

## Tennessee Broadband Accelerate Program

Broadband plays an essential role in the growth of Tennessee’s people and communities. Businesses need it to connect to customers, students need it to participate fully in their education, and we all need it to access information and resources that impact our everyday life including banking, healthcare and more.

To stand alongside Tennessee’s least-served counties and municipalities, Heartland Forward and the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society, in conjunction with the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD) and the University of Tennessee (UT), invite eligible communities to apply to an intensive educational program, **Tennessee Broadband Accelerate Program**.

Six community teams will be selected to participate in the free hybrid in-person/virtual program, which aims to bring informational resources to counties or municipalities seeking to expand broadband access within their borders. It is strongly recommended that applicants define their community at the county level. Communities will be selected based on the strength and commitment of their team and preparedness as evidenced in their application materials, as well as their level of need, with preference given to economically distressed counties.

Each community will recruit a team of at least eight, and up to 15 participants to actively engage in the intensive sixteen-week program. The team should include a combination of local stakeholders from the following entities, including city or county government, development districts, agriculture, educational institutions at all levels, information technology centers, chambers of commerce, healthcare providers, and other applicable entities. Teams will complete a broadband development curriculum to gain a better understanding of planning processes, technology options, and business and financial models that support successful community broadband development programs.

Application Timeline	
<b>February 13, 2023</b>	Application period opens
<b>February 16, 2023</b>	Community interest webinar (12-1 CST/1-2 EST)* *Interested parties should email <a href="mailto:reid.sharkey@tn.gov">reid.sharkey@tn.gov</a> to register
<b>March 13, 2023</b>	Applications due
<b>March 27, 2023</b>	Select and notify cohort communities

This virtual program will combine existing online content (webinar and conference recordings), cohort group learning opportunities, and individual community consultation. The

February							March							April						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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5	6	7	8	9	10	11	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
26	27	28					26	27	28	29	30	31		23	24	25	26	27	28	29
														30						

curriculum was originally created by the Blandin Foundation and has been continuously updated and improved over time. The program will be deployed in partnership with Heartland Forward, the Benton Institute, TNECD, and UT. Queries from applying teams are welcome during the application period and should be directed to Bill Coleman ([bcoleman@benton.org](mailto:bcoleman@benton.org)).

Each cohort will meet on consecutive Wednesdays starting April 19, 2023, ending on July 26, 2023 from 8:30-10:30 CST/9:30-11:30 EST on Zoom. Meeting information and any requisite materials will be provided digitally to selected cohorts.

## **Program Details**

### ***Launch: Orientation Session***

April 12, 2023 (9-1 CST/10-2 EST), at an in-person location (UT Extension Office, Murfreesboro, TN):

The six selected teams will gather to discuss each community's current situation, assets and barriers, possible team roles, and hear from instructional staff on broadband technology basics.

### ***Phase One: Leadership Education***

Community teams will complete a broadband development curriculum to gain a better understanding of planning processes, technology options, and business and financial models that support successful community broadband development programs. Broadband funding programs will also be highlighted. Teams commit to watch a set of archived online webinars and participate in weekly follow-up, including interactive cross-community discussions. Each cohort will have time during these sessions to plan their next activities. If desired, teams are welcome to meet independently of the program's weekly meetings to further discuss and plan their team's next steps.

### ***Phase Two: Information Gathering***

With assistance from instructional staff, each cohort will review existing broadband maps and interview existing and prospective internet service providers to fully understand existing and planned broadband services.

Each team will be required to conduct surveys of residents, businesses, and key anchor institutions like schools and health care providers. Teams will be expected to obtain meaningful participation in the survey process as determined in advance by the Accelerate program facilitators.

Instructional staff will provide the survey instrument and participation link. If printed surveys are needed, community teams be responsible for completing data entry of printed surveys and for costs associated with printing, distribution, and collection of any printed surveys. Communities will have full access to all the survey data. Upon agreement of all parties, prospective ISP partners may be engaged as survey partners.

### ***Phase 3: Opportunity Analysis and Next Steps***

Benton Institute staff will facilitate two meetings, one week apart, with each community team to review the collected information and process outcomes. Next steps will be determined, which may include:

1. Proceed to develop a partnership model and finalize project funding with an identified, preferred ISP.
2. Proceed to a more formal feasibility study phase with engineering alternatives, pro forma business case development, and partnership identification and formation activities.
3. Hold off on further action.

***Program Closeout: Report to the Community***

Each community will present their findings, strategies, and next steps to the other participating communities in the cohort for peer review and comment and will also be required to present their completed work and strategy going forward to an appropriate local audience.

**On-site Visit**

Program staff will arrange a community visit at the program midpoint. Communities could choose to host a community broadband summit, technology fair, focus groups, or other event to highlight the initiative's progress and gather additional community input.



**Application and Information:**

**Due Date:**

Applications are due by midnight on **March 13, 2023**. Applications should be submitted to (in PDF format) to **Bill Coleman** at [bcoleman@benton.org](mailto:bcoleman@benton.org).

**Team Manager Contact Information:**

- Name
- Title
- Organization
- Phone
- Email

**Team Members:**

Please list your team members and identify their area affiliations/roles. Please understand the weekly time commitment when organizing your community's cohort. Teams larger than eight individuals are appropriate, however we ask that you limit your team size to fifteen people or less.

Team Member Name	Title	Organization
1. (Team Manager)		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

**Application Questions (maximum of 4 pages):**

1. Please briefly describe the composition of your team and each member's experience, including with community development and broadband expansion.
2. Please describe any previous broadband planning efforts in your community.
3. In your s experience, what affect is the lack of broadband having on your area? How is broadband a priority for the community?
4. Please describe the progress that your community would hope to achieve.