



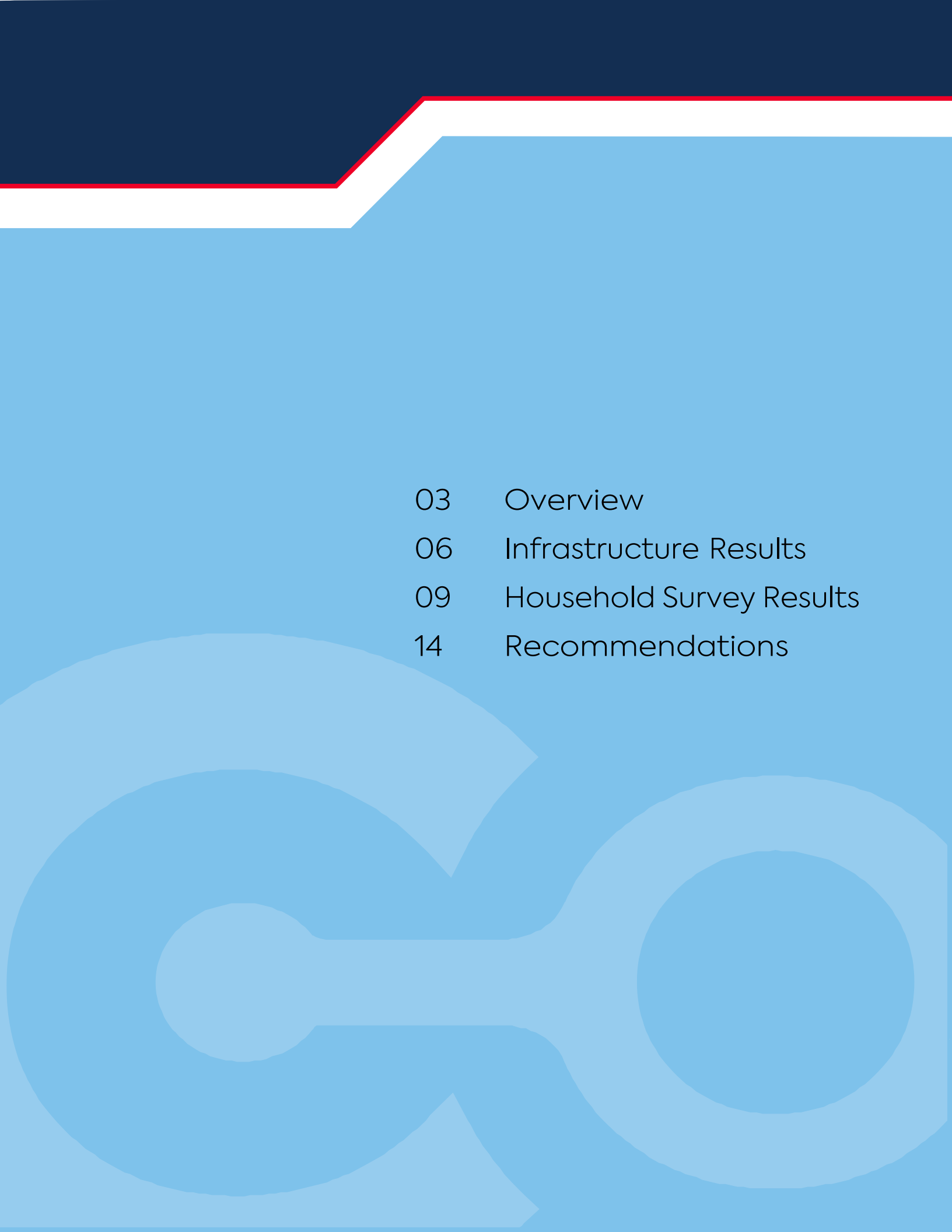
Connected
A CONNECTED NATION Initiative

Addressing Your Community's Unique Needs

Wilbarger County, Texas Executive Summary and Recommendations

November 2024

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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, Wilbarger County stakeholders 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 most significant impact toward improving broadband access, adoption, and usage across every local sector.

Pursuant to this goal, between April and July 2024, Wilbarger County conducted a comprehensive survey of broadband technology access and adoption across the community, collecting responses from local 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 Wilbarger 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](#).

