EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Technology Plan

Jack County, Texas

November 2021

CONNECTED NATION®

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF SERVICE

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

The Connected Nation Texas (CN Texas) Connected Program partnered with the Jack County Broadband Team to conduct a study designed to determine the availability of broadband infrastructure; how its 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.
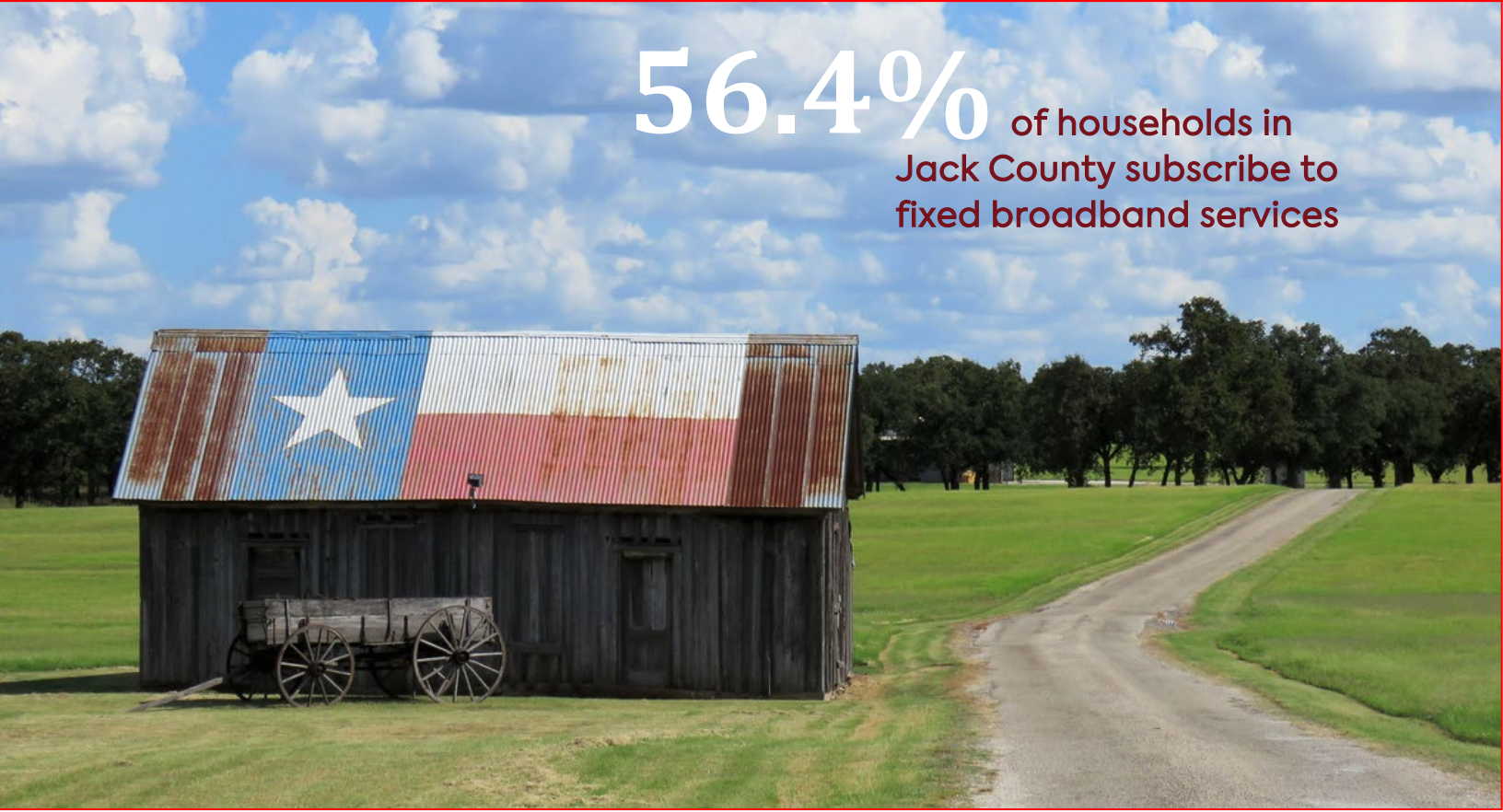
Pursuant of this goal, between April and July 2021, Jack County conducted a comprehensive survey of broadband technology access and adoption across the community. Jack County collected responses from 287 households. CN Texas staff also met with local officials to determine community needs and gather qualitative data for consideration in the study. Overall, the assessment was designed to identify issues and opportunities to close the Digital Divide.

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

To highlight key findings, CN Texas created an interactive map. It provides data on broadband availability in the community overlayed with survey data from the recent broadband assessment. To access the map, click HERE.

JACK COUNTY, TEXAS QUICK FACTS
Population **8,472**
Households **3,168**
Median Household Income **$52,045**
Poverty Rate **16.3%**
Adults with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher **13.5%**
Homeownership Rate **81.3%**
Hispanic or Latino **18%**
Households with Broadband Access[1] **92.98%**

Source: United States Census Bureau
https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US48237
1. The current FCC definition of broadband is a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. These data are derived from Connected Nation Texas, July 2021.
https://connectednation.org/texas/planning/

56.4% of households in Jack County subscribe to fixed broadband services

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

Nearly one-half of businesses (46.6%) said they need employees with moderate to advanced technology skills. Only **43%** of businesses said their employees currently meet the technologies needs of the company very well.

