



## IV. CONNECTED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

Since 2011, Connected Tennessee has provided communities and their multitude of stakeholders with facilitated broadband and technology outreach and education through the [Connected Community Engagement Program](#) (Connected). Supported by data gathered through Connected Tennessee's broadband mapping and research, the Connected program examines local technology conditions and benchmarking deficiencies and successes and creates a plan for expanding broadband and technology access, adoption, and use throughout a community. This is a comprehensive report to cover work completed and best practices from technical assistance projects in Tennessee.

### Connected Teams Include:

- Local government officials
- Business owners
- Schools
- Libraries
- Chambers of commerce
- Economic development corporations
- Farm Bureau members
- Healthcare institutions
- Emergency management
- Native tribes
- Internet service providers
- Higher education

*And many others*

Connected leverages state-based, public-private partnerships to engage residents at the local level. The program coalesces and trains regional leaders and supports the formation of community broadband planning teams comprised of various cross-sector representatives. These teams work with

Connected Tennessee to assess the existing broadband and technology landscape using criteria developed as part of a national community certification model.

The assessment is separated into three distinct broadband measures: access, adoption, and use. Each criteria has a maximum of 40 points, with 120 points available overall. This scoring rubric enables Connected Tennessee to identify previously unrealized community needs; the goal of the program is to then empower informed and collaborative local strategies and initiatives that target the specific technology gaps in the community.



Each community is provided with a step-by-step action plan to meet their goals. The plan also supports future broadband expansion and programs that will help ensure that the community maintains widespread Internet access, adoption, and use.

The entire assessment – from formation of the Connected Team to the completion of a Technology Action Plan – lasts 8-24 months, depending on the size of the team, the champion leading the effort, and other community-specific factors.

Connected communities have made great strides in addressing regional-specific issues. The program has helped communities implement projects to address connectivity and technology issues that include, but are not limited to, broadband infrastructure expansion, provider identification, digital literacy training to increase small business Internet use, and technology adoption. For example:

**Sullivan County and Morristown:** Sullivan County and Morristown have become the first and second certified Connected communities in the state of Tennessee. The Connected program entails building a comprehensive action plan for developing a technology-ready community by reviewing the technology landscape, developing regional partnerships, establishing local teams, and conducting a thorough community assessment. To obtain Connected certification, these communities had to meet certain benchmark scores based on the National Broadband Plan that demonstrate it is a technologically advanced community.



*Here in northeast Tennessee, the first frontier of our country, we have the perfect mix of cutting-edge technology in a rural setting with all the urban advantages. Our low cost of living and traditional values make it a great place to raise a family, start a business, or join a successful corporation.*

*Richard Venable  
NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership CEO*

With the release of the Technology Action Plans, Sullivan County and Morristown have laid out strategies for sustaining, community-led technology utilization. In accordance with the goals stated in the Technology Action Plans a few of the projects focused on include: 1) broadband awareness by facilitating a Technology Summit; 2) broadband availability by performing an analysis of local policies and ordinances and completing a vertical assets inventory; and 3) education by improving digital learning and connecting all school classrooms to the Internet.

At the time of certification there were 17 certified Connected communities nationwide, with Sullivan County and Morristown being the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> communities to earn the certification, respectively.

**Washington County:**

Teams, such as the Washington County Technology Assessment Team, used the SBI data in an effort to identify priority projects that would advance technology access, adoption, and use in their area. On May 6,

2014, the Washington County Technology Assessment Team held their kickoff meeting at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee. Nine attendees, including representatives from the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce and the Johnson City Power Board, met and ultimately engaged a group of Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) students at East Tennessee State University to assist with data gathering and project recommendations.

The M.B.A. student research team met on a weekly basis from September through the first week in December 2014. Bi-weekly conference calls were held with the research team and members of the Johnson City, Tennessee Chamber of Commerce to keep everyone on track to complete all aspects of the assessment by December. The research team's findings were presented on December 9, 2014 to 24 technology team members and invited guests including, the Washington County Mayor and representatives from Congressman Phil Roe's office. The presentation outlined the findings and provided unofficial access, adoption, and use scores. The Washington County community became the third certified Connected community in the state. The priority project that resulted from the team's assessment process is a pilot program through Johnson City

Power Board to deliver broadband via fiber to businesses within their service footprint. The project is planned to commence in March 2015.

The Connected program benefits communities through the assessment, benchmarking, planning, and certification processes; residents and businesses benefit through expanded access to relevant technology and opportunities for digital skill development; and private sector organizations benefit from a more investment-friendly environment, greater levels of online engagement, and an increasingly tech-savvy customer base.



To date, in Tennessee 28 community planning meetings were held across the state by a total of 12 engaged communities and collaborated with local, cross-sectorial stakeholders. Two Tennessee communities have achieved Connected certified community status, one completed a Technology Action Plan, and two more were close to certification at the close of this program. Program staff assisted these communities in planning, scheduling, and facilitating local and regional planning sessions

*Participating in the Connected program was an excellent way to gain a better idea of the technology landscape and market the technology assets that exist in our community. I'm proud of the way our team came together representing every sector assisting with gathering the data to complete the assessment. Our team was dedicated to this project, and we appreciate the recognition by Connected Nation and Connected Tennessee.*

Marshall Ramsey, President  
Morristown Area Chamber of Commerce

through the creation of meeting agendas and documentation of the work accomplished. Support was further provided to train community members to develop Technology Action Plans. The progress of each community involved in the Connected program was tracked and monitored so that staff were able to provide support where needed and report to Stakeholders on the progress of each community. The SBI program also offers expertise to the community team through detailed broadband mapping and analysis, technical services and data validation, and community outreach and awareness support.

## Community Engagement Status



Current as of March 10, 2015



- Certified Connected
- Completed Action Plan
- Community Engaged
- No Project Launched

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Community Name	Access Score	Adoption Score	Use Score	Total Score	Date Published	Status
Greene County	31	20	38	89	01/28/15	Action Plan
Morristown	40	36	39	115	10/10/13	Certified
Sullivan County	40	38	40	118	10/09/13	Certified

Broadband and related technologies are essential for success in the twenty-first century connected global economy. Rural areas without adequate infrastructure, populations lacking digital literacy skills, and businesses unaware of the benefits of technology use will continue to be left behind without targeted programs to address these gaps. Connected Tennessee’s mapping and research uncovers the persisting access and adoption needs throughout the state, while its Connected Community Engagement Program ensures that communities have the knowledge, support, and resources to close these divides and leverage broadband for improved community and economic development.

While this report has highlighted successes under this collaboration, it is evident that additional work remains in order to ensure that all Tennessee communities and residents are connected to twenty-first century technology and have the skills and support to use it to its fullest.