WILBARGER COUNTY, TEXAS QUICK FACTS

Population
12,887

Households
4,626

Median Household Income
\$50,769

Poverty Rate
18.4%

Adults with a Bachelor's Degree
or Higher
16.6%

Hispanic or Latino
29%

Households with
Broadband Access¹
94.1%

Source: [Wilbarger County U.S. Census Profile](#)

¹The current FCC definition of broadband is a minimum of 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. These data are derived from the [FCC National Broadband Map](#) – with numbers as of December 2023.



50%

of households in
Wilbarger County
report subscribing
to fixed internet
service



2 out of 3 households surveyed (66.7%) reported subscribing to mobile broadband; of those, 50% use their mobile internet as a primary or secondary connection to go online.

94.1% of households in Wilbarger County have access to internet service at speeds needed to run many modern applications (100 Mbps downstream and 20 Mbps upstream). Statewide, 91.9% of households have internet access at these speeds.

Households in Wilbarger County have fewer internet devices than other Connected communities – including 0.33 desktops and 1 laptop per household on average.

All households surveyed (100%) reported being satisfied with their current internet service.

All households surveyed (100%) reported no interest in additional internet options at home.



Infrastructure Results



According to data from the FCC’s National Broadband Map, as of December 2023, 94.1% of Wilbarger County households have access to broadband of at least 100/20 Mbps – the current definition of broadband set forth by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Broadband service in Wilbarger County is distributed throughout the county.

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

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE QUICK FACTS	
Unserved Households (100/20 Mbps)	272
Households Served (10/1 Mbps)	95.7%
Households Served (25/3 Mbps)	94.3%
Households Served (100/20 Mbps)	94.1%
Households Served (1000/100 Mbps)	88.2%

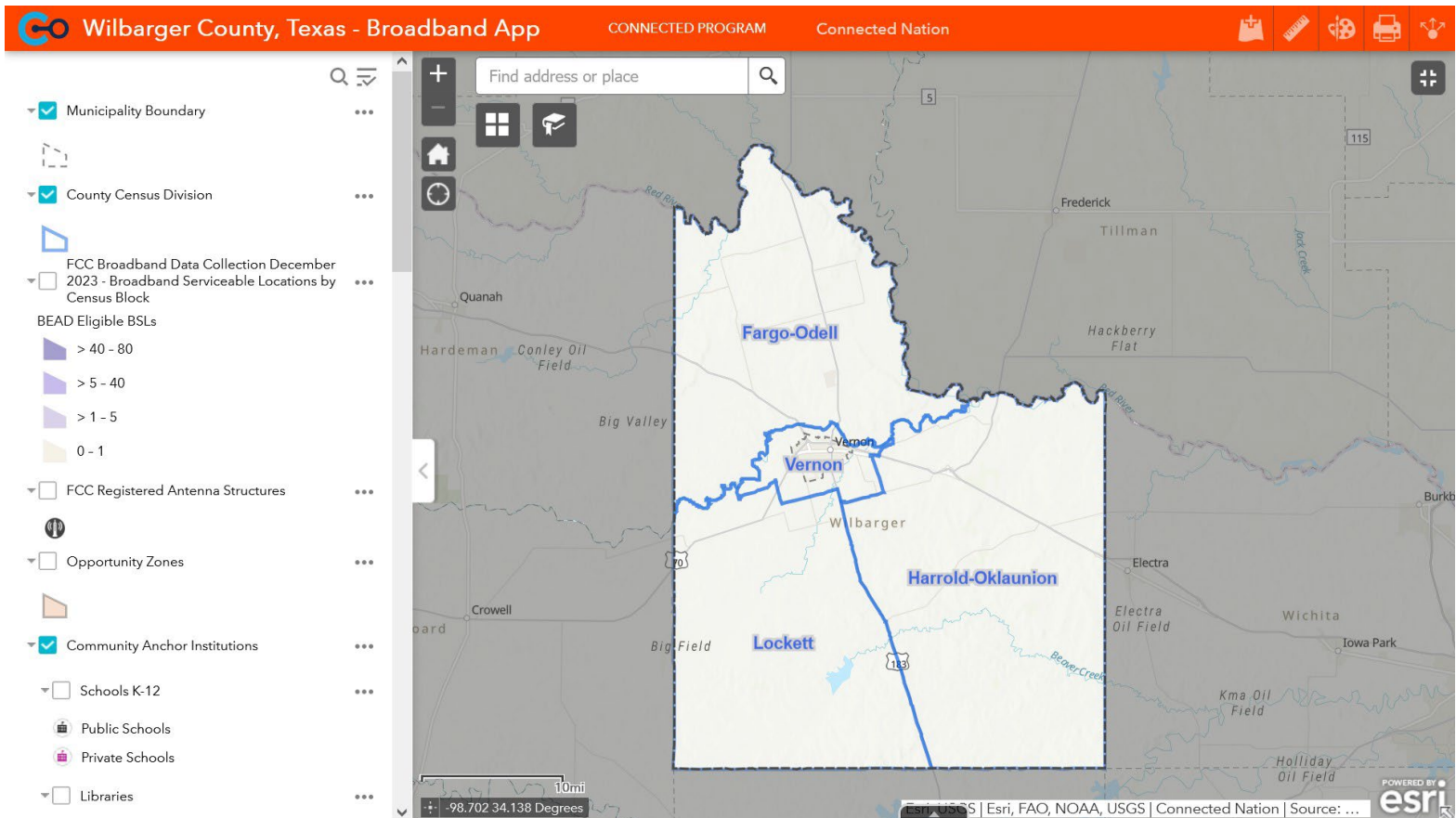
Broadband data released by the FCC for their [National Broadband Map](#).