Jack County households **pay more** on average for access to the internet **($76.73)** than other Connected communities ($71.59).

About **65% of residents and 64% of businesses** reported that they were dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were slow speeds and unreliable connections.

More than 9 out of 10 residents **(95%)** said they would like to have improved or additional options for home internet service.

INFRASTRUCTURE
RESULTS
02

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Texas

According to CN Texas broadband data initially released in July 2021 — followed by additional public feedback, field validation, and provider input, most households in Jack 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 covers much of the county with unserved areas between the main thoroughfares.

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

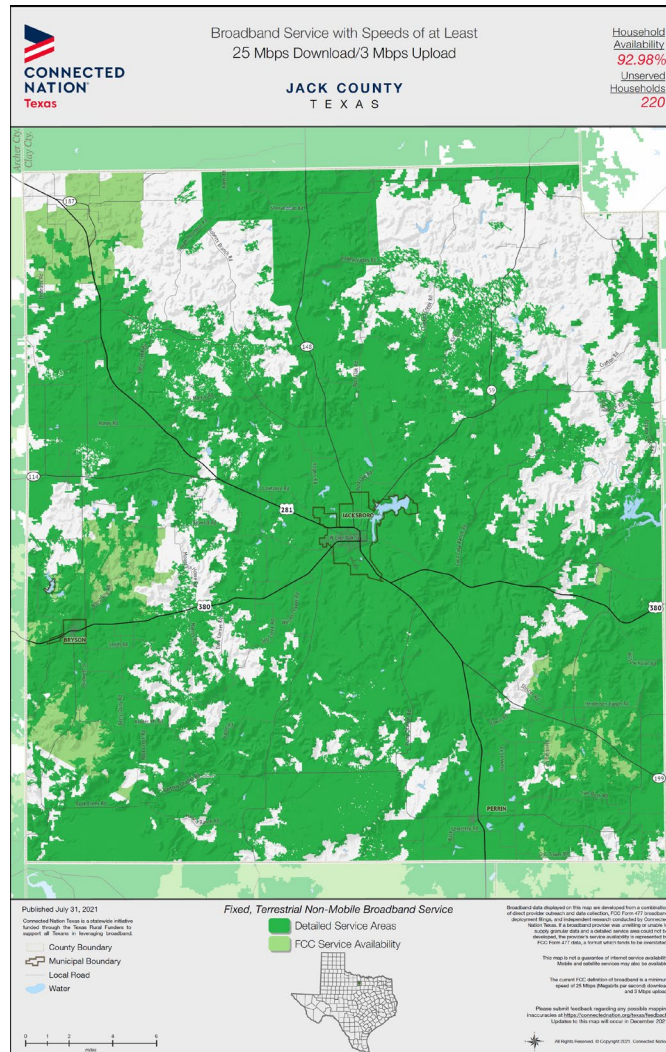| BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE QUICK FACTS |
|:---:|
| Unserved Households (25/3 Mbps) **220** |
| Households Served (10/1 Mbps) **94.76%** |
| Households Served (25/3 Mbps) **92.98%** |
| Households Served (50/5 Mbps) **87.26%** |
| Households Served (100/10 Mbps) **86.80%** |

https://connectednation.org/texas/mapping-analysis/

PROVIDER	TECHNOLOGY	MAXIMUM DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAXIMUM UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
AT&T Southwest	DSL Fixed Wireless	25 10	2 1
Brazos Communications	Fiber	1000	100
	DSL	30	3
CenturyLink	DSL	60	5
Cirra Networks	Fixed Wireless	25	6
Comcell	Fiber	1000	1000
New Source Broadband	Fixed Wireless	50	7
Nextlink Residential	Fixed Wireless	100	20
Rise Broadband	Fixed Wireless	25	5

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

CONNECTED NATION℠
Texas

220

Jack County households cannot access broadband

What Is 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 received 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.
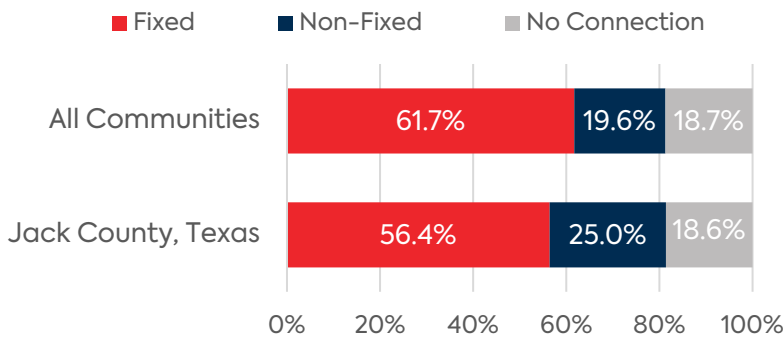
HOUSEHOLD
SURVEY RESULTS
03

