



DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT

2025 IMPACT REPORT



As we release this
**2025 Digital
Empowerment
Report,**
Connected Nation
(CN) is also marking
an important
milestone — our
25th anniversary.



This moment offers an opportunity to reflect on the progress made over the past year while looking ahead to the future of our work to expand digital opportunity.

In 2025, our mission took on renewed urgency as the rapid acceleration of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies began to reshape how we learn, work, access services, and connect with one another. While these innovations create new opportunities, they also risk widening existing gaps for individuals who lack access to connectivity, devices, or the digital skills needed to fully participate. Addressing these challenges requires not only infrastructure, but also sustained investment in people, partnerships, and practical solutions at the community level.

This report highlights how CN responded to that need. Over the past year, we expanded digital skills training, strengthened partnerships across states and regions, and began integrating new areas of focus, including AI literacy, into our work. We also continued to support communities through data, research, and engagement, ensuring that local voices inform the strategies and solutions we pursue.

None of this work happens in isolation. It is made possible through collaboration with community organizations, industry partners, policymakers, and local leaders who share a commitment to expanding opportunity. Together, we are helping to build a more connected, inclusive, and resilient future.

As we look ahead, we will build on this momentum through our strategic plan and a series of new initiatives designed to expand our impact. We will launch new tools to better measure and communicate outcomes, expand access to digital skills training, and bring together partners and communities in new ways, including through a 25-hour digital skills marathon as we pursue a Guinness World Record in digital inclusion.

We are proud of what we accomplished in 2025, and we are energized by the opportunities ahead as we enter our 25th year. Thank you to our partners, supporters, and the communities we serve for being part of this work.

**Everyone belongs
in a Connected Nation®**



Tom Ferree
Chairman & CEO



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DIGITAL LITERACY AND LEARNING

AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

35,000+ TRAINED IN
RECORD YEAR

300%+ INCREASE IN STUDENT
TRAINERS

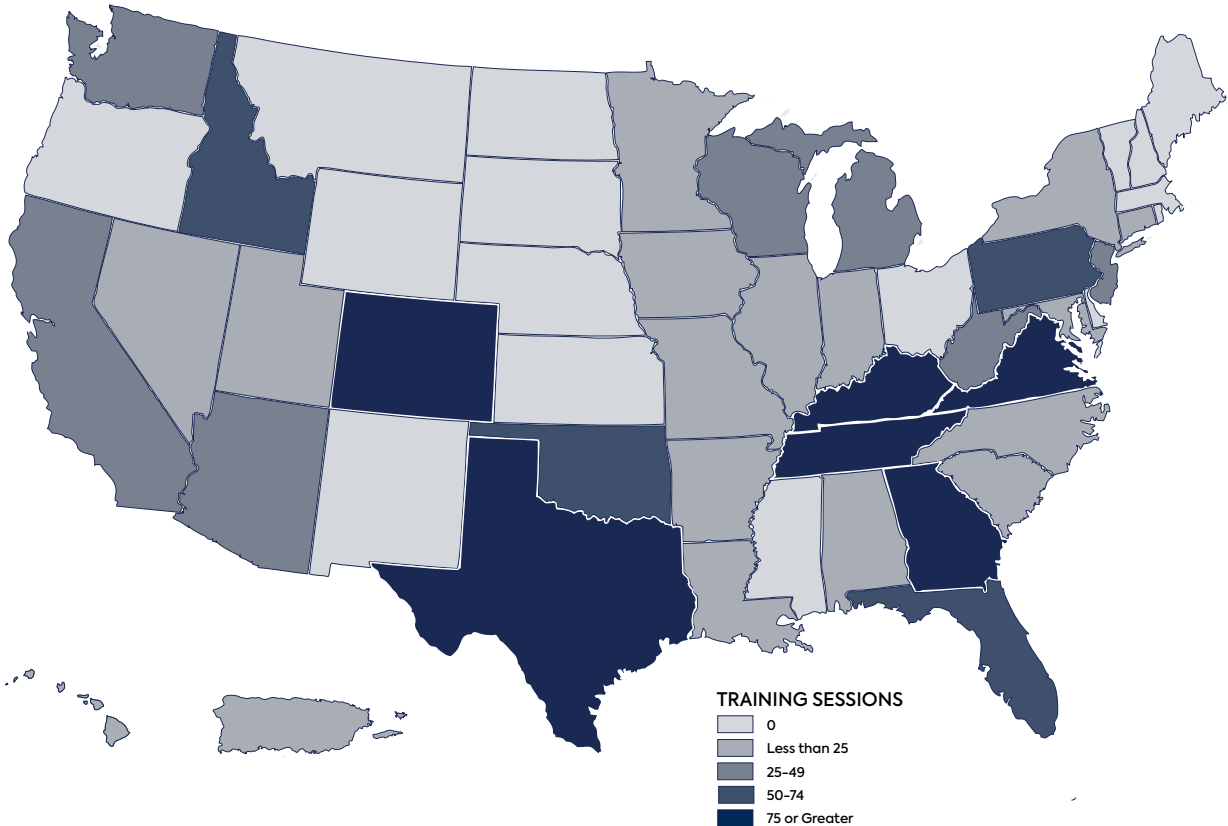
500+ ORGANIZATIONS/
COMMUNITIES ENGAGED



**MOST PEOPLE
TRAINED IN
ONE YEAR**



2025 Digital Skills Training Footprint



At Connected Nation, expanding digital opportunity means ensuring people have the skills and confidence to use technology in ways that open doors to education, employment, and community engagement. In 2025, CN delivered our largest year of digital empowerment training to date, **hosting 1,818 workshops and training 35,211 individuals nationwide in digital skills.**

Building on this work, we also advanced AI readiness, launching pilot programs in Kentucky and Texas and curating AI literacy resources that help new learners gain the clarity, confidence, and skills needed to navigate the growing role of artificial intelligence in everyday life.

TEENS TEACH TECH

POWERED BY AT&T

Across the country, young leaders are stepping forward to help their communities build essential digital skills. Through **Teens Teach Tech, powered by AT&T**, students organize workshops, teach older adults how to use technology, and help expand digital opportunities where they are needed most. The program also expanded significantly, engaging 2,147 student leaders, an increase of more than 300% since the last report.

MICHAEL SCHMALZ – ALABAMA

Michael organized digital skills workshops in Birmingham, Ala., to help older adults and community members learn to use smartphones for video calling and online tools.

Inspired by the impact he saw, he launched Digital Harmonies, an initiative aimed at expanding device access and digital literacy training for rural and elderly residents across Alabama.



Michael was the first student to receive the 2025 Student Broadband Hero Award

[View Teen Spotlight](#) [View Press Release](#)

JOSHUA LOPEZ – ARIZONA

Joshua demonstrated the leadership and community impact that define the Teens Teach Tech, powered by AT&T, program. In 2024, Joshua represented the program at the Net Inclusion Conference, participating in a panel discussion on intergenerational digital engagement.

During the session, he shared his experiences with helping older adults build confidence using technology and reflected on how young leaders can play a critical role in bridging the Digital Divide. His participation highlighted the power of youth leadership in expanding digital skills and strengthening connections across generations.



Joshua Lopez participated in a panel discussion at the 2024 Net Inclusion Conference.

THE STANDOUT TEAM OF 2025

Out of all this year's teams, Puede Network Scholars in Dallas, Texas, trained the most people. During their annual Christmas posada, the students trained

1,272 LEARNERS IN **18+** WORKSHOPS



It's the world we live in. You either learn it [digital skills], or you get left behind."

- Mike Podraza 78-year-old participant

DIGITAL SKILLS WORKSHOPS

EQUIPPING WORKFORCE PROFESSIONALS TO GUIDE JOB SEEKERS IN A DIGITAL ECONOMY

In partnership with Virginia Works, Virginia's state workforce development agency, we trained over 200 professional staff on best practices for teaching digital skills. This statewide train-the-trainer session was the first of its kind and was attended by Career Navigators and Super Managers from every county who learned the barriers and solutions to deploying digital skills workshops. We saw a ripple effect from other workforce professionals in Virginia who were similarly invested in facilitating trainings for their communities.