PROVIDER	TECHNOLOGY	MAXIMUM DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAXIMUM UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
AT&T	Fixed Wireless	25	3
AT&T	Copper	10	1
Optimum	Cable	940	35
Santa Rosa Telephone Cooperative	Copper	10	1
Santa Rosa Telephone Cooperative	Fiber	1000	1000
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	25	3
United States Cellular Corp.	Fixed Wireless	25	3
Verizon	Fixed Wireless	50	5
Web Fire Communications Inc.	Copper	100	100

Wilbarger County Infrastructure



Accurate maps are the first step in understanding the status of broadband infrastructure in Wilbarger County and statewide. The map below depicts wired and licensed fixed wireless broadband coverage at speeds of 25/3 Mbps from the FCC Broadband Map, which is also available [here](#).





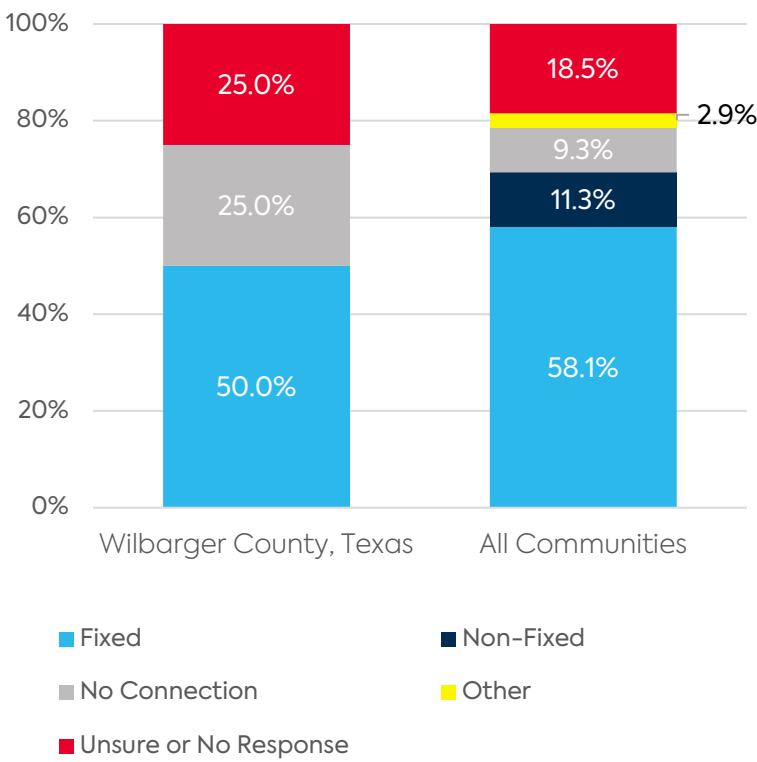
Household Survey Results

Household Survey Results



The following section provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Wilbarger County between April and July 2024. Altogether, CN Texas received five survey responses from households across the county; respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity or lack thereof. Data from Wilbarger County are compared with data from hundreds of other rural Connected communities across Michigan, Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

Home Broadband Adoption



ADOPTION

In Wilbarger County, 50% of households that took the survey subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology. In comparison, 25% indicated they did not have an internet connection. This leaves 25% of survey respondents unsure of what service they have or did not respond.