HOUSEHOLD
SURVEY RESULTS:
Jack County

CONNECTED NATION℠
Texas

HOUSEHOLD

Fixed Home Broadband Adoption **56.4%**
Average Monthly Internet Cost **$76.73**
Average Download Speed **11.40 Mbps**
Households Satisfied with Service **35%**

Home Broadband Adoption

- Fixed
- Non-Fixed
- No Connection

	Fixed	Non-Fixed	No Connection
All Communities	61.7%	19.6%	18.7%
Jack County, Texas	56.4%	25.0%	18.6%

Primary Barrier

	Too Expensive	Not Available	Other
All Communities	26.4%	53.5%	20.1%
Jack County, Texas	22.0%	39.0%	39.0%

- Too Expensive
- Not Available
- Other

The following provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Jack County between April and July 2021. Altogether, CN Texas received 287 completed surveys from households across the county, and respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity, or lack thereof. Data from Jack County are compared to data from across hundreds of other rural, participating Connected communities across Michigan, Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

ADOPTION

In Jack County, 56.4% of surveyed households subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology. One-quarter of respondents (25%) indicate they have internet service delivered via dial-up, satellite, or a mobile wireless service. This leaves fewer than 1 in 5 (18.6%) survey respondents without internet access at home.
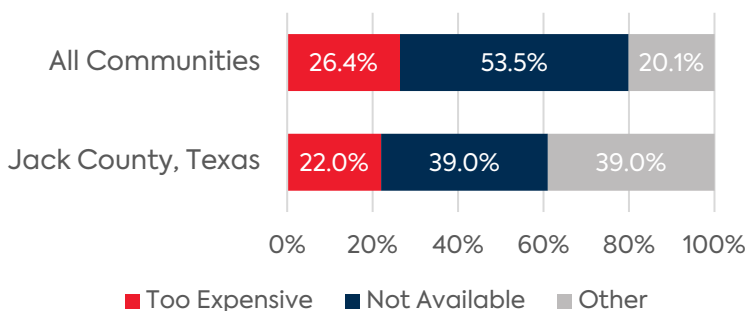
Among those without a home internet connection, 39% said they do not subscribe because it was not available to them, while 22% indicate that it was too expensive. Other barriers include a lack of home computers and the ability to access the internet from someplace other than home. Overall, like in many communities, cost and availability are the two most commonly cited barriers to home broadband adoption.
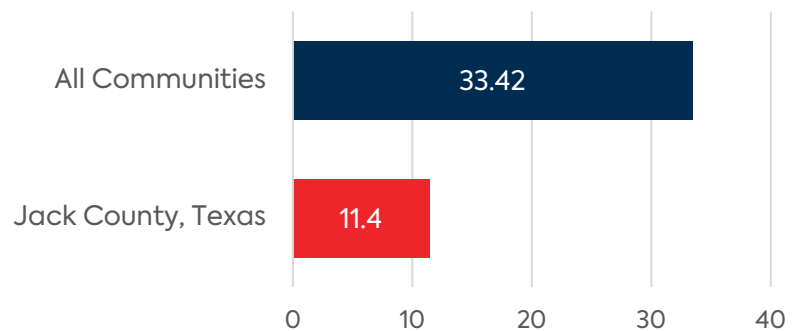
CONNECTION DETAILS

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 $76.73 per month. This is higher than the monthly cost in other communities ($71.59). Two percent of the median household income in Jack County is $86.74 per month.

Average Monthly Cost

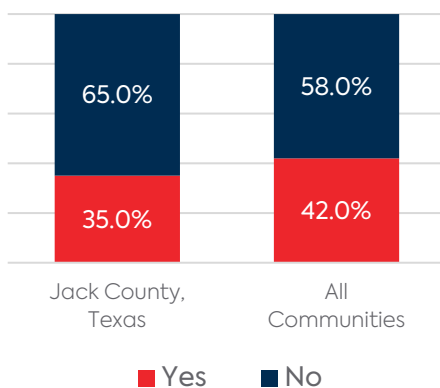|	
All Communities	$71.59
Jack County, Texas	$76.73
Jack County 2% Median Household Income	$86.74

