

BACKGROUND

Since 2007, Connected Tennessee collaborated with the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (ECD) for the purpose of benchmarking the state's broadband availability and usage. With program staff already in place, staff continued to serve as a broadband resource for state stakeholders as a function of the SBI grant program. Support provided to stakeholders has varied based on the specific stakeholder group and need, but Connected Tennessee has been able to share its resources and expertise in an effort to improve the broadband landscape across the state. The number of stakeholders supported is vast and includes ECD, Tennessee Valley Authority, LaunchTN, the Connected Tennessee Steering Committee, Nashville Technology Council, Greater Memphis IT Council, United States Department of Agriculture, elected officials, and many more.

The program office, established in Nashville, served as a go-to resource and primary champion of broadband as it related to adoption, access, and use within the state. Updates were provided to program partners and stakeholders throughout the state through direct interactions, addressing requests for information or data, and raising awareness of broadband-related news and information through a variety of media. Outreach staff distributed 51 press releases statewide, maintained a program blog and social media pages, and distributed regular e-newsletters to subscribers. The program closed with approximately 2,000 social media followers.

Throughout the project, representatives served as subject matter experts in the areas of impacting broadband access, adoption, and use, while program data was often highlighted by media outlets in pieces related to technological advancement efforts. In January 2014, the Nashville *Ledger* reached out to the program office to discuss the growth of Nashville as a tech hub, as well as the growing residential needs of customers and how Connected Tennessee has worked to make growth easier. As a result, the *Ledger* published four articles which focused heavily on broadband and technology, with the Tennessee SBI program offering data and research as subject-matter experts.

Program representatives were invited to attend a number of events for the purpose of sharing program-related information and expertise. Staff attended events such as the regional broadband meeting coordinated by the Southeast Tennessee Development District (SETDD) in cooperation with the Office of U.S. Senator Bob Corker and hosted by Volunteer Energy Cooperative in Decatur, Tennessee. The goal of this meeting, held in early 2014, was to facilitate dialogue regarding broadband and the real world challenges and issues faced by those living in SETDD counties. Residents from around the district participated in panels discussing cost-prohibitive broadband options as well as the lack of option availability. Several Internet Service Providers were represented at the meeting and were given an opportunity to present what they are doing to meet the needs of the underserved. Program material focused on expanding access in order to meet the needs of K-12 education and entrepreneurial and small business in rural areas, as well as economic development opportunities for the state.

In an effort to assist in expanding access for economic development, Connected Tennessee worked with Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development to create and maintain business park site information. "Shovel Ready" Select Tennessee Certified Sites announced by ECD were mapped, geocoded, matched with broadband information, and depicted on the [My ConnectView™](#) interactive broadband mapping platform. At the conclusion of the grant 34 sites were depicted. This information proved useful in preparing for advancement as subsequent Economic Development projects were announced for five of the Certified Sites. Program staff also provided priority business sites and location

information from the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) publicly available for viewing and data request on the Connected Tennessee My ConnectView™ interactive map. Under the direction of the state, this project provided broadband information, insights, and expertise to various stakeholders throughout the state.