



Department of
**Economic &
Community Development**

DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY (DO) TASKFORCE SERIES 1

Unpacking the Digital Opportunity Landscape

4/17/2025

Agenda

1. **Purpose of the Taskforce**
2. **Digital Opportunity Programs Overview**
3. **Strategies for Collaboration and Opportunities for Partnerships**
4. **Open Discussion**
5. **Next Steps**



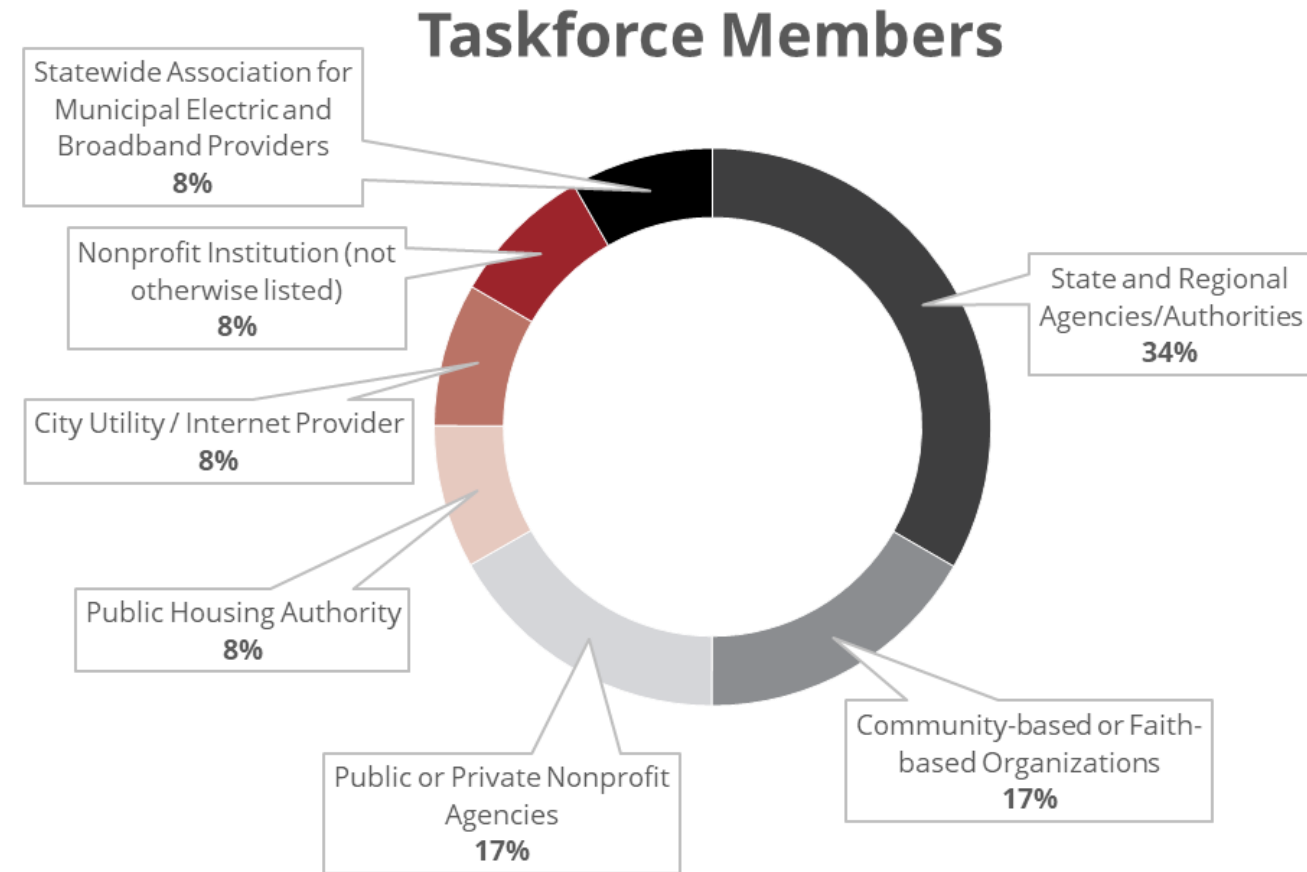
1. PURPOSE OF THE TASKFORCE



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Purpose & Taskforce Composition

- Convene **statewide leaders** and **practitioners** to advance digital opportunity initiatives in Tennessee.
- Identify **barriers, opportunities, and strategies** for expanding access to affordable, high-speed internet and improving digital literacy.
- Foster **collaboration** and **partnerships** between state agencies, local organizations, the private sector, and community advocates.
- Serve as an **advisory group** to assist in the implementation of statewide Digital Opportunity (DO) initiatives and investments.



Meeting Series 1: Objectives



Examine Tennessee's digital opportunity programs, impacts and, gaps, and discuss strategies for collaboration.



2. DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS OVERVIEW



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TNECD's Digital Opportunity Programs

- **Digital Skills, Education, and Workforce Development (DSEW)** – Focused on digital skilling, workforce development, online safety, government accessibility, and devices.
- **Connected Community Facilities (CCF)** – Focused on community spaces that enable digital opportunity.
- **Broadband Ready Communities (BRC)** – Focused on local adoption efforts.
- **Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT)** - Focused on telecommunications workforce.