$0 $25 $50 $75 $100
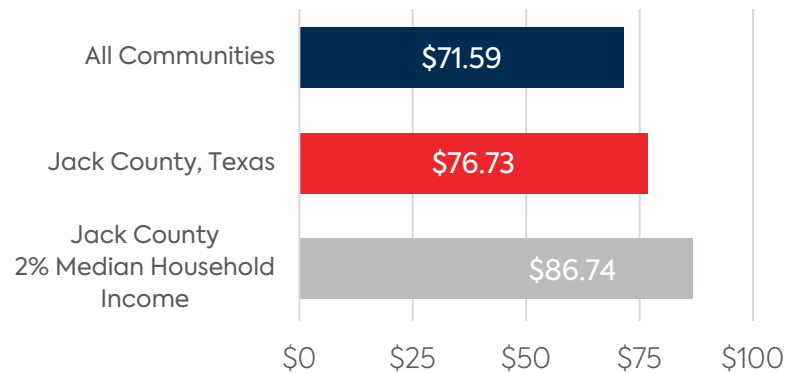
The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 25 Mbps and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps. On average, respondents indicate that their connection's download speed is 11.4 Mbps, which is below the minimum defined speed.
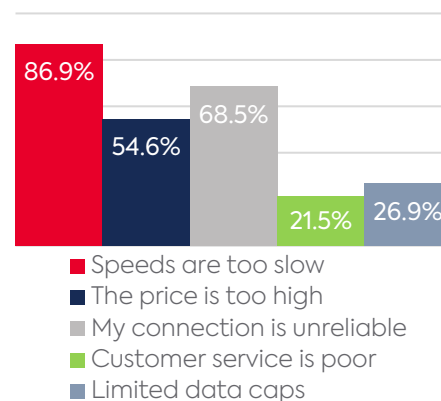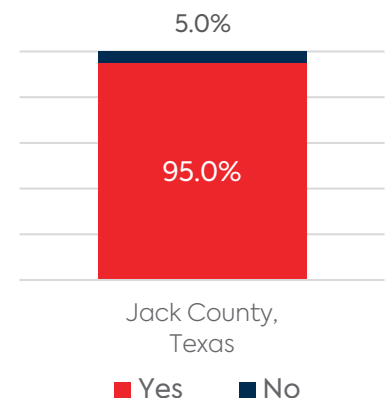
Average Speeds (Mbps)

All Communities	33.42
Jack County, Texas	11.4

0   10   20   30   40

Does Your Internet Meet Your Needs?

Jack County, Texas: No 65.0%, Yes 35.0%
All Communities: No 58.0%, Yes 42.0%

Legend: Yes (red), No (navy)

Why Doesn't Your Internet Meet Your Needs?

Speeds are too slow: 86.9%
The price is too high: 54.6%
My connection is unreliable: 68.5%
Customer service is poor: 21.5%
Limited data caps: 26.9%

Legend:
- Speeds are too slow
- The price is too high
- My connection is unreliable
- Customer service is poor
- Limited data caps

Are You Interested in More Choices at Home?

Jack County, Texas: No 5.0%, Yes 95.0%

Legend: Yes (red), No (navy)

Competition provides residents with choices for service, allowing households the ability to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. Almost two-thirds (65%) of residents indicate that their internet connection does not meet their needs. This is a higher rate of dissatisfaction than among households in other communities (58.3%).

When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 86.9% of dissatisfied households indicate that their speed is too slow, 54.6% say the price is too high, and about two-thirds (68.5%) indicate that the connection is unreliable. (Respondents could choose more than one reason.)

Finally, 95% of all respondents indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

Nearly two-thirds (65.7%) of responding households report that they subscribe to mobile internet service, which they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is a little less than what is reported in other Connected Communities (72.0%).

Additionally, 29% of these mobile-connected households report that they rely on their mobile connection as their primary source of internet connectivity at home, or to connect other household devices to the internet.

Households Subscribing to Mobile Internet Service

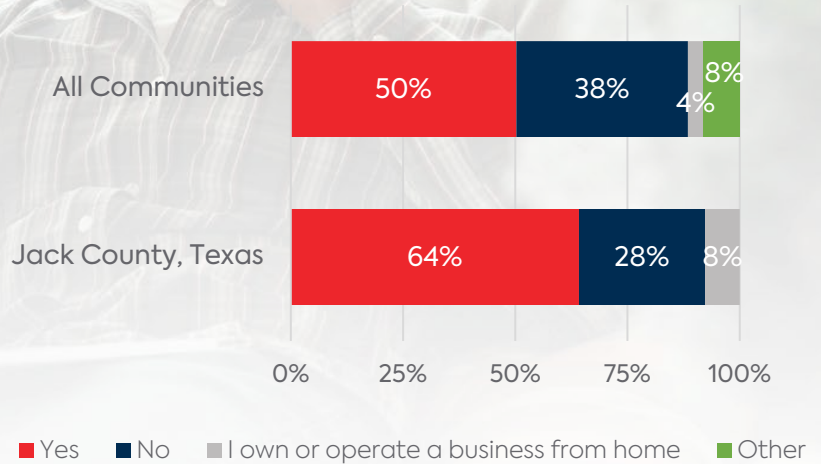|	Jack County, Texas	All Communities
No	34.3%	28.0%
Yes	65.7%	72.0%

