

BROADBAND ACCESS STRATEGY OVERVIEW



T.L.L. TEMPLE FOUNDATION
EST. 1962
BUILDING A THRIVING RURAL EAST TEXAS

OBJECTIVE

Broadband connectivity is improved, propelling economic opportunity and building thriving rural East Texas communities.

CHALLENGE

Access to broadband internet is necessary to fully participate in 21st century American life. Broadband connects people to healthcare, education, economic opportunity, social and civic engagement, commerce, and entertainment opportunities. However, for many rural East Texans, reliable broadband is either not available or not affordable. In the Deep East Texas region, for example, more than half of the zip codes do not have broadband.¹ Many East Texas counties have broadband available to no more than 50% of households, with one county having broadband availability as low as 18% of households.² East Texans who do have internet on average pay 400% more per megabit than their urban peers.³ The economic, health, and education consequences for rural counties without broadband are severe, interconnected, and perpetuating. Limited broadband also constrains economic growth, cutting off business productivity and employment opportunities. Lack of reliable internet access is also a strong predictor of childhood poverty and causes rural population loss.⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the importance of digital technologies and services, including remote workers trying to join video conferences, students struggling to participate in online course work, and patients seeking virtual doctor visits through telehealth portals. Because rural areas disproportionately lack access to high-speed internet, the consequences of the digital divide have been exacerbated for East Texans.

OPPORTUNITY

Increasing broadband access, affordability, and adoption has become a clear priority for communities across rural East Texas. The projected economic impact of increased broadband access and adoption is massive: in 12 Deep East Texas counties it would result in more than 10,000 new jobs and \$1.4 billion in added GDP over a 10-year period. With affordable access, rural East Texans will be able to fully participate in civic engagement, earn online education credentials, and remotely access healthcare through telemedicine.

Activities to improve rural broadband connectivity are well underway in East Texas. Technical specialists are collaborating with local leaders to conduct market and network analyses, develop engineering plans, and pursue resources to build regional broadband infrastructure. Counties across East Texas are surveying rural residents and leaders in key sectors like business, healthcare, and education to create community

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¹ <https://www.detcog.gov/broadband>

² https://connectednation.org/texas/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2020/07/TX_Broadband_AvailabilitybyCounty_25x3Mbps_2020_07_31.pdf

³ <https://www.detcog.gov/broadband>

⁴ <https://www.bbcmag.com/community-broadband/lack-of-broadband-access-linked-to-childhood-poverty>

technology actions plans to achieve greater rural broadband access and adoption. Renewed data collection initiatives are generating more precise rural broadband access and usage data, and partners across the state are advocating for policies that prioritize and support rural broadband connectivity. Broadband is a critical 21st century infrastructure, and delivering broad, equitable access will transform the future of rural East Texas.

STRATEGY

The T.L.L. Temple Foundation is implementing a targeted strategy to improve broadband connectivity to propel economic opportunity and build thriving rural East Texas communities. The Foundation will invest in regional data collection, analysis, and planning necessary to secure state and federal resources required to build broadband infrastructure at scale across East Texas. At the county-level, the Foundation will support locally led efforts to improve rural broadband access and adoption. Across all activities there will be an emphasis on investing in data to better understand the availability, usage, and benefits of broadband and provide decision makers with information and ideas to improve rural East Texas broadband access.

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FOCUS AREAS

- **Leverage Capacity:** Support rural communities to access local, state, and federal resources to improve broadband connectivity
 - Strengthen regional capacity to secure the resources to develop broadband infrastructure at scale across East Texas
- **Community Support:** Enable partners to provide services that improve rural communities’ capacity to plan, develop, and improve broadband infrastructure and increase connectivity
 - Engage rural communities in strategic planning to improve broadband access and usage
 - Strengthen locally-led efforts to improve broadband access and usage across rural East Texas
- **Advocacy:** Fund partners to provide data, studies, and information for legislative and agency action to improve broadband connectivity
 - Invest in data to better understand the availability, usage, and benefits of rural East Texas broadband
 - Provide key decision makers with information and ideas to improve rural East Texas broadband access

MONITORING PROGRESS

To ensure that we are accelerating change and achieving results, the foundation is monitoring broadband access, affordability, and adoption:

- By geography: In counties participating in project investments, in our service area, and in Texas
- By socio-economic status, race, and gender.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information about T.L.L. Temple Foundation or about this strategy, please refer to our website tlltemple.foundation or call **936-634-3900**.