BUILDING DIGITAL CONFIDENCE AND CYBER SAFETY FOR OLDER ADULTS

We continued working with community partners to help older adults build digital confidence while staying safe online. Through hands-on workshops in communities such as Midland, Texas, and Highlands Ranch, Colo., we helped seniors strengthen everyday technology skills while introducing practical cybersecurity tips. Participants learned how to use smartphones and computers more effectively, recognize common scams, and protect their personal information while navigating an increasingly digital world.



Seniors in Midland, Texas, practice smartphone and computer skills while learning how to recognize online scams and protect their personal information.



Participants in Highlands Ranch, Colo., take part in hands-on digital skills training, including texting tips and cybersecurity basics.



Digital Works refresh (San Antonio Hope Center)

REFRESHING DIGITAL WORKS FOR THE AI ERA

In 2025, CN reimagined Digital Works to align with the realities of today’s workforce. The redesigned program strengthens foundational digital skills while introducing AI literacy, cybersecurity, and practical tools for job search and career advancement.



What we heard from workforce partners was clear: job seekers are not just lacking advanced skills; they are missing the digital foundations needed to participate in today’s economy.

WHY WE REIMAGINED OUR JOB READINESS STRATEGY

92%

OF JOBS NOW REQUIRE DIGITAL SKILLS

GROWING DEMAND

EMPLOYERS WILL INCREASINGLY EXPECT AI SKILLS

1 IN 3

WORKERS LACK FOUNDATIONAL DIGITAL SKILLS

These trends, combined with growing demand for AI and cybersecurity knowledge, reinforced the need to modernize Digital Works beyond traditional job readiness.

DIGITAL WORKS PILOT SNAPSHOT: SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Through our first redesigned Digital Works pilot, **we partnered with the San Antonio Hope Center** to deliver hands-on training focused on digital skills and an AI-supported job search.

Among the 35 participants:

- *90% planning a career change*
- *25% re-entering the workforce after time away*
- *10% had never owned a laptop*

Participants represented a wide range of professional backgrounds, from health care and customer service to skilled trades and community services.

What worked:

- *AI prompting and cybersecurity were the most impactful topics*
- *Participants with varying skill levels all found value*
- *Strong partnerships enabled integrated training plus device access*
- *Hands-on, practical application increased engagement and confidence*

Together, these efforts will ensure Digital Works continues to evolve as a scalable, workforce-aligned program that equips learners with both foundational digital skills and emerging competencies such as AI.



SCALING THE MODEL IN 2026

Building on the success of the San Antonio pilot, we are expanding Digital Works pilots throughout 2026 to further validate and refine the model. These additional pilots will help strengthen the curriculum, test delivery across diverse communities, and ensure the program meets evolving workforce needs.

This next phase will focus on:

EXPANDING PILOT LOCATIONS
TO INCLUDE BOTH RURAL AND URBAN
COMMUNITIES

REFINING AND VALIDATING
CURRICULUM MODULES BASED ON
PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES AND PARTNER
FEEDBACK

DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE DIGITAL
WORKS WORKBOOK TO SUPPORT HANDS-ON
LEARNING AND LONG-TERM SKILL RETENTION

STANDARDIZING A FLEXIBLE, MODULAR
CURRICULUM THAT CAN BE ADAPTED TO
DIFFERENT AUDIENCES AND PARTNER NEEDS

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES



400

EERO DEVICES PROVIDED
TO UNDERSERVED HOMES



NEARLY
300

PARTICIPANTS IN THE
COMMUNITY EVENTS



9

COMMUNITIES IMPACTED
THROUGH ENGAGEMENT
& EDUCATION





Connected Nation hosted six community meetings across Michigan, Texas, and Oklahoma and completed three Technology Action Plans to support communities in Texas and Oklahoma, working alongside local leaders and partners in regions including Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, Far West Texas and the Amarillo region, and Lawton, Okla.

