Connected
A CONNECTED NATION Initiative

Addressing Your Community's Unique Needs

Jefferson County, Texas
Executive Summary

June 2022

CONNECTED NATION™

connectednation.org

Agenda

Overview

Jefferson County Overview

Today, technology plays a pivotal role in how businesses operate, how institutions provide services, and where consumers choose to live, work, and play. A community's success has become dependent on how broadly and deeply it adopts technology resources, which include access to reliable, high-speed networks; the digital literacy of residents; and the use of online resources for local business, government, and leisure.

As such, the Jefferson County Broadband Committee partnered with the Connected Nation Texas (CN Texas) Connected Community Engagement Program to conduct a study designed to determine the availability of broadband infrastructure; how county residents are adopting and using broadband services; and what steps would have the greatest impact toward improving broadband access, adoption, and usage across every local sector.

Pursuant of this goal, between February and April 2022, Jefferson County conducted a comprehensive survey of broadband technology access and adoption across the community that collected responses from 1,274 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 Jefferson County. This document provides a summary of that assessment, as well as recommendations for improving broadband and technology access, adoption, and usage. Additionally, CN Texas created an interactive map. To access that map, please click here.

JEFFERSON COUNTY, TEXAS QUICK FACTS
Population **256,526**
Households **94,012**
Median Household Income **$50,840**
Poverty Rate **18.0%**
Adults with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher **19.3%**
Hispanic or Latino **22.97%**
Households with Broadband Access[1] **99.56%**

Source: https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US48245
[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 and last updated in January 2022. https://connectednation.org/texas/planning/

61.3%
of households in Jefferson County report subscribing to fixed internet service

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

__96.82%__ of households in Jefferson County have access to internet service at speeds needed to run many modern applications (100 Mbps downstream and 10 Mbps upstream). Statewide, __93.55%__ of households have internet access at these speeds.

Two-thirds of employed survey respondents in Jefferson County (__67%__) report teleworking in some capacity. Of those, __22%__ telework every day and an additional __24%__ telework several days per week.

__35.3% of households and businesses__ reported that they were dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were slow speeds, high prices, and unreliable connections.

More than 4 out of 5 households __(82.8%)__ said they would like to have improved or additional options for home internet service.

Infrastructure
Results

Jefferson County Overview

According to CN Texas broadband data initially released in January 2022, followed by additional public feedback, field validation, and provider input, 99.56% of Jefferson County households have access to broadband of at least 25/3 Mbps, the current definition of broadband set forth by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Broadband service in Jefferson County is distributed throughout the county.

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

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE
QUICK FACTS

Unserved Households (25/3 Mbps) **408**	
Households Served (10/1 Mbps) **99.85%**	
Households Served (25/3 Mbps) **99.56%**	
Households Served (50/5 Mbps) **96.85%**	
Households Served (100/10 Mbps) **96.82%**	

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

PROVIDER	TECHNOLOGY	MAXIMUM DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAXIMUM UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
Astound Broadband (EnTouch)	Fiber	1000	1000
	Cable	115	20
AT&T Southwest	Fiber	1000	1000
	DSL	18	1.5
	Fixed Wireless	10	1
Cameron Communications	DSL	25	3
Internet Management Services	Fiber	1000	1000
NDemand	Fixed Wireless	10	3
Rise Broadband	Fixed Wireless	15	3
Southern Broadband (Rural Telecommunication of America)	Fiber	1000	1000
	Fixed Wireless	36	12
Sparklight	Cable	1000	50
Spectrum (Charter)	Cable	940	35
Synkro	Fixed Wireless	20	2
Texas Windstream Inc. (Windstream)	Fiber	1000	1000
	DSL	200	200
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	25	3

Jefferson County Overview

This page presents Jefferson County's (25/3 Mbps) map. To access the full map, go to https://connectednation.org/texas/county-maps/ and select Jefferson County from the list.

Portions of the county are served by internet service providers (ISPs) offering slower advertised speeds, and those areas are not shown on this map.

