



Strengthening Broadband in Our Communities

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WISE COUNTY, TEXAS

Some Perspective

- ▶ Wise County, Texas, is a county of approx. 70,000, adjacent to Fort Worth/Tarrant County
- ▶ 923 square miles, largely rural, agricultural history; limestone mining
- ▶ Proximity to DFW Metroplex is causing rapid growth in residential sector/housing subdivisions
- ▶ Broadband development has not kept up with modern demands/needs, especially as growth accelerates
- ▶ Currently serving second term as Chair of the National Association of Counties' Telecommunications and Technology Steering Committee
- ▶ Also serving as Co-Chair of NACo's Broadband Task Force

Why is everyone talking about broadband?

- ▶ It is not a new topic, but it has become a near-universally American topic.
- ▶ 2020 pandemic exposed widespread connectivity issues from rural communities to urban communities.
- ▶ People were forced to experience and think about broadband in entirely different framework.
- ▶ It touches every aspect of our lives: local economy, public safety, healthcare, education, public safety, elections, court systems, and quality of life.

T&T Resources

- ▶ NACo's T&T steering committee is a group of county officials working to understand and advocate for/against policies, legislation, and regulations that will help/hurt broadband expansion in our communities.
- ▶ The "TestIt" App is a GREAT tool to engage citizens.
- ▶ "True State of Connectivity" Report should be required reading for anyone seeking to understand the basis of broadband concerns.
- ▶ Naco.org/broadband

Broadband Task Force

- ▶ To elevate the broadband issues, NACo President Gary Moore created the Broadband Task Force.
- ▶ Comprised entirely of county officials, with an advisory council of industry partners
- ▶ Split into 4 subcommittees: Preparing for Broadband, Barriers to Buildout, The Digital Divide, and Future-Proofing.
- ▶ Each sub discussed in-depth those issue areas and developed short/intermediate/long-term goals
- ▶ We then found intersecting issues and began working through those.
- ▶ Final product will be two-fold: best practices toolkit/clearinghouse for county officials, and a policy recommendation report.

What does ARP say about broadband?

- ▶ Broadband is a clear eligible expense (and priority) in the American Rescue Plan funding sent directly to counties.
- ▶ Flexibility for different types of broadband investments
- ▶ Funds may be used to make broadband investments aimed at “unserved or underserved” communities- defined as 25 Mbps down/3 Mbps up
- ▶ Eligible projects are intended to meet/exceed upload/download speeds of 100Mbps.

Things to Remember about Broadband

- ▶ Broadband is not one size fits all.
- ▶ Everyone is starting from a different situation.
- ▶ Geographical barriers, economic barriers, regulatory barriers
- ▶ What is realistic for your community/county? Fiber? Wireless? Combo?
- ▶ Don't ignore emerging technologies.
- ▶ You don't have to be an expert or a provider! Seek out partners.
- ▶ Don't get in a hurry: funds must be allocated by Dec. 2024 and completed by 2026.