These gatherings were designed to foster listening, dialogue, and shared learning around connectivity and opportunity, including discussions on diverse broadband technologies and emerging solutions such as low-Earth orbit (LEO) satellite connectivity.



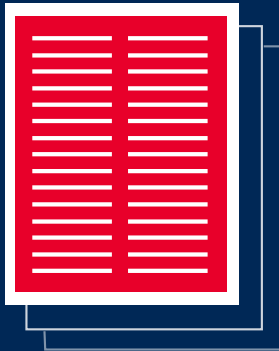
CN continued its community technology planning work in partnership with The Priddy Foundation, working with the final five communities in the foundation’s 24-county footprint to develop customized Technology Action Plans. This work across North Texas and Southern Oklahoma over the past four years has brought data, education, and coalition-building to local communities at a critical time in broadband infrastructure.

These engagements were supported in part by Amazon and made possible through partnerships with the following organizations:



EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF UTAH
TECHNOLOGY INVENTORY REPORTS



5 K-12 SCHOOL REPORTS PUBLISHED
2015, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2023

1 2024 LIBRARY REPORT





UTAH EDUCATION NETWORK

[UEN Digital Teaching and Learning](#)

This year, **Connected Nation published a report on the first comprehensive technology assessment of all 60 main public libraries in Utah.** Using data gathered by the Utah Education Network (UEN) and the Utah State Library Division (USL), we analyzed the existing technological infrastructure and resources. Our report provided state and local leaders with the necessary insights to make informed decisions regarding funding and library strategies for technology deployment and use, ensuring that technology investments are strategically allocated to address the areas of greatest need.

Key findings:

Every library system's main branch in Utah has computing devices available for patron use in the library.

Statewide, main libraries in Utah offer 1.36 computing devices available for use on site per 1,000 patrons.

More than 3 out of 5 Utah library systems say their main libraries have total Wi-Fi coverage inside.

Also, in the fall of 2025, CN completed the data collection process for our sixth Utah School Technology Inventory. Since the first inventory, completed in 2015 in partnership with UEN, we streamlined how this information is gathered via a customized survey portal. This year, as in every prior iteration, CN proudly achieved 100% participation among Utah's public and charter schools, which was published in April 2026.



Utah is one of the most connected school systems in terms of tech in the entire country. Being able to go out and get ahead of questions like, 'What do we need? How do we build it?' and then really listening to our community is very important."

- Matthew Winters
Artificial Intelligence Education Specialist
Utah State Board of Education (USBE)

GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH



3

CONFERENCES



3

RESEARCH
PAPERS

The Connected Nation Research team collaborated with multiple teams across the country to help identify and overcome barriers to closing the Digital Divide.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE FOR NATIVE NATIONS

This examined how the Digital Divide impacts Tribal households with children in northern Michigan.

The report, titled “Building Education Equity: Understanding the Digital Divide among Children in the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians,” analyzed data from a 2023 survey of Tribal member households. It focuses on computer ownership and internet access — two vital tools for educational success — and reveals that while many families are connected, significant gaps remain for others.

INTERNET INSECURITY IN RURAL AMERICA

This study revealed an urgent need to address internet insecurity in rural America. The report, titled “Stuck in the middle: Internet insecurity in rural America,” analyzed data from 2,600 rural households.

Nearly one-third of rural households surveyed reported experiencing a gap in their home internet situation. The data also showed that households with children under 18 years old and people with disabilities were more likely to experience internet insecurity than other households.

These results demonstrated that to benefit from broadband, not only do rural Americans need to get connected, but they must stay connected.