■ Yes ■ No
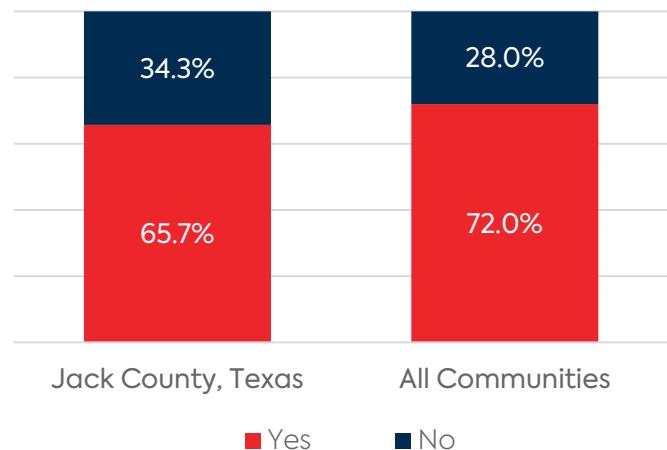
TELEWORK

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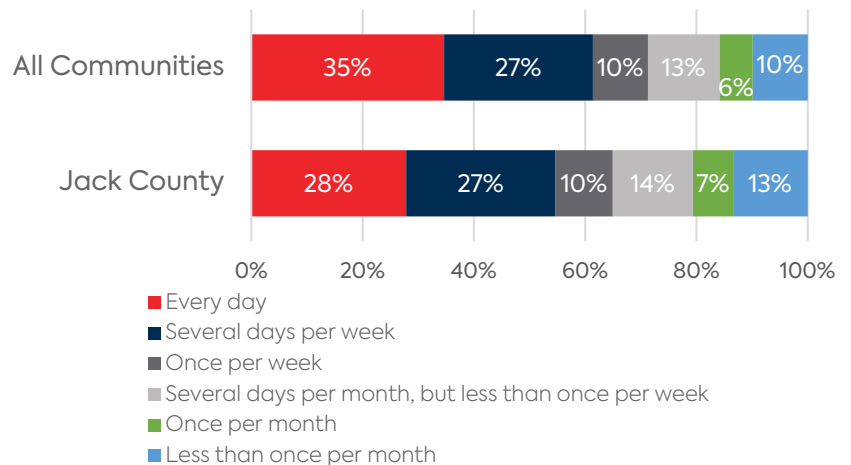
Teleworking is quickly becoming a critical part of growing a local economy because it represents an opportunity to attract and retain employees, even when employees are not located in the same community as their employers. However, this only works if those employees have access to advanced broadband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

Nearly 2 out of 3 employed respondents in Jack County (64%) telework in some capacity. More than one-quarter of these teleworkers (28%) do so every day.

Do You Currently Telework?

	Yes	No	I own or operate a business from home	Other
All Communities	50%	38%	4%	8%
Jack County, Texas	64%	28%	8%	

How Frequently Do You Telework?

	Every day	Several days per week	Once per week	Several days per month, but less than once per week	Once per month	Less than once per month
All Communities	35%	27%	10%	13%	6%	10%
Jack County	28%	27%	10%	14%	7%	13%

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RECOMMENDATIONS
04

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

Goal 1: Increase online engagement in Jack County through free digital literacy and communication workshops.

In 2021, Jack County partnered with Connected Nation Texas to better understand the community's broadband landscape. Survey results reveal that 81% of households subscribe to home internet services, along with 75% of agriculture producers, and 88.5% of businesses. While these are strong subscription rates, broadband adoption is only part of the equation. It is important to understand how a community is using the internet to determine if its residents are making the most of it.

Looking specifically at digital communication trends, survey results reveal that businesses and community institutions are leaving certain tools and resources untapped. For example, 43% of businesses report never using Instagram, while another 48% do not use LinkedIn. Two out of three libraries and community institutions (67%) do not use Twitter, while another 17% do not communicate with the public via website updates. In the public safety sector, digital communication is slim, with 86% of respondents indicating they never use Twitter, 57% do not use Instagram, and 29% do not interact with the public via website updates.

Broadband is a tool that allows communities to connect locally, as well as engage on a global scale. The internet is a powerful resource for economic development, community revitalization, workforce expansion, and scholastic achievement. When embraced as an integral part of life, broadband contributes to a thriving community and promotes greater quality of life for its members. In this sense, it is about more than adopting broadband, it is about bettering residents' lives, the community, and society as a whole.

Objective:

Increase digital communication among community sectors through group workshops that demonstrate the importance of broadband in a digitally inclusive and evolved community.

Actions:

Action 1 – Jack County leaders should identify key advocates in each of the following areas who can educate the general community about the short- and long-term benefits of broadband adoption and use. Industry leaders can speak to the importance of broadband in their lines of work and discuss the myriad uses. The more residents, businesses, and community institutions understand the positive benefits of broadband, the greater the likelihood of adoption and use.

Highlight economic and practical advantages of **telework**: According to survey results, 64% of employed respondents telework. Of that group, 28% telework from home every day, with an additional 27% teleworking from home multiple days per week. By working remotely, an employee can reside in Jack County but be employed by an entity in Dallas, Houston, Lubbock, or another state entirely. Telework offers greater flexibility in work schedules and expands the number of job opportunities for rural Texans, while also increasing the number of potential applicants for employers. The keys to teleworking are adequate digital skills to engage online, and a reliable internet connection.

Showcase physical health and time-saving benefits of **telehealth** services: The future of medicine is online. For communities that lack large hospitals, general practitioners, surgical attendees, and medical specialists, telehealth is a natural substitute. Online medical services allow residents to speak with top-of-the-line doctors, dentists, surgeons, dermatologists, veterinarians, and medical specialists through the click of the button. These online services are important not only in times of emergency, they also allow residents flexibility when meeting with medical professionals. Survey results reveal that 100% of health care facilities are subscribing to internet services, and all are utilizing videoconferencing services on a monthly basis.