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

To access the map as a PDF, click here.
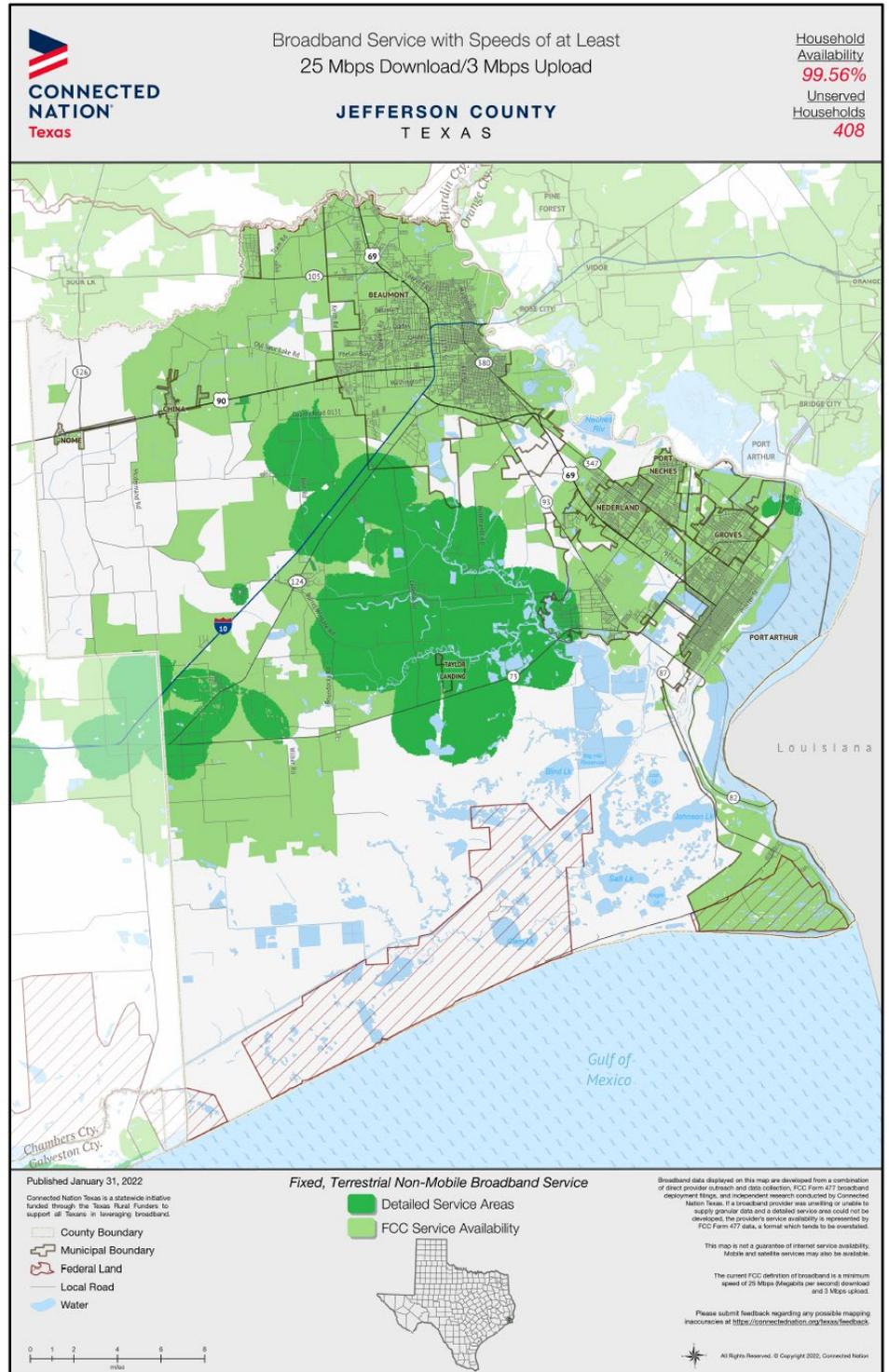

Broadband data published by CN Texas in 2022:
https://connectednation.org/texas/mapping-analysis/

Household Survey
Results

Household
Survey Results

The following section provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Jefferson County between February and April 2022. Altogether, CN Texas received 1,274 completed surveys from households across the county; respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity or lack thereof. Data from Jefferson County are compared to data from hundreds of other rural Connected communities that participated in the program across Michigan, Ohio, and Texas to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

Home Broadband Adoption

Legend:
- Fixed
- Non-Fixed
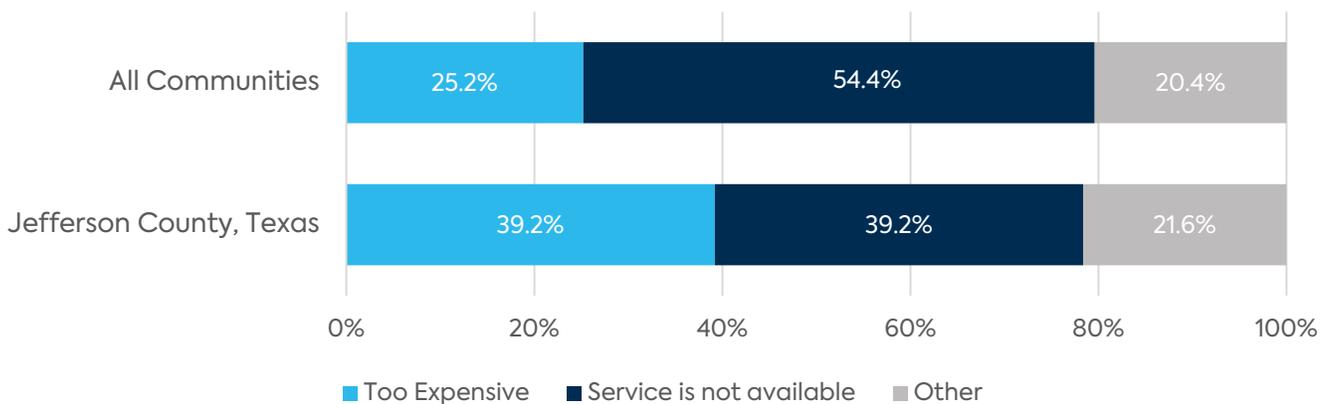- No Connection
- Other
- Unsure or No Response
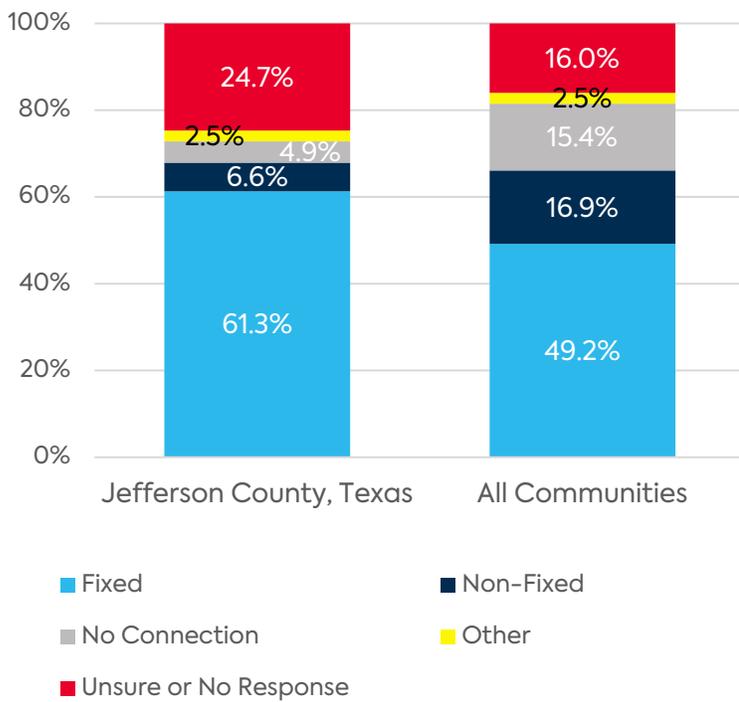
ADOPTION

In Jefferson County, 61.3% of households that took the survey subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology, while 6.6% indicate they have internet service delivered via dial-up, satellite, or a mobile wireless service. This leaves 4.9% without internet and 24.7% of survey respondents unsure of what service they have.