THE ROLE OF REMOTE MONITORING

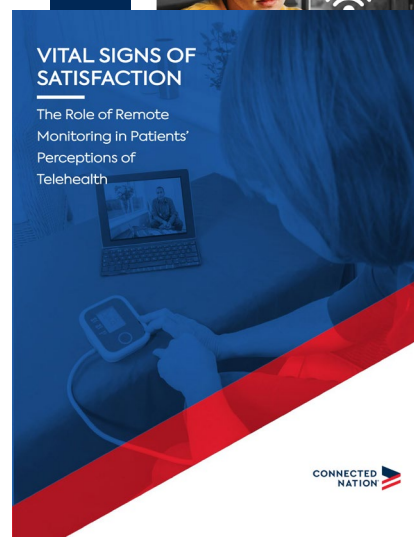
This report offered new insight into how Americans’ experiences with different telehealth modalities affect their attitudes toward it, and why these findings demonstrate a critical need to expand broadband solutions.

The report, titled “Vital Signs of Satisfaction: The Role of Remote Monitoring in Patients’ Perceptions of Telehealth,” focused on one of telehealth’s most promising innovations: remote monitoring.



Internet insecurity is an important issue that nearly 1 in 3 rural households face. As the infrastructure improves and more Americans can access high-speed internet, we need to make sure that everyone can benefit by having reliable, affordable service all the time.”

– **Chris McGovern**
Director, Research Development
Connected Nation



PROMOTING THE HUMAN IMPACT OF DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT WORK

63

PODCAST
EPISODES

96

IMPACT STORIES
AND BLOGS

7,109

NEWS MENTIONS
(UNPAID)

130,169

WEBSITE VISITORS
(37% ENGAGEMENT RATE)

12.1

BILLION
AGGREGATE
READER/VIEWERSHIP

\$54.1

MILLION
AD EQUIVALENCY
(UNPAID)

CN's Communications team goes beyond promoting the organization's own digital empowerment programs; we champion the work of our national and local partners and the collective efforts of organizations nationwide.

Understanding that bridging the Digital Divide requires a united front, we curate and share vital resources, research, and opportunities from across the country. Our team amplifies these voices

through strategic storytelling across our blogs, e-newsletters, podcasts, and social media channels.

At the heart of our work are the people we serve. We are dedicated to capturing and sharing personal stories that demonstrate the real-world impact of digital empowerment work. This section highlights examples of how we bring this mission to life.



NATIONAL RECOGNITION AND PROMOTION



The Connected Nation Podcast celebrated its five-year anniversary in 2025, earning its fourth national award.

The podcast received an Award of Distinction (silver) for best podcast series in the “science and technology” category, presented by the National Communicator Awards.

The podcast shares the work organizations are doing to expand access, adoption, and use of high-speed internet and its related technologies to all people.

In 2025, guests included the first Student Broadband Hero Award winner; leadership from organizations like Mission Telecom, Calix, and Google; and State Broadband Leadership from across the country. Topics covered everything from Tribal Nation broadband work to AI infrastructure to digital skills training.

In addition, the Communications team produced 48 videos focusing on impact of the digital empowerment work and covering dozens of press conferences, digital skills training sessions, and workforce development classes supported through CN’s digital empowerment programs, which are listed throughout this publication.



DIGITAL INCLUSION WEEK

#DIW2025

650+

COMMUNITIES ASSISTED
WITH PLANNING

60,000+

TECH-ENABLED
DEVICES DISTRIBUTED

127,000+

INDIVIDUALS TRAINED

21+ MILLION

PEOPLE IMPACTED

The Communications team developed a special landing page for Digital Inclusion Week 2025, which took place Oct. 6-11. It included CN classes, events, news updates, and program details for those who would like to participate in this annual celebration.

Digital Inclusion Week raises awareness about the need for increased digital skills training in communities. The theme for 2025 was “Community-Driven Digital Futures.”