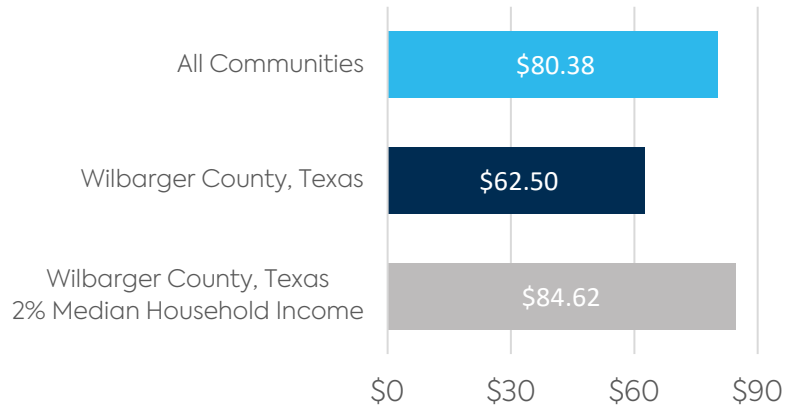


CONNECTION DETAILS

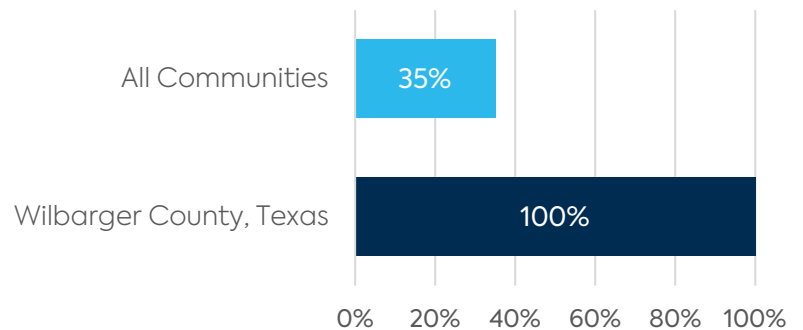
Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that, on average, their internet connection costs about \$62.50 per month. This is less than the monthly cost paid in other communities (\$80.38). Two percent of the median household income in Wilbarger County is \$84.62 per month.

The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 100 Mbps and an upload speed of at least 20 Mbps. On average, respondents indicate that their connection's advertised download speed is 300 Mbps. In Wilbarger County, 100% of internet-connected households subscribe to download speeds faster than 100 Mbps.

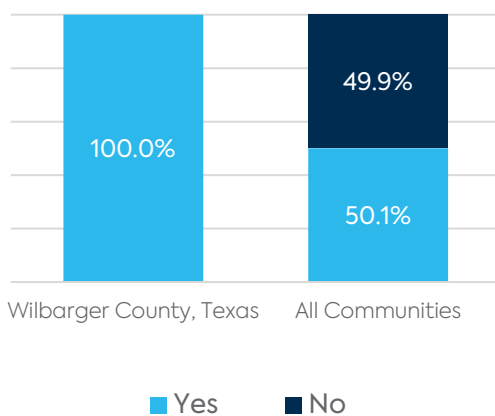
Average Monthly Cost



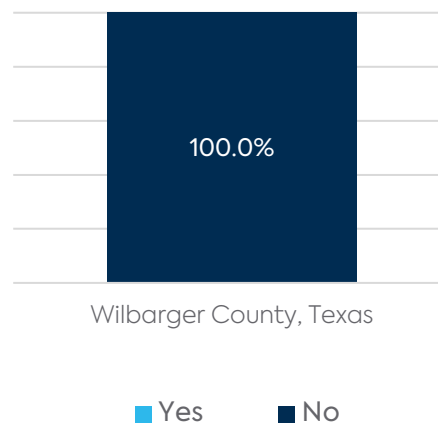
Percentage of Respondents with At Least 25/3 Mbps



Does Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Are You Interested in More Choices at Home?