Among those without a home internet connection, 39.2% said they did not have broadband because it was too expensive. An additional 39.2% say service is not available.

Primary Barrier

Legend:
- Too Expensive
- Service is not available
- Other

Household Survey Results
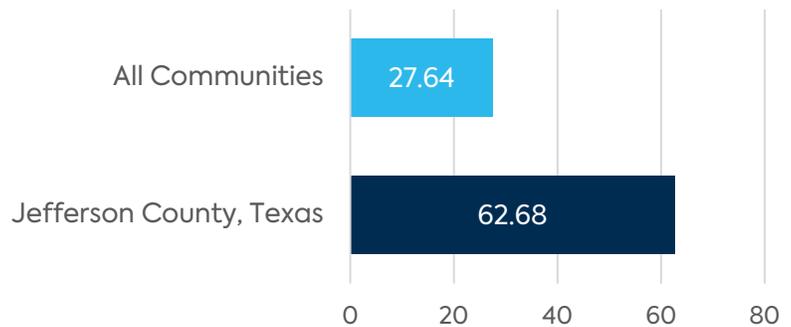
CONNECTION DETAILS

Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that, on average, their internet connection costs about $76.77 per month. This is slightly lower than the monthly cost paid in other communities ($77.76). Two percent of the median household income in Jefferson County is $84.73 per month.
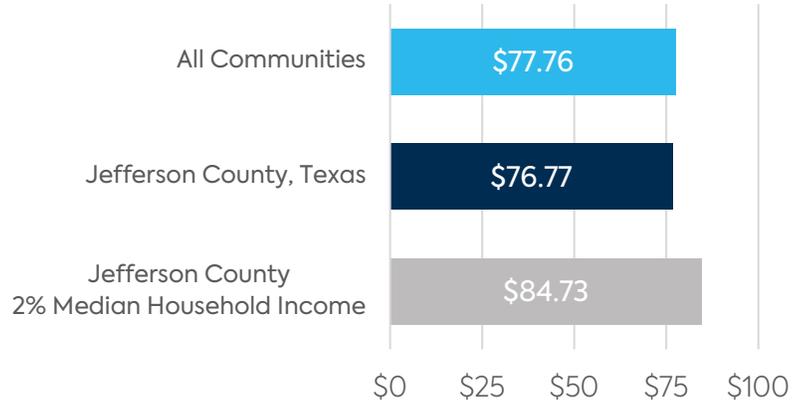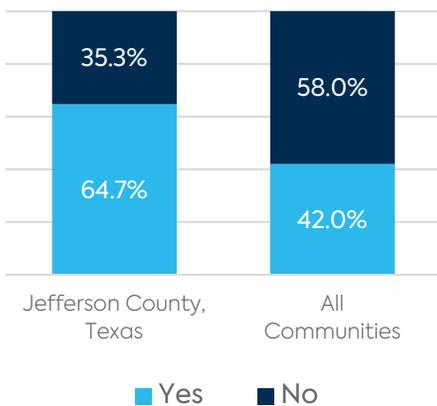
The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 25 Mbps and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps. On average, respondents indicate that their connection's download speed is 62.68 Mbps, which is 150.7% above the minimum defined speed.
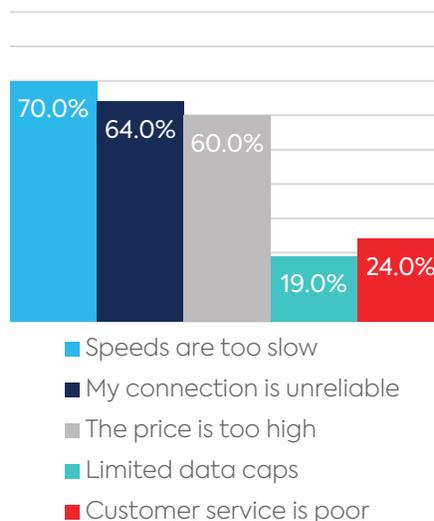
Average Monthly Cost
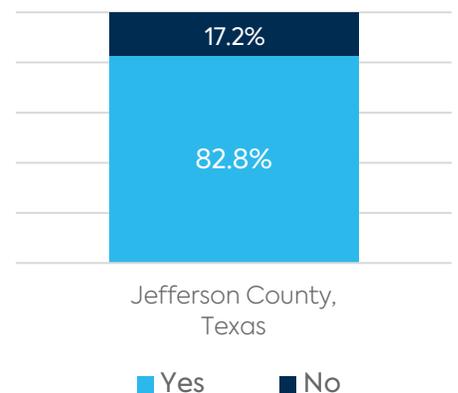
All Communities	$77.76
Jefferson County, Texas	$76.77
Jefferson County 2% Median Household Income	$84.73

$0 $25 $50 $75 $100

Average Speeds (Mbps)

All Communities	27.64
Jefferson County, Texas	62.68

0   20   40   60   80

Does Your Internet Meet Your Needs?

Jefferson County, Texas: No 35.3%, Yes 64.7%
All Communities: No 58.0%, Yes 42.0%

■ Yes   ■ No

Why Doesn't Your Internet Meet Your Needs?

- Speeds are too slow: 70.0%
- My connection is unreliable: 64.0%
- The price is too high: 60.0%
- Limited data caps: 19.0%
- Customer service is poor: 24.0%

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

Are You Interested in More Choices at Home?

Jefferson County, Texas: No 17.2%, Yes 82.8%

■ Yes   ■ No

Household Survey Results

Competition provides residents with choices for service, allowing households the ability to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. Nearly 2 out of 3 responding households (64.7%) indicate that their internet connection meets their needs. This is a much higher rate of satisfaction than among households in other communities (42.0%).

When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 70% of dissatisfied households indicate that their speed is too slow, 64% say their connections are unreliable, and 60% indicate that the price is too high. Respondents could choose more than one reason for dissatisfaction.

Finally, more than 4 out of 5 (82.8%) indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

A little less than 7 out of 10 (69.2 %) households reported that they subscribe to mobile internet service, which they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is nearly identical to what is reported in other Connected communities (70.7%).