CONNECTED NATION IN THE NEWS



[Audio - Tom Ferree on Farm to Fork's national radio show on BEAD - 01/15/2025](#)

[Heather Huddleston in Comms Daily re: RDOF - 01/24/2025](#)

[Colin Reilly shared details on the BEAD tracker in the Colorado Sun - 9/11/25](#)

[Stateline sourced Connected Nation's BEAD tracker for its update on universal broadband 9/22/25](#)

[The Wichita Business Journal covered the AI Interconnection Summit](#)

[Connected Nation's digital skills training spotlighted on Univision during national Digital Inclusion Week](#)

[Colin Reilly: How the BEAD Tracker Speeds Up Broadband Insights in Broadband Breakfast](#)

POLICY AND ADVOCACY



MODERATED DIGITAL
EMPOWERMENT
DISCUSSIONS AT FOUR
NATIONAL CONFERENCES



LAUNCHED
CURATED AI PAGE



SIGNED NATIONAL
AI PLEDGE



Connected Nation advanced policy and advocacy efforts by elevating community insights, engaging in national conversations, and tracking emerging issues shaping the future of digital opportunity.

We also contributed to the national dialogue by participating in conferences, working groups, and cross-sector convenings, including the Connect America, Broadband Nation Expo, and Net Inclusion Conference, where CN shared our approach to digital empowerment and the growing importance of AI literacy. As part of this work, we signed a national AI pledge, reinforcing our commitment to the responsible and inclusive use of emerging technologies.

CN also curated AI training and literacy resources to help communities, educators, and workforce partners better understand and apply these tools in practical ways.

We monitored and engaged in key policy developments, including state-level discussions on data center growth, evolving broadband mapping frameworks, and implementation considerations tied to federal and state broadband investments, strengthening CN's role as a trusted partner in an increasingly complex digital landscape.



MUHAMMAD ALI INDEX: ADVANCING COMPASSION THROUGH DATA

Connected Nation joined the Muhammad Ali Center in January 2025 as one of a select group of organizations invited to serve as an Impact Partner, in conjunction with the release of the Muhammad Ali Index in New York City.

The Index is a national measurement framework designed to assess and track compassion across communities, using data and research to better understand how individuals engage with empathy, respect, and service to others. As part of this network, Connected Nation is helping to translate insights from the Index into action by integrating compassion-driven approaches into digital skills training and community engagement efforts, ensuring that access to and use of technology are grounded in connection, trust, and opportunity.

BUILDING ON PROGRESS



2025 marked a year of meaningful progress as Connected Nation expanded our reach, deepened partnerships, and continued evolving our programs to meet the changing needs of communities.

From record-setting training efforts to new approaches in AI literacy and workforce development, our work reflected a clear commitment to helping individuals build the skills they need to participate fully in today's digital world.

WHAT'S NEXT

Looking ahead, CN is building on this momentum through our strategic plan, which prioritizes expanding digital skills training, strengthening community partnerships, integrating AI literacy across our programs, and increasing access to tools and resources that support long-term economic opportunity. These goals will guide our efforts as we continue to scale our impact and respond to the growing importance of digital inclusion.

In the year ahead, we are excited to launch several new efforts that will further strengthen this work. The introduction of a Digital Empowerment Dashboard will provide new ways to measure and visualize impact across communities, while enhancements to the Drive Your Learning platform will expand access to self-paced training and learning pathways. We will also bring together partners, communities, and learners through our 25-Hour Digital Skills Marathon, a signature event celebrating CN's 25th anniversary and our attempt to set a Guinness World Record while advancing digital opportunity at scale.

Together, these efforts reflect both the progress we have made and the opportunity that lies ahead. As we continue this work, we remain focused on ensuring that every individual has the tools, skills, and support needed to thrive in an increasingly digital and AI-enabled world.

WITH GRATITUDE AND RECOGNITION

OUR PARTNERS IN IMPACT

This progress would not be possible without the **leadership, investment, and collaboration of partners** across the country who share a commitment to expanding digital opportunity.

We extend our sincere thanks to *AT&T, Amazon, Spectrum, Public Library Association, Compudopt, Priddy Foundation, Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA), the*

Muhammad Ali Center, Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition (SHLB), National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), and other rural community partners, as well as state and local broadband leaders.

COMMUNITY AT THE CENTER

Our work is grounded in trusted local partnerships. Community-based organizations, regional collaborators, and local leaders ensure that programs are accessible, relevant, and responsive to the needs of the



Everyone belongs in a Connected Nation®



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CONNECTEDNATION.ORG