areas can include, but are not limited to:

- Restaurants: Working with popular locations can expand access to hotspots and increase business for these establishments.
- RV parks and campgrounds: Both counties are home to several RV parks, and students live in those parks. These are great areas to expand hotspots.
- Libraries: Discussed above. Libraries will need to expand hours of services.
- Hotels
- Medical centers: Cuero Community Hospital and Lavaca Medical Center
- Popular coffee shops
- Popular supermarkets: HEB and Brookshire Brothers
- Government offices and courthouses

Action 3 – The counties should promote low-cost programs that are currently available, such as the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, which provides discounts directly to individuals and families by applying through a local participating provider. The communities should also keep

abreast of new federal programs and potential state programs for broadband access, adoption, and usage. The broadband director should have a current list available. Also, Connected Nation updates its program listing regularly at <https://connectednation.org/current-broadband-funding/>.

Action 4 – Connect with service providers in your area to discuss special programs that can potentially help schools and students connect to the internet. Several internet providers have added programs since the beginning of the pandemic. EducationSuperHighway <https://www.educationsuperhighway.org/bridge-to-broadband/> has an initiative to help connect students to broadband for remote learning. It partners with internet service providers to launch programs that enable states and school districts to identify students without broadband and purchase service for low-income families. By providing a ZIP code, the school district can check if programs are available.

In DeWitt County, all ZIP codes have programs offered by one of more of the following providers:

- Charter (Spectrum Stay Connected K-12)
- GVTC
- AT&T
- Frontier Communications

In Lavaca County, all ZIP codes have programs offered by one or more of the following providers:

- Frontier Communications
- AT&T
- Spectrum
- Comcast

The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program focuses on providing discounts directly to individuals and families by applying through a local participating provider. Details can be found at <https://connectednation.org/current-broadband-funding/>.

Lifeline is another federal program that can help lower the monthly cost of phone or internet services for eligible customers. More information can be found at <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>. This program is administered through the Universal Service Administrative Company.

Responsible Parties:

The broadband director and all school superintendents from DeWitt and Lavaca Counties. Local

providers should share information with schools.

Resources:

Dropdown under dashboard Community Resources:

<https://connectednation.org/texas/#>

Information on resources available to schools:

<https://connectk12.org/states/TX>

<https://www.educationsuperhighway.org/bridge-to-broadband/>

[Internet Society](#): Guide to Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities in the U.S.

[BroadbandUSA](#): Federal Grant Resources

[Grants.gov](#): NTIA Broadband Infrastructure Program

[American Rescue Plan](#): County Allocation

[American Rescue Plan](#): City Allocation