Additionally, 20.9% of mobile-connected households report that they either rely on those mobile connections as their primary source of home internet connectivity or use mobile service to connect other household devices to the internet.

Households Subscribing to Mobile Internet Service

	Jefferson County, Texas	All Communities
No	30.8%	29.3%
Yes	69.2%	70.7%

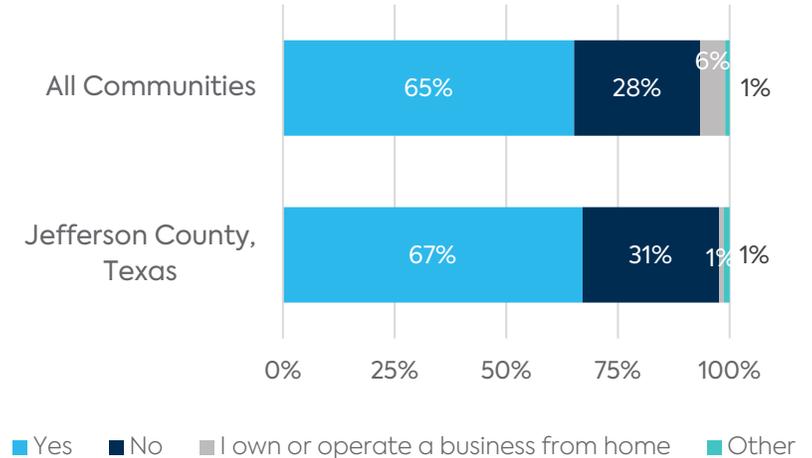■ Yes ■ No
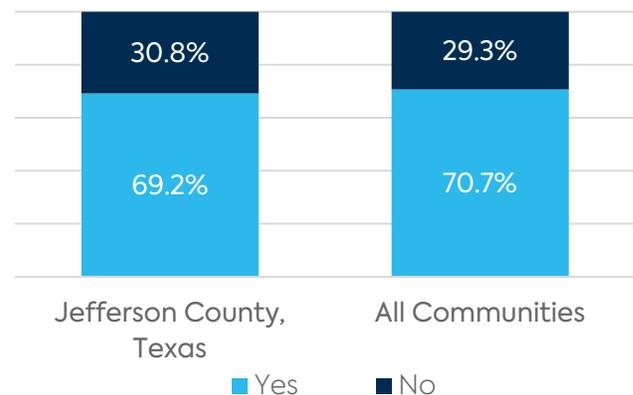
Household Survey Results

TELEWORK

Teleworking, or telecommuting, refers to working outside of the conventional workplace by way of telecommunications or computer-based technology. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many organizations to allow their staff to telework.
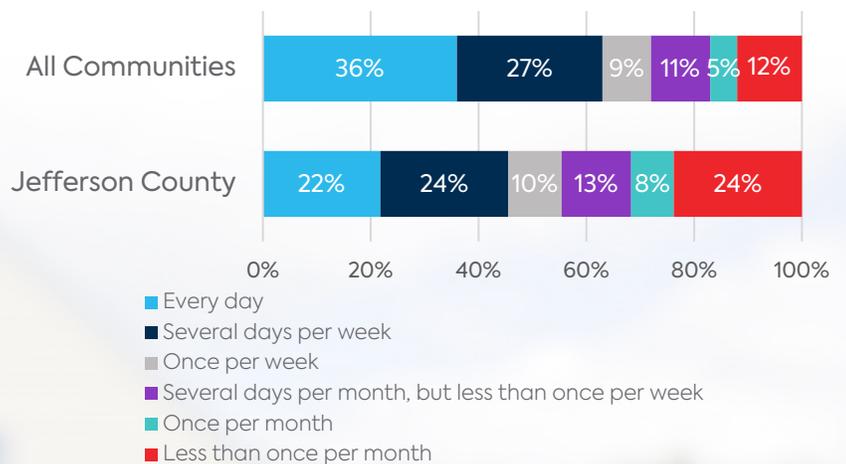
Teleworking is quickly becoming a critical part of growing a local economy because it represents an opportunity to attract and retain employees even when employees are not located in the same community as their employers. However, this only works if those employees have access to advanced broadband infrastructure.

Approximately 67% of employed respondents in Jefferson County telework in some capacity. More than 1 out of 5 (22% of this group) telework every day.

Do You Currently Telework?

	Yes	No	I own or operate a business from home	Other
All Communities	65%	28%	6%	1%
Jefferson County, Texas	67%	31%	1%	1%

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	36%	27%	9%	11%	5%	12%
Jefferson County	22%	24%	10%	13%	8%	24%

Recommendations

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

Jefferson County survey results illustrate a community with higher-than-average internet speeds, adoption rates, device ownership, and service satisfaction with its internet service. Looking long-term, Jefferson County should capitalize on state and federal funding opportunities, public-private partnerships, and local leadership to bring quality programs to residents, businesses, and community institutions that will boost economic growth, business retention, workforce and community development, academic achievement, public safety preparedness, and health care advancements. Equipped with survey data highlighting the internet needs and wants of residents, the county can develop near- and long-term plans to address the findings. Although barriers to access, adoption, and usage will need to be addressed, Jefferson County is positioned to bridge the Digital Divide for all residents and businesses within the county.

Goal 1: Establish central leadership in Jefferson County as a tool for economic advancement and community development

Objective:

Establish a permanent broadband team in Jefferson County that can serve as the go-to point of contact for questions, meetings, and projects.

From February to April 2022, the Jefferson County Broadband Team, in partnership with Connected Nation Texas (CN Texas), collected surveys across nine community sectors to assess the connectivity, affordability, and general technology needs of Jefferson County residents. The local broadband team, led by County Judge Jeff Branick and his assistant, Fred Jackson, brought together community stakeholders spanning education, government, health care, business, and technology. With the once-in-a-generation infusion of money coming from the federal and state governments, it is paramount that Jefferson County establishes a permanent broadband team to: 1.) ensure the work completed as part of this community engagement is carried forth, and 2.) the community is staying on top of state, local, and federal broadband happenings.

