

**We've all seen over the past year that broadband is no longer a luxury, but a necessity.**

Connected Nation is a national 501c3 organization focused on broadband. We celebrated our 20-year anniversary last month. Our mission is for all Americans (and Texans) to be connected to broadband and to use it and related technologies to improve their lives. We are unique in that we approach broadband from three perspectives: physical access, adoption, and use.

Connected Nation first worked in Texas from 2010 until 2014 during the federal government's State Broadband Initiative. During that time, money was provided to all states and territories for broadband mapping and planning activities. Texas designated Connected Nation to administer this grant in partnership with the Texas Department of Agriculture.

Our statewide program, re-launched in mid-2019, is funded by the Texas Rural Funders, a coalition of funding organizations that works to bring additional attention and resources to rural Texas. We are engaged in broadband data collection --- analysis (which includes public comment and field validation) --- and broadband mapping. We are also leading community engagement and broadband planning initiatives in rural communities across the state. We serve as a neutral educational resource on broadband technologies, public policy initiatives, digital inclusion – and general broadband awareness.

**Today, I'd like to share four state-level broadband best practices that Connected Nation Texas has identified.**

As described by the Pew Charitable Trusts in their 2020 report, state broadband plans define goals and objectives, help guide state investments, provide a baseline against which to measure progress, and provide a framework for local planning efforts. Texas is one of only six states without such a plan. Connected Nation Texas believes strong state broadband plans are developed with thorough multi-sector stakeholder engagement and include goals and metrics that are revisited often.

In May of 2020, Pew reported that nearly three quarters of states have created a dedicated broadband office. State broadband offices serve as a neutral resource for community leaders, broadband providers, and residents --- implement state broadband plans --- and administer broadband development programs. Connected Nation Texas believes the existence of a state broadband office demonstrates the state's commitment to connectivity.

Research published in 2020 by Drs. Brian Whitacre and Roberto Gallardo found that state-level funding programs increase general broadband availability by 1-2 percentage points. Connected Nation Texas believes state-level funding programs positively complement existing dollars from federal initiatives, particularly in high-cost areas.

All three of these state-level broadband best practices require good data. Current FCC broadband data has proven to be so flawed that an overwhelming majority of states either have their own broadband mapping programs or participate in the NTIA's National Broadband Availability Map. States that have their own mapping programs have been able to gather and publish more granular data in a timely manner while also being able to verify collected data through on-the-ground verification. Granular, current, and validated data leads to improved research capabilities and overall better planning, program implementation, and targeted, responsible distribution of funds and resources.

**I appreciate the time you've given me today and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.**