Promote the importance of emergency preparedness in the **public safety** sector (911, interoperable networks): With reliable broadband comes increased public safety capability for EMS, police, and fire departments. Not only can first responders communicate reliably with each other using mobile devices in the field, they also can communicate with other agencies at the local, state, and federal level. With a jail in the county, it is paramount for police and fire to have full broadband coverage in case of emergency.

Demonstrate scholastic resources and achievements available through **online learning** (K-12, higher education): Digital platforms connect teachers, administrators, and students alike with new and innovative curriculum and learning techniques. With reliable broadband throughout the county, students can connect to online educational platforms from both the school building and their kitchen table.

Promote **e-commerce** as the gateway to the global economy: As businesses and community organizations expand their online presence, they expand their customer pool, and ultimately increase profit. By utilizing websites and social media to market services and sell products, businesses can take part in a larger digital economy. More than 7 out of 10 businesses (71%) reported that they currently have websites, according to survey feedback. With an active and invested Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Council (EDC), Jack County businesses can access local resources designed to improve their online presence.

Community Advocates to Consider:
- Telework → Jacksboro Chamber of Commerce, Jacksboro EDC
- Telehealth → Faith Community Health System (Hospital), Jail Infirmary

- <u>Public Safety</u> → Emergency Management Staff, Jack County Sheriff's Office, Jack County Fire Department, Jacksboro Fire Department, Jacksboro Police Department, Bryson VFD, Cundiff VFD, Faith Community Health EMS
- <u>Online Learning</u> → Superintendents and school principals (Jacksboro ISD, Bryson ISD, Perrin–Whitt CISD)
- <u>E-Commerce</u> → Jacksboro Chamber of Commerce, Jacksboro EDC, Commissioners Court

Action 2 – Once the industry-specific leaders have been identified, the community should develop and host free workshops. Ultimately, the goal is for residents and community institutions (businesses, police departments, clinics, schools, etc.) to increase their online presence and general digital communication. Workshop classes should be based on the topics in Action 1.

Workshop curricula should be curated using material created by the county and publicly available programs such as Digital Learn and Grow with Google (resources linked below). Classes should be offered at local facilities such as a school gym or community center. The intention of the workshop is for residents to learn more about broadband and how it relates to their personal and professional life. If successful, residents will be equipped with new ways to use the internet and smart devices.

Workshop topics can include:
- Navigating social media
- Online safety tips and tricks presented by the local IT Director or Police Department
- How to do a telehealth visit
- Dos and Don'ts of telework
- "Network and Webs" events to meet local business owners and create a website

Action 2A – Ask community members, stakeholders, and businesses to lead the workshops based on their expertise and skillsets. It is important for the community to feel this is a collective effort, and an open forum for discussion and questions. The more people who share their knowledge on a topic, the more others can learn.

Action 2B – To make broadband accessible to everyone, it needs to be presented in a way that everyone understands. It is important to consider that 18% of the Jack County population is Hispanic or Latino, and 12.4% of residents speak a language other than English at home, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Therefore, all materials pertaining to broadband workshops and digital skills should be available in English and Spanish.

Action 3 – Information about upcoming workshops should be readily accessible and widely publicized. Upcoming workshops should be advertised through social media, on government websites, in local newspapers, and other local outlets (i.e., advertisements in water bills, flyers at the local park, and school announcements). General discussion about the benefits of broadband should become

commonplace in Jack County, with elected officials and local stakeholders openly highlighting the importance of internet access, adoption, and usage.

Responsible Parties:

Residents; local units of government; community organizations; businesses; internet service providers

Timeline:

Community workshops should be available no later than the end of Q2 2022. Curricula should be reviewed and updated every 3-4 months.

Resources:

Improving the Quality of Life in Rural America with Broadband Internet
https://bonfire-ec.com/improving-the-quality-of-life-in-rural-america-with-broadband-internet/

Implementing Productive Teleworking with Business-Quality Mobile Communications
https://tango-networks.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Tango-Networks-Trend-Advisor-Productive-Teleworking-with-Mobile-Communications-v15May2020.pdf

How Better Broadband Access Will Help Telemedicine Reach Its Full Potential
https://intouchhealth.com/how-broadband-will-help-telemedicine-reach-its-full-potential/

Texas Broadband Providers by County
https://connectednation.org/texas/planning/

The Benefit that Broadband Internet Offers for Ecommerce
https://www.newsanyway.com/2020/02/26/the-benefits-that-broadband-internet-offers-for-ecommerce/

Census: Jack County
https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US48237

The complete guide to digital skills
https://www.futurelearn.com/info/blog/the-complete-guide-to-digital-skills

AARP Joins with Nonprofit to Teach Tech to Older Adults
https://www.aarp.org/about-aarp/info-2021/oats-senior-planet.html

Digital Learn: Use a computer to do almost anything!
https://www.digitallearn.org/

Grow with Google
https://grow.google/

GCFLearnFree.org® program
GCFLEanfree.org

Goal 2: Increase broadband availability and speeds in Jack County through strategic partnerships.