Actions:

Action 1 – **Create a permanent Jefferson County Broadband Team made up of leaders from each community sector.** Jefferson County should establish a local network of leaders who are passionate about improving broadband throughout the community. A standing group of leaders are already active in the broadband space; it's simply a matter of making it

official. This will be especially important as grant opportunities arise. This group should function as an overseer of broadband progress and engage the Jefferson County Commissioners Court, under the leadership of Judge Branick.

The broadband committee should have representation from all community sectors:

- **Health Care:** Local physicians or hospital staff: Victory Medical Center Beaumont, The Medical Center of Southeast Texas, Christus St. Elizabeth Hospital, Memorial Hermann Baptist Beaumont Hospital, Christus Southeast Texas, Christus Dupuis Hospital of Port Arthur, Mid-County Urgent Care, OmniPoint Health Hospital, and others.
- **Government:** County Judge, County Commissioners, Mayors, City Councils, County IT Director.
- **Education (K-12):** Superintendents, School IT Directors: Beaumont ISD, Nederland ISD, Port Neches-Groves ISD, Hamshire-Fannett ISD, Port Arthur ISD, Sabine Pass ISD, private and charter schools.
- **Education (Higher Education):** Lamar University, Grace School of Theology, College of Education and Human Development, and others.
- **Public Safety:** Sheriff's Office, Police and Fire Departments, Emergency Management.
- **Agriculture:** County Ag Agent, leading agriculture producers.
- **Business:** Local chambers of commerce and economic development centers.
- **Nonprofits and Community Organizations:** Beaumont Public Library System's six branches (Beaumont Public Library, R.C. Miller Library, Elmo Willard Library, Theodore Johns Library, Tyrrell Historical Library, and Maurine Gray Literacy Center) Jefferson County Library, Effie & Wilton Hebert Public Library, Marion & Ed Hughes Public Library, and Port Arthur Public Library – American Red Cross Gulf Coast Region.
- **Community at Large:** A resident who is interested in furthering the broadband agenda of Jefferson County.

Action 1A – Determine the ongoing responsibilities of the Broadband Team. Taking the local committee with specific duties will help ensure its long-term success.

The responsibilities of the team should include:

- Staying up to date on state and federal broadband legislation.
- Applying for applicable state and federal grant programs.
  Ensuring digital engagement in Jefferson County in all community sectors (telehealth, telework, online learning, Wi-Fi in businesses, etc.).
- Attending workshops, webinars, meetings, and general training that discuss broadband specifically and telecommunications generally.

- Providing digital literacy and digital skills assistance to the community's at-risk populations.
- Participating in regular meetings. The team should meet at least once a month. Meetings can be held virtually, in person, or in a hybrid capacity to accommodate members' needs. These meetings should provide updates on community activities, allow time for guest speakers and presentations, and offer an open forum for discussion about broadband advancements in Jefferson County.

Action 2 – **Create a technology portal/website to promote local broadband resources**. The website should serve as a one-stop resource guide for broadband providers, community residents, and local leaders. The website should include resources related to digital literacy, digital skills, reduced-cost broadband offerings in the county, public-computing centers, and other relevant information for residents and internet service providers (ISPs).

Action 3 – **Track state and national broadband policies.** The Broadband Team should remain informed and up to date on any publications, events, and policy briefs published by (1.) the Governor's Broadband Development Council ([GBDC](#)) and (2.) the Broadband Development Office ([BDO](#)). The team should coordinate ongoing community outreach efforts and initiatives in accordance with the long-term objectives of the aforementioned entities. Local broadband teams should mirror the successes and objectives laid out by the state of Texas. Taking advantage of federal and state funding as it becomes available will position Jefferson County to increase digital opportunities for all its residents.

Responsible Parties:

Community anchor institutions: libraries, schools, businesses, nonprofits, etc.; internet service providers; local units of government; residents

Timeline:

Begin building out the network to include other interested community contacts within the next three months.

Resources:

[Municipal Boards: Best Practices for Adoption Technology](#)

[Smart Cities Readiness Guide](#)

[Texas Broadband Providers by County](#)

Becoming Broadband Ready

How states are expanding broadband access: New research identifies tactics for connecting unserved communities

Connected Nation: What we do for you

BroadbandUSA: Federal Funding Guide

Letter: Do your part on broadband

Guide to Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities in the U.S.

Goal 2: Increase broadband speeds for all Jefferson County residents.

Objective:

Secure 100x20 Mbps connectivity for all Jefferson County residents, in partnership with broadband providers and community stakeholders.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines broadband as a minimum of 25 Mbps download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed. Jefferson County residents reported their average download speed to be 62.68 Mbps. While this is over the federal standard, this speed only supports about five to seven devices at a time. For multiperson homes reliant on multiple digital devices, including Smart TVs, gaming consoles, laptops, and cellphones, five to seven is a relatively small (and limiting) number. With telework, telehealth, school from home, online gaming, and TV streaming, the need for a fast and reliable home internet connection is in high demand. The good news is, many new funding programs are requiring providers to build at speeds of at least 100x20 in areas where they accept grant money. This greater threshold provides for more connected devices at a single time, which means greater digital opportunities. To attract businesses, retain skilled workers, and encourage community and economic development, Jefferson County should bring at least 100 Mbps connections to all community institutions, ensuring quality internet for all.

Actions:

Action 1 – __Review current and planned broadband deployments in the county.__ The first step to increasing broadband speeds across Jefferson County is meeting with local broadband providers, including those who have been allocated funding through the FCC Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction, to determine the community's infrastructure needs (i.e., what needs to be updated or replaced, what are the costs, what are the

obstacles). Two conversations between ISPs and the county have already taken place – on February 3 with Charter Communications, and March 22 with Resound Networks. As new funding sources become available, the county should communicate regularly with providers to determine the best use of the funds, and the areas that will benefit the most from improved (or new) infrastructure.