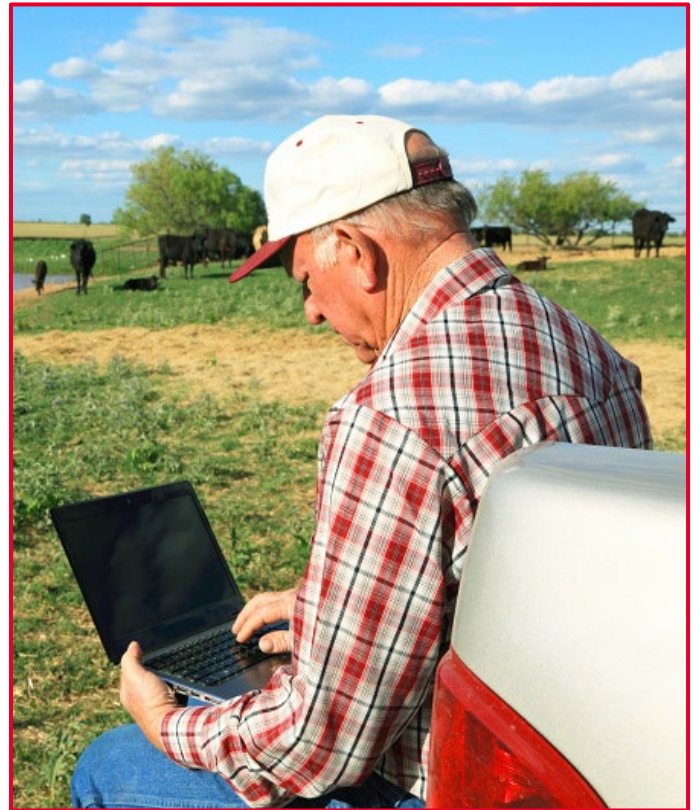
Competition provides residents with service choices, allowing households to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. All (100%) responding households indicate that their internet connection meets their needs, a higher rate of satisfaction than among households in other communities (50.1%).

No survey respondents (0%) indicated they were interested in additional internet choices for their homes.

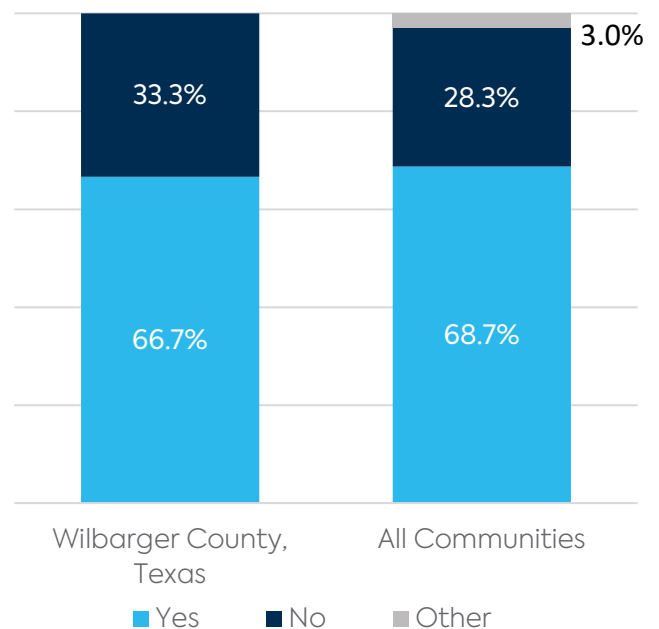
MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

About 2 out of 3 households (66.7%) report that they subscribe to mobile internet service that they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is slightly less than what is reported in other Connected communities (68.7%).

Additionally, 50% 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





Recommendations



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

A residential survey was deployed in Wilbarger County between April and July 2024 to assess the connectivity, affordability, and general technology needs of the county's residents. This qualitative data collection effort informed the analysis and recommendations in this plan. Additionally, CN Texas hosted six digital skills workshops at the Carnegie City-County Library in May 2024. Classes were free and open to the public. The classes engaged residents in digital skill-building exercises and empowered safe, online learning. CN Texas personnel also met with city of Vernon leaders, including Darrell Kennon and Monica Wilkinson, to discuss broadband priorities in the community and the connectivity needs of residents.

The following recommendations combine data from the countywide survey, online research, and direct community feedback to advance broadband programming and initiatives in the community.

Goal 1: Capitalize on strategic partnerships to increase broadband availability and reliability in Wilbarger County.