According to the broadband survey conducted in Jack County in partnership with Connected Nation Texas, the average download speed reported by residential survey respondents was 11.40 Mbps. This is significantly lower than the FCC's definition of broadband at 25/3 Mbps. An average download speed of 11.40 Mbps might support one to two devices at any given time — a standard that is not sustainable in an increasingly digital society. Slow speeds are coupled with the fact that 64% of employed residents telework, and 8% own or operate a business from their home. Teleworkers cannot be successful or competitive in their job fields without reliable and fast internet connections. Beyond telework, it is important to recognize how slow internet speeds negatively impact and deter digital engagement.

Objective:

Promote greater broadband access, adoption, and usage in Jack County through broadband infrastructure projects (improvements and expansions).

Actions:

Action 1 – To effectively understand the broadband funding landscape in Jack County, community leaders should meet with internet service providers that have already been allocated federal money, including recipients of funding through the Connect America Fund (CAF) and the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF). The community should meet with local internet service providers (ISPs) to assess the **status** and **viability** of ongoing or upcoming infrastructure improvement and expansion projects. As community leaders consider expanding and improving broadband infrastructure, the goal should be to pursue strategic projects that are not needlessly redundant (i.e., expand access where RDOF winners are already working).

CAF Phase II Auction Winning Bids:
AMG Technology (Nextlink): 175 Locations, $597,897.50

RDOF Phase I Auction Winning Bids:
Windstream Services, Debtor-In-Possession: 8 Locations, $120,420.00

ISPs who attended the August Provider Meeting:
Comcell, Local Loop (SynKro), Nextlink

Action 2 – During meetings with providers, community leaders should discuss the role the county could play (through financial backing or strategic partnerships) in a project to ensure completion, or discuss starting a new project altogether. Ultimately, Jack County should play a strategic role in ongoing or planned projects that will widely benefit the most residents. It is important for county leadership to be informed of ongoing infrastructure improvement and expansion projects such that the community can be involved in necessary decisions.

Jack County has been allocated $1,735,519.00 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. Should county officials choose to spend any of these federal funds on broadband, it is important that they are prepared, informed, and ready to begin working with reliable partners.

Action 2A – If Jack County has a vested interest in certain infrastructure expansion or improvement projects, it is pertinent to supply that information to providers. For example, if improving the public safety communication infrastructure is a priority for the community, or if new neighborhoods are being built and need infrastructure, it is important to discuss these opportunities with providers. Ultimately, county leadership should continue having fruitful conversations with providers who can and will contribute to expansion and improvement projects.

Action 3 – After taking stock of broadband initiatives in the county, it is important to identify applicable grants to expand broadband access, adoption, and usage. Grants may provide funding for broadband infrastructure or digital literacy and digital skills expansion. Current grant opportunities can be found on the Connected Nation and BroadbandUSA websites. Links can be found in the resources section below.

Action 4 – Jack County should establish and maintain relationships with regional organizations and elected officials. Elected officials may be able to provide letters of support or additional resources when submitting grant applications. Additionally, the county should engage neighboring communities in discussions about broadband development. Communities around Jack County have recently engaged in broadband development endeavors and can share insights, dos and don'ts, and potential partnership opportunities.

Regional Organizations and Elected Officials for Potential Partnerships:
- Nortex Regional Planning Commission (NORTEX)
- The Priddy Foundation

- Other "Connected Communities:" Throckmorton, Shackelford, Fisher, others to come; those communities that have also engaged in communitywide broadband surveys and planning efforts with CN Texas
- Susanna Feather, Chief of Staff for Rep. David Spiller
- Congressman Ronny Jackson
- Jacksboro Chamber of Commerce and EDC
- Jacksboro and Bryson municipal leaders

Action 5 – As community leaders meet with broadband providers to discuss federal grant monies and community infrastructure, they should consider the value of public-private partnerships (PPPs). These partnerships take many forms and allow all parties (in this case, the county and a broadband provider) to leverage an asset that the other does not have or cannot easily acquire. The community can offer infrastructure (publicly owned building rooftops, light poles, towers, and other vertical assets for mounting infrastructure) for network deployment, as well as committed anchor tenants. Private-sector partners bring network-building and operations experience. Some elements to consider include competition, enhanced service, risk avoidance, and service redundancy. The community should consider all legal obligations when considering partnership negotiations.

Examples of PPPs
- Model 1: Private Investment, Public Facilitation — Make available public assets such as fiber and conduit, share geographic information systems data, streamline permitting and inspection processes, offer economic development incentives to attract private broadband investment.
- Model 2: Private Execution, Public Funding — Identify revenue streams that can be directed to a private partner, issue RFP for private turnkey execution.
- Model 3: Shared Investment and Risk — Evaluate using assets, and funding new assets, to attract private investment; evaluate building new fiber assets to businesses and/or homes for leasing to private ISPs.