RDOF Phase I Winners:
- Charter: 2,807 locations ($449,239)
- LTD Broadband: six locations ($30,448)
- Resound Networks LLC: 136 Locations ($426,555)

Providers in Jefferson County (Data published January 31, 2022, CN Texas):
- En-Touch
- AT&T
- Cameron Telephone Co.
- Internet Management Services
- Ndemand
- Rise Broadband
- Southern Broadband
- Rural Telecommunications of America
- Cable One - Sparklight
- Charter
- LocalLoop - Synkro
- Windstream
- T-Mobile

Action 1A – Provide survey results and interactive map to providers. When meeting with providers, it is important to share the results of the survey and provide an overview of the interactive map. More than one-third of residents who do not subscribe to internet service (39.2%) said it was because the service was too expensive. This highlights the need for affordable options in Jefferson County. Of those who do subscribe to the internet, 35.3% said their current service plan does not meet their needs. This granular, local data paints a unique picture that should be used to enrich the quality, type, and location of services offered throughout the community.

Action 2 – Consider public–private partnerships. Public-private partnerships (P3s) take many forms, depending on the needs and resources of each community. The strength of these partnerships is that each party brings something important to the table that the other lacks or cannot easily acquire. For example, Jefferson County can offer assets (publicly owned buildings, light poles, towers, and other vertical assets for mounting fixed wireless or wirelines infrastructure) for the deployment of a network, as well as guaranteeing committed anchor tenants and possible funding sources.

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

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

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

Action 2A – **Strategize to attract profitable partnerships and maximize grant opportunities.** When seeking out ISPs to partner with, think long-term. The landmark Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, signed into law in November 2021, promises $65 billion for broadband. These funds will be used in a variety of ways, but the biggest chunk of money is designated for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD). BEAD funding will be allocated to states, which will then be responsible for doling it out according to a set plan. As Jefferson County plans for the use of these funds, it's important to consider reliable partners, matching funds, and long-term technology solutions. Additional commentary from technology and policy experts has been linked in the resource section below.

Action 3 – **Prepare sample grant applications and supporting documents for upcoming funding opportunities**. Jefferson County should monitor funding sources at the state and federal levels that promise money for broadband expansion and improvement projects. Application windows are historically very brief and application reviews very competitive, thus making it very important for communities, especially rural ones, to have smart, well-written applications with supporting data ready to go. It's not only important to be prepared in advance of an application, but it's important to prioritize forward and long-term thinking when applying for funding. Jefferson County residents will continue to need broadband for telehealth, telework, communication, public safety, and entertainment. As demand rises, infrastructure will need to support varied and broad uses.

Funding sources include:
- The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
  o A minimum of $100 million will be allocated to the state of Texas, with current estimates of $2 billion to $3 billion in federal funding headed to Texas. The state is responsible for developing and distributing these funds.
- Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

- o The U.S. Treasury Department issued its Final Rule on January 6, 2022, expanding the use of funds for broadband.
  - Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CPF)
    - o Under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the CPF provides $10 billion to eligible governments to carry out critical capital projects that directly enable work, education, and health monitoring. Texas was allocated $500.5 million, and the Broadband Development Office (BDO) plans to open a competitive grant program with a majority of these dollars this fall. More information can be found on the BDO's website (linked below). A recent publication that can help answer questions about the CPF is available [here](#).

Action 3A – <u>**Identify a grant writer to help ensure funding opportunities are not missed.**</u> As previously mentioned, grant application windows are short and review processes competitive, thus Jefferson County needs to work with a reliable and trusted grant writer who can accurately capture the needs and wants of Jefferson County residents, businesses, and community leaders in writing. Grant writing duties may be an expense that can be shared with neighboring counties, or with a regional entity. Hardin, Orange, Jasper, and Jefferson Counties are part of the South East Texas Regional Planning Commission (SETRPC), and this may present an opportunity to share a grant writer amongst the counties.

Responsible Parties:

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

Timeline:

Jefferson County leaders should begin meeting with broadband providers within three months of receiving this plan. Increasing broadband speeds will increase the number of opportunities (economic opportunities, digital learning opportunities, etc....) for residents, businesses, educators, and community leaders. Leadership should meet with neighboring counties and SETRPC to discuss grant writing partnerships within the same timeframe.

Resources:

[The push to expand rural broadband expands across state government](#)

[How much internet speed do I need?](#)

[US Telecom: Preparing your Community for Broadband Success](#)

[The era of the broadband public-private partnership: New trends and opportunities in the wake of COVID-19](#)

[For full effect, broadband expansion will require cooperation](#)

[Texas Broadband Development Office: Funding Resources](#)

[U.S. Department of the Treasury: Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds](#)

[EDA: Economic Adjustment Assistance](#)

[Current Broadband Funding](#)

[Texas Broadband Providers by County](#)

[Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds](#)

[Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, County Allocation](#)

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

[Auction 904: Rural Digital Opportunity Fund](#)

[FCC: First RDOF Default Public Notice](#)

[The BEAD Grant Dilemma](#)

[South East Texas Regional Planning Commission](#)

Goal 3: Curate workforce development and digital literacy curriculum for local use to expand economic opportunities for Jefferson County residents

Objective:

The Jefferson County Broadband Committee should partner with local stakeholders to hold community workshops on workforce development and digital literacy.

Digital literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information. It requires both cognitive and technical

skills. In answering digital literacy questions on the CN Texas residential survey, responses ranged from "I need to learn" to "I know a little" to "I'm comfortable with this." Businesses in Jefferson County reported that their workforce needs nearly 1 in 4 employees (24%) to have advanced technological skills. In addition, 1 in 6 businesses (16.7%) say that their current workforce meets their technology needs poorly or only fairly well. In fact, nearly 2 out of 3 Jefferson County businesses (62.5%) consider technology training very important for their employees, suggesting the need for a workforce with cutting-edge technology skills. Ultimately, technology skills are paramount to competitiveness in the workforce, community development in a digital society, and general quality of life (i.e., telehealth, telework).

The Jefferson County Broadband Team should create a digital readiness program for its residents. The program should cover telework basics and equip participants with skills necessary for landing a job (i.e., resume building, interview skills). This program should include digital skills, digital literacy, and a workforce development curriculum and extend to all Jefferson County residents.