ECD Program Goal & Impacts



Households & Communities with Broadband

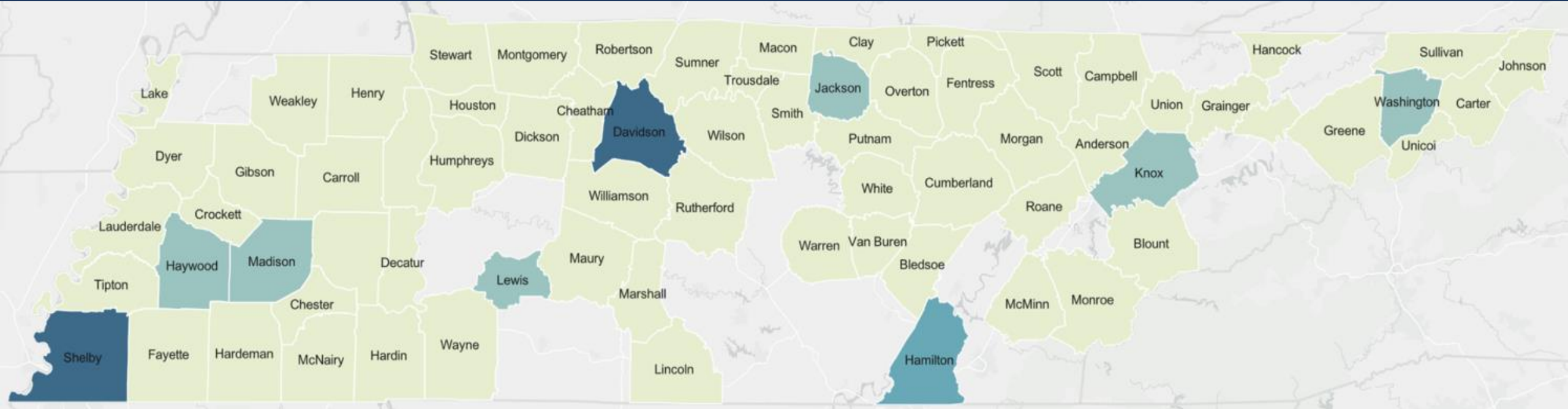
- Provide access to basic skilling programs
- Provide access to devices like laptops
- Provide training and opportunity for services like telehealth, remote work, and education
- Support digital workforce development activities
- Improve devices and capacities for training at local CAIs

Households & Communities without Broadband

- Fills resource gaps, broadband connections, telehealth, public Wi-Fi
- Empowers CAIs like libraries and schools with new technology and services
- Gives local leaders access to planning funds



Digital Opportunity Projects

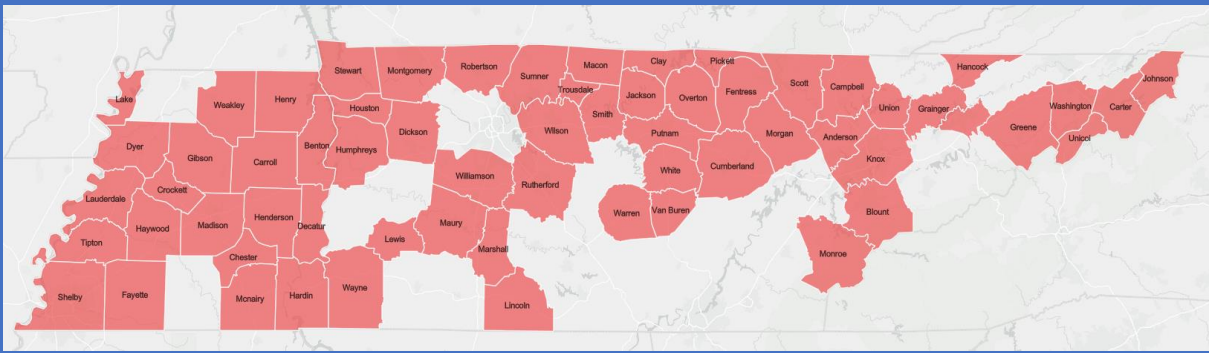


Number of Projects:

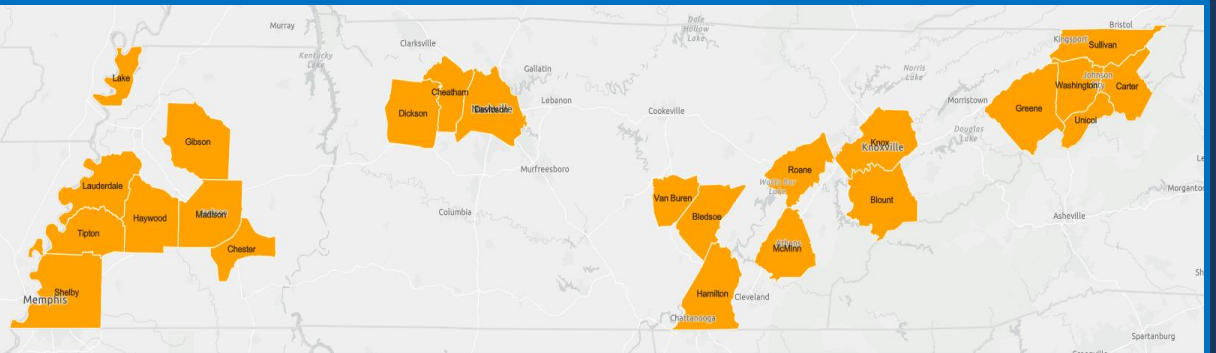


BRC, DSEW, CCF and TCAT Digital Opportunity