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

Texas was allocated \$3.3 billion under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) via the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program and \$55 million under the Digital Equity Act (DEA). These programs will fund projects that help expand high-speed internet access and ensure Texas communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in society, democracy, and economy by promoting diverse digital advancement projects. This federal funding opportunity is a once-in-a-generation infusion of money administered by the Texas Broadband Development Office (BDO) to eligible entities via a competitive grant program. As this is a generational funding opportunity, Wilbarger County should track broadband developments at the state and federal levels to ensure community needs are met in a timely manner.

Action 1 – Establish and maintain open communication and positive relations with internet service providers (ISPs) working or scheduled to work in the county, as well as ISPs interested in expanding in the county.

ISPs are key partners for communities looking to expand broadband access. Checking in regularly with ISPs allows community leaders to stay abreast of construction and expansion progress or plan changes, identify challenges they face, and communicate community goals and objectives. This open communication allows ISPs to better understand community needs and communities to better understand the obstacles and barriers that ISPs face. This understanding can encourage creative problem-solving, which can lead to finding solutions through public-private partnerships. Public-private partnerships are arrangements between public entities, such as local governments, and private entities, such as ISPs, to achieve a common goal. They are often, but not always, funding arrangements.

Additionally, the county should strive to be an environment amenable to business. This means having



easy-to-use websites that allow ISPs and vendors quick access to relevant information, as well as fostering a business environment that rewards open communication and timely resolution of concerns. Fostering open communication with ISPs is critical for broadband development. As part of BEAD applications, ISPs must demonstrate local support. Relationships with local leaders will ensure successful grants and deployment according to county needs.

Action 2 – Pursue state and federal funding for broadband advancement.

As mentioned previously, the infusion of federal funds via BEAD and DEA into the state is an opportunity for Texas communities to support ISPs and other entities looking to expand infrastructure and programs that support robust broadband delivery. Wilbarger County should explore the best ways to support ISPs who are considering buildouts in the community.

In addition, other funding sources, such as the U.S. Economic Development Association or the U.S. Department of Agriculture, promise opportunities for broadband. Funding guides have been linked in the resource section. Capitalizing on this once-in-a-generation funding opportunity will ensure Wilbarger County residents have faster, more reliable broadband for years to come.

Action 3 – Partner with local ISPs to promote low-cost broadband programs.

According to survey results in Wilbarger County, the average monthly cost of internet is \$62.50. Feedback provided by the city of Vernon officials who spoke with CN Texas in May 2024 about the ongoing broadband assessment highlighted a cost barrier for many residents. City officials noted that many residents are on a fixed income, many due to their age and retirement status, which makes high monthly internet charges burdensome. As such, the county should work with community leaders and institutions to publicly promote programs and opportunities designed to reduce the cost of broadband service.

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

- **Resources to locate affordable internet service or computers:** Using online resources, Wilbarger 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. Resources include EveryoneOn (<https://www.everyoneon.org/>), which helps residents locate low-cost internet services and affordable computers by ZIP code and by need based on their participation in assistance programs.
- **State and federal low-cost programs:**
 - [Lifeline](#) is a federal program administered through the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) Universal Service Administrative Co. that lowers the monthly cost of phone or internet services for eligible consumers. 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.

ISPs often offer consumers low-cost options or subsidized programs at a significantly reduced cost. The IIJA requires internet providers that receive federal grant money to provide low-cost services to eligible low-income households. Using Wilbarger County-specific data, local advocacy for internet



affordability will ensure that residents can continue accessing online information and virtual resources.

Action 4 – Establish broadband leadership within the county.

In Connected communities, broadband affects many sectors across the county, from local government to health care, education, business, and agriculture. Coordinating all these sectors requires engagement and commitment from each. Wilbarger County should establish a broadband coalition with representation from key community anchor institutions, local businesses, and residents to create a coordinated response to broadband challenges and opportunities in the county. Broadband coalitions allow everyone to collaborate and share opportunities while avoiding duplication of services and resources.

Resources

- [The FCC High-Cost program: CAF A-CAM](#)
- [The Rural Digital Opportunity Fund \(RDOF\)](#)
- [Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, Allocation by County](#)
- [ARPA SLFRE, Final Rule](#)
- [Broadband Development Office Funding Programs](#)
- [BroadbandUSA: Federal Funding Guide](#)
- [Guide to Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities in the U.S.](#)
- [Lifeline Program](#)

Goal 2: Ensure Wilbarger County residents have the digital literacy skills necessary for safe digital engagement.