Actions:

Action 1 – **Look to other communities for examples.** Organizations across the state and the country have worked tirelessly during the pandemic to bridge the Digital Divide, specifically as it relates to digital literacy. Examples include the Orleans Digital Literacy Initiative in Buffalo, N.Y.; Digital Literacy Coaches and Navigator Program in Wisconsin; Opportunity Las Cruces with the local Economic Development Department and Workforce Development and Career Center; digital literacy certification and computer training in Plainfield, N.J.; and Senior Connect in Austin, Texas. Each of these programs is unique, but the underlying current is their drive to provide digital training and support to the community (for free). The hope is that residents will be able to use the internet with greater ease and confidence after engaging with one of these local initiatives. To learn more, please reference the links in the resource section below.

Developing curriculum for workforce development and digital literacy courses is underway across Texas and the country. It's likely that organizations in Jefferson County already have a basic curriculum prepared for such workshops. For example, The Southeast Texas Workforce Development Board, dba [Workforce Solutions Southeast Texas](#), is based in Port Arthur. Its mission is the equip Southeast Texas with the skills and knowledge that meet the needs of employers to foster the region's economic growth. This organization includes neighboring counties, such as Hardin and Orange, and could host digital training skills classes.

Action 2 – **Partner with community stakeholders for workshop execution**. Industry leaders can speak to the importance of broadband in their line of work, as well as discuss its myriad uses. A banker can discuss the benefits of online banking while a school IT director can discuss the importance of online safety. Jefferson County already has the resources in terms of both

personnel and curriculum to deliver quality programs to the community.

Community partners:
- American Red Cross Texas Gulf Coast Region
- Workforce Solutions of Southeast Texas (Port Arthur)
- Chambers of Commerce: Greater Beaumont COC, Greater Port Arthur COC, Groves COC, Nederland COC, Port Neches COC
- Libraries: Beaumont Public Library System (Beaumont Public Library, R.C. Miller Library, Elmo Willard Library, Theodore Johns Library, Tyrrell Historical Library, and Maurine Gray Literacy Center), Jefferson County Library, Effie & Wilton Hebert Public Library, Marion & Ed Hughes Public Library, and Port Arthur Public Library
- Communities in Schools Southeast Texas

Workshop topics to consider:

- **Introduction to Microsoft Office Suite** – Employers report that 16.7% of their workers are poorly to fairly well trained to match the organization's technology needs.
  - o **About**: Train employees on the basics of Microsoft Office Suite, given its ubiquitous use in companies/industries.
  - o **Who**: Chambers of Commerce

- **How to Teleconference** – 67% of employed survey participants telework, leaving more than 30% who do not.
  - o **About**: What is telework, and why is it appealing for employees and employers?
  - o **Who:** Chambers of Commerce

- **Introduction to Social Media and Websites** –The survey reports that 18.2% of businesses do not have a website, and a high percentage of businesses do not use various digital communications tools to interact with their community.
  - o **About:** How can an online presence help businesses grow and improve productivity?
  - o **Who:** Chambers of Commerce

- **Telehealth 101** – Access to quality health care is essential, and new technology offers greater access to health care providers via the internet.
  - o **About**: Discuss terminology commonly associated with telemedicine and the benefits of virtual health care.
  - o **Who**: Local hospital/medical professionals

- <u>**Online Safety Tips and Tricks**</u> – Residents indicated they "know a little" to "I'm comfortable with this" when referring to cybersecurity on the internet.
  - o <u>**About**</u>: Being safe on the internet should be a priority for all. Discuss how to keep you, your family, and your information safe online.
  - o <u>**Who**</u>: Jefferson County Police or Sheriff's Department

- <u>**Effective Online Learning and Teaching Strategies**</u> – In Jefferson County, K-12 schools report that 31.8% of classroom instruction is blended and online learning. Effective teaching and learning techniques are key.
  - o <u>**About**</u>: Discuss what teachers and students can do to maximize the benefits of online learning.
  - o <u>**Who:**</u> Beaumont ISD, Nederland ISD, Port Neches-Groves ISD, Hamshire-Fannett ISD, Port Artur ISD, Sabine Pass ISD, private and charter schools, and Communities in School Southeast Texas

Responsible Parties:

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

Timeline:

Digital literacy and workforce development programs are important in the here and now. Classes should be offered by Fall 2022. The curriculum should be reviewed and updated every three to four months.

Resources:

[Improving the Quality of Life in Rural America with Broadband Internet](#)

[Implementing Productive Teleworking with Business-Quality Mobile Communications](#)

[Texas Broadband Providers by County](#)

[The complete guide to digital skills](#)

[AARP Joins with Nonprofit to Teach Tech to Older Adults](#)

[Digital Learn: Use a computer to do almost anything!](#)

Recommendations

Grow with Google

GCFLearnFree.org® program

National Digital Inclusion Alliance

5 Reasons Why Libraries are Essential to Have

First-Ever National Study: Millions of People Rely on Library Computers for Employment, Health, and Education (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation)

Senior Connect: Connecting Seniors in Central Texas

Plainfield Public Library to Offer Computer Literacy Training

Closing the digital skills gap: Opportunity Las Cruces

Eau Claire County: County Stars free digital literacy program

It Takes a Village: Solving the Broadband Adoption Problem in Rural America

FCC Chairwoman Rosenworcel responds to Rep. Mrvan on improving veterans access to broadband

Orleans County Digital Literacy Initiative

Mobile Computer Labs, Classrooms Bring STEM to rural schools

American Red Cross Texas Gulf Coast Region

Workforce Solutions Southeast Texas

Goal 4: Pursue regional planning opportunities with other forward-thinking and broadband-inclusive communities

Objective:

Broadband is a shared interest in the region. The neighboring counties should support each other, share ideas, and work together to provide broadband for all and close the Digital Divide.

Actions:

Action 1 – <u>Host broadband meetings with regional stakeholders</u>. Boasting a population of more than 250,000, with high-quality hospitals, universities, and active businesses, including the Port of Port Arthur, as well as a young demographic, Jefferson County is a hub of activity in the region. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median age in Jefferson County is 36.5. With once-in-a-lifetime levels of funding allocated for broadband in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), it is important to think regionally. Just as it is important for Jefferson County to have improved connectivity, neighboring communities must also be connected. There is power and value in community partnerships — especially when those communities share Texas values.