Responsible Parties:

Local units of government; broadband providers; community and regional organizations

Timeline:

Community leaders should begin meeting with internet service providers within three months of receiving this plan. While Jack County does not have to allocate funding or spend federal dollars within that same three months, the community should outline the scope of broadband infrastructure projects (ongoing and planned) within that timeline.

Resources:

      Connected Nation Texas: Jack County Map
https://cn-maps.hatfield.marketing/US/TX/v4/tx_jack-county_25x3.pdf

      Texas Broadband Providers by County
https://connectednation.org/texas/planning/

      Auction 904: Rural Digital Opportunity Fund
https://www.fcc.gov/auction/904

      Connect America Fund: FCC
https://www.fcc.gov/general/connect-america-fund-caf

      Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds

      Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, County Allocation
https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/fiscalrecoveryfunds_countyfunding_2021.05.10-1a-508A.pdf

      Guide to Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities in the U.S.
https://www.internetsociety.org/resources/doc/2021/guide-to-broadband-funding-opportunities-in-us/

      Current Broadband Funding
https://connectednation.org/current-broadband-funding

      BroadbandUSA: Federal Funding Guide
https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/resources/federal

      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: Promote low-cost broadband offerings for vulnerable populations.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the poverty rate in Jack County is 16.3%. More specifically, 26.7% of children under the age of 18 live in poverty. Comparatively, the poverty rate in the state of Texas is

13.6%. These statistics demonstrate a real need in Jack County for free and reduced-cost digital services. For children under the age of 18, this need is especially prevalent as it relates to online educational opportunities. It is important to recognize the broadband access, adoption, and usage equation is three-fold. First, a resident needs access to an internet device, such as a laptop or tablet. Second, the resident needs access to broadband to use it. A laptop or tablet is only as good as its internet connection. Third, a resident needs the appropriate digital skills to operate the device. Without that necessary knowledge and skills, the device remains largely useless to the user.

Objective:

Increase access, availability, and use of broadband by addressing the cost barrier and providing additional public services.

Actions:

Action 1 – In the broadband survey, 22% of households that do not have internet stated cost was a barrier. Of those who do have internet service at their home, 55% said cost was a reason for their current dissatisfaction. Furthermore, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income in Jack County is $52,045, which is about $11,000 less than the median household income in the state of Texas ($62,843). These statistics support the need for affordable broadband options in Jack County. As such, it is important for qualifying residents to know the options available to them that can make broadband more affordable. Jack County residents should be made aware of local and national providers that offer special, low-cost services. Such resources include EveryoneOn, a national nonprofit that allows residents to identify local and national providers who offer special low-cost services for vulnerable populations, older adults, and low-income families with children. The organization's mission, stated simply, is to "unlock opportunity by connecting families in underserved communities to affordable internet service and computers, and [deliver] digital skills trainings."

Using the above resources, the following ZIP codes are eligible for multiple broadband assistance programs:
- 76427
- 76458
- 76459
- 76486

Action 2 – Community leaders and institutions should publicly promote programs and opportunities designed to reduce the cost of broadband service. Notices can be sent out in water bills, posted in the newspaper, circulated in monthly school newsletters, discussed at Commissioners Court and city hall meetings, or advertised at frequently-visited community buildings and businesses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community leaders and institutions to consider:
- School districts (Jacksboro ISD, Bryson ISD, Perrin-Whitt CISD)
- Local and county government: Jacksboro, Bryson, Jermyn, Perrin, Joplin
- Local media: KLSR 105 Radio, The Sun Newspaper
- Jacksboro Chamber of Commerce and local businesses
- Other: Convention Center, Gladys Johnson Ritchie Library

Programs to promote:
- Lifeline
- Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB)
- PCs for People

Action 3 – Reduced-cost broadband at home is only part of the solution. To ensure all residents have access to the internet, Jack County should increase the number of publicly available computers in frequently accessed locations. This can include increasing the number of devices in locations that currently serve the public or adding computers, laptops, and tablets in locations that currently have none. According to survey results, only two locations in the county offer public computer access, with a total of four computers between them. This is a very small number of devices to serve a county of 9,000 people.

Action 3A – The county, schools, and library should use available funds or grant money to acquire new devices or partner with community organizations and internet service providers to outfit buildings with computing devices.

Locations to consider:
- Local Schools
- Public Library
- Government Buildings: City Hall, Courthouse

Responsible Parties:

Community institutions: businesses, schools, libraries, organizations; local government leaders and elected officials; broadband providers; community residents

Timeline:

Jack County community organizations and leaders should immediately market low-cost broadband programs and resources. New or improved computing devices should be available around the community by end the end of Q2 2022.

Resources:

Lifeline Support for Affordable Communications
https://www.fcc.gov/lifeline-consumers

Companies Near Me: USAC
https://data.usac.org/publicreports/CompaniesNearMe/Download/Report

Emergency Broadband Benefit
https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit

Texas Broadband Providers by County
https://connectednation.org/texas/planning/

Census: Jack County
https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US48237

EveryoneOn
https://www.everyoneon.org/

PCS for People
https://www.pcsforpeople.org/