Objective: Partner with libraries and community organizations to provide digital literacy training. Broadband connects people to the world and opens the door to opportunity. Where there is broadband, there is development, achievement, and innovation. In rural communities, broadband looks like economic development, greater academic achievement, advancement in agriculture and farming, connection to telehealth services, infrastructure improvement, and general technological advancements. To engage online, an individual must have the digital skills to navigate the internet safely. Many local and national organizations offer digital training and literacy workshops to the public for free or at a reduced cost. Making these programs widely and frequently available throughout Wilbarger County will increase engagement, adoption, and internet use and open digital opportunities for all.

In May 2024, CN Texas hosted six digital skills workshops in partnership with the Carnegie City-County Library. Class topics included internet basics, computer basics, email basics, mobile device basics, introduction to videoconferencing, and internet safety (cybersecurity). Classes were free and open to the public. All participants received a certificate of completion at the end of each class. Additionally, all participants and host sites received a link to the online curriculum to continue digital learning. This engagement is a prime example of programming that community anchor institutions can offer to



residents, often for free, in partnership with local and national organizations. Continuing this work is a priority for the library and should be supported by county leaders.

Action 1 – Develop a curriculum for free community workshops.

Community organizations should continue offering digital skills workshops in partnership with local and regional organizations. Classes can be provided at local facilities, such as the school gym, library, or community center, and be advertised through the local media. Classes should promote safe online activity and increase digital engagement. The more the community engages online, the more residents will reap the benefits of a digital lifestyle.

Workshop topics might include:

- How to teleconference
- Cybersecurity 101
- Microsoft Office skills
- Intro to social media and website building
- Telehealth basics

CN Texas provided the Carnegie City-County Library with curriculum and materials when it offered in-person training. This curriculum can be used as is or customized further to meet residents' needs.

Action 1A – Provide varied formats for greater community involvement.

In addition to hosting in-person workshops, the general curriculum should be available for pickup at frequently accessed public locations in the form of paper handouts. Handouts function as a “grab and go” resource for residents to take with them to review later. In this way, everyone can benefit from the content in whatever way is most compatible with their schedule and preferred learning method. Additionally, the library and other city and county websites can promote online learning platforms that teach digital skills.

Action 2 – Partner with community stakeholders for workshop execution.

Finding broadband champions who can share the impact of technology from their perspective can help class participants understand the broad impacts of connectivity. Industry leaders can speak to the importance of broadband in their respective lines of work. For example, a banker can discuss the benefits of online banking, while the school IT Director can discuss the importance of online safety. Building on local expertise will help drive workshop attendance and meet the unique needs of Wilbarger County residents. When county leaders understand their audience, they can invite guest speakers, select a specific curriculum, and pick class times/locations that are most convenient for the end user, which will promote greater engagement.

Resources

Digital Literacy

- [Connected Nation Digital Literacy Workshops](#)
- [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](#)
- [AARP joins nonprofit to teach tech to older adults](#)
- [The complete guide to digital skills](#)
- [Grow with Google](#)

Cybersecurity

- [Cybersecurity courses](#)
- [Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency - Cyber Resource Hub](#)
- [Connected Nation Cybersecurity Workshops](#)

Goal 3: Identify opportunities for digital advancement in Wilbarger County using broadband and related technologies.

Objective: Bring additional resources to Wilbarger County to support residents' adoption and use of the internet. Broadband connects people to the world and opens the door to opportunity. Where there is broadband, there is development at the individual and community level.

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

State and federal agencies focus on broadband access and adoption, providing significant funding to increase broadband availability and close the Digital Divide. Additionally, many Texas and national philanthropic organizations support this work. Wilbarger County should evaluate these grant programs and make strategic decisions to apply for funding to advance broadband access, adoption, and use in the county.

Wilbarger County has been allocated grant-writing funds in conjunction with the countywide Connected Engagement program. The goals and actions outlined in this document provide the framework for county leaders to prepare for and pursue applicable funding opportunities and program advancements designed to close the Digital Divide in Wilbarger County.

Through countywide partnerships and collaborative efforts, the community can advocate and provide equitable, affordable, and reliable broadband access for all residents, businesses, and community anchor institutions. Texas Rural Funders maintains an online hub of grant resources. The community should consider utilizing this resource to identify a funding program that best meets their needs.

Resources

- [Texas Rural Funders Latest Grants](#)