All surrounding counties, including Jasper, Hardin, and Orange counties, have received funding to complete similar community broadband assessments. After all the engagements are complete, communities will be able to compare data findings, discuss outreach strategies, and share tips and tricks for improving broadband, based on shared interests and experiences.

Responsible Parties:

The broadband committee, the County Judge, and commissioners.

Timeline:

Collaborating with forward thinking broadband communities should start within three months of accepting this plan.

Goal 5: Increase broadband adoption among Jefferson County residents by providing and promoting low- and reduced-cost internet plans and subsidy programs

Objective:

Increase the adoption and use of broadband and related technologies by the residents of Jefferson

County.

Broadband adoption is critical for increasing the digital capacity of a community, and is essential for empowering communities and individuals. It not only refers to a subscription to a service provider, but it also refers to the daily use of the internet. It requires the basic skills and access to a personal device that enables an individual to accomplish basic tasks. The leading barriers to broadband adoption, in areas where access is not an issue, are affordability, lack of digital skills, and lack of awareness. Therefore, it is imperative for project plans to reflect programs that can help overcome barriers to adoption.

In the household survey, about 39% of households that do not have internet stated cost was a barrier. Internet costs that are above 2% of monthly income is considered a cost burden. The cost barrier can be further explained by the poverty rate in the county — 18%.

Action 1 – **Promote programs that help residents overcome the affordability barrier to broadband adoption.** Jefferson County should work with community leaders and institutions to publicly promote programs and opportunities designed to reduce the cost of broadband service. This can be done by sending notices out with the water bill, posting notices in the newspaper or monthly school newsletters, discussing programs at Commissioners' Court or City Hall meetings, or advertising affordability programs at frequently visited community buildings and businesses.

Below are some programs and resources that could be promoted to residents:

- **A resource to locate affordable internet service or computers:** Using online resources, Jefferson County residents can identify local and national providers who offer special, low-cost services for vulnerable populations, older adults, and low-income families with children. Such resources include EveryoneOn, which helps residents locate low-cost internet services and affordable computers by ZIP code and need, based on their participation in assistance programs.
- **Information about low-cost internet services offered by providers:** In Jefferson County, AT&T offers the *Access from AT&T* program for $10 per month or less based on the maximum speed available at the subscriber's address, with speeds up to 25Mbps. Spectrum offers *Spectrum Internet Assist* for about $20 a month for up to 30 Mbps. *This is subject to household eligibility and service availability at a specific address. Prices are subject to change, so residents are advised to check with their providers.*
- **State and federal low-cost programs:** Two critical programs offer discounts for broadband to eligible households:
  - o **Lifeline Program:** This is a government assistance program run by the Public Utility Commission of Texas that provides a discount to qualifying low-income customers who subscribe to voice telephone service or broadband internet service. The Lifeline discount for

qualifying low-income customers may be up to $12.75 per month ($3.50 state discount and $9.25 federal Lifeline discount), depending on the services a resident subscribes to and their eligibility. Lifeline service is non-transferable and is limited to one discount per household.

o **The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP):** This program is run by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to help low-income households pay for internet service and connected devices such as a laptop or tablet. The providers offering ACP discounts in Jefferson County include some providers listed on the CN service map: AT&T, Spectrum (Charter Communications Operating, LLC), Sparklight, Rise, Rural Telecommunications of America, En-Touch Systems, and T-Mobile. For a full list of providers that are offering this service, please click here.

Affordable Internet Services Available in Jefferson County

Provider	Program Name	Cost and Features	Eligibility	How to Apply
AT&T	Access from AT&T	• $10/month or less based on the maximum speed available at the address with speeds up to 25 Mbps. • Free installation.	• Households with families on Supplemental Nutritional Access Program (SNAP). • Families on the National School Lunch and Head Start Programs. • Household with income at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines.	For more information, click here, or call 1-855-220-5211 (English) or 1-855-220-5225.
Spectrum	Spectrum Internet Assist	• Approximately $20 • a month. • No data caps, free modem, and free Internet Security Suite protection.	• At least one person in the applying household must participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of the NSLP, or receive Supplemental Security Income (for applicants age 65+ only).	For more information, click here or call (844) 525-1574.

Provider	Program Name	Cost and Features	Eligibility	How to Apply
T–Mobile	Project 10Million	• Free 100GB of internet per year for 5 years. • Free hotspot with free shipping.	• Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) • Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) • Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) • Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) • Medicaid • Head Start • Foster youth, migrant homeless, or runaway youth.	Apply here
State and federal governments	Lifeline	Up to $12.95 discount for broadband service from participating providers ($3.50 state discount and $9.25 federal discount).	At least one person in the household receives: • SNAP Housing Assistance • TANF • SSI • National School Lunch Program • Households with income based at or below 150% and 135% of the federal poverty guidelines for the state and federal discounts, respectively.	Apply online or download the application package and send it by mail.

Recommendations

Provider	Program Name	Cost and Features	Eligibility	How to Apply
Federal government	Affordable Connectivity Program	• Up to a $30/month discount on internet service. • Up to a $75/month discount for households on qualifying tribal lands. • A one-time discount of up to $100 for a laptop, tablet, or desktop computer (with a co-payment of more than $10 but less than $50).	• An income at or below 200% or less than the Federal Poverty Guidelines. • If you or your child or dependent participate in certain government assistance programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, WIC, Pell Grants, SSI, Veterans Pension, Free and Reduced Lunch Program, WIC, Medicaid, or other programs. • If you or your child or dependent already receives a Lifeline benefit.	Contact a participating broadband provider. Apply online. Print an application: English and Spanish (Application instructions).

Responsible Parties:

The director of broadband or the broadband team, County Commissioners, County Judge, local chambers, churches, and providers.

Resources:

The Affordable Connectivity Program is designed to supplement the cost of internet services to households who qualify

Lifeline Program designed to help with monthly phone and internet costs

Ideas to reduce your monthly billing