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Rural LISC Expands Digital Navigator Footprint in East Texas with \$500,000 Grant From the T.L.L. Temple Foundation

East Texas libraries to serve as hubs for internet access and training

Washington, DC – T.L.L. Temple Foundation today announced Rural LISC as the recipient of a \$500,000 grant to support the expansion of its digital coaching model to improve access to opportunity in East Texas communities where availability and uptake of affordable, reliable broadband internet is limited.

As high-speed internet is now recognized as an essential service following the pandemic and federal funding has surged, a new model has been created to fill capacity gaps: cross-trained digital coaches that help individuals gain the skills required to succeed in the 21st century. The Rural LISC model has been effectively implemented in a network 40 community-based organizations in rural locations across the country, with the East Texas expansion representing the first inclusion to its network of rural libraries as community anchors key to the delivery of these essential services.

While increasing broadband access is predominately a technical concern, social determinants in rural settings, including communities with limited internet knowledge, skills, and confidence continue to present a challenge. As stakeholders work to expand broadband infrastructure across East Texas, the grant will help ensure removing barriers to internet adoption and use is a commensurate priority. In rural East Texas, for example, [less than 16% of eligible households](#) are currently enrolled in the Federal Communications Commission’s Affordably Connectivity Program, according to an estimate from Rural LISC.

“Building local capacity in rural communities to address broadband adoption and use is foundational to widely shared economic opportunity in today’s economy,” said Caitlin Cain, LISC Vice President and Rural LISC Director. “Establishing a cohort of peer rural libraries across the region as host sites for digital connectors represents a significant step forward in creating the conditions to improve economic and community development in underserved Deep East Texas.”

As trusted, public service-oriented institutions, libraries emerged as critical anchors for program implementation.

“Rural LISC is a pioneer for the digital navigator model and has identified a cohort of rural East Texas libraries that are committed to becoming host sites for the program,” said Wynn Rosser, Ph.D., President & CEO, T.L.L. Temple. “By training and supporting current library staff, this initiative will build the capacity of libraries to serve as local hubs for addressing the barriers community members face and will chart a path toward digital inclusion as broadband infrastructure is built out across rural East Texas.”

Seven libraries will participate in initial community assessments with Rural LISC to determine their local needs for digital navigation services, including the T.L.L. Temple Memorial Library in Diboll, the Arthur Temple Sr. Memorial Library in Pineland, the Newton County Library, the Allan Shivers Library and Museum in Woodville, the Jasper Public Library, the Maud Public Library, and the San Augustine Public Library.

Rural LISC has implemented its digital connector train-the-trainer model elsewhere in Texas and in 19 other states since 2020. Through a multi-year implementation timeline for the T.L.L. Temple-funded initiative, including organizational assessment, training and onboarding digital coaches, facilitated connections to national resource providers and professional networks, and standardized monitoring and evaluation, Rural LISC will incorporate emerging best practices to ensure sustained regional impact.

About Rural LISC

Launched in 1995, Rural LISC is the rural component of LISC, the largest community development support organization in the country. Through a partnership base of over 145 organizations spread across 49 states, Rural LISC provides a wide range of services, including financial support, training, technical assistance and capital resources to help rural community partners and developers invest in rural communities. To date, Rural LISC has leveraged nearly \$3.3 billion from public and private sources to produce 35,000 affordable homes and apartments. Rural LISC investments have also produced over 4 million square feet of commercial and community space, including 20 early childhood care centers. Rural LISC technical assistance has touched more than 700 businesses, resulting in over 12,000 jobs supported and/or retained. Rural LISC is committed to ensuring equity and investment in rural America. Learn more at www.lisc.org/rural.

About T.L.L. Temple Foundation

The T.L.L. Temple Foundation works alongside rural communities to build a thriving East Texas and to alleviate poverty, creating access and opportunities for all. Since its founding in 1962 by Mrs. Georgie Temple Munz, the T.L.L. Temple Foundation has invested more than \$540 million primarily to strengthen communities in rural East Texas. For more information about the foundation, visit www.tlltemple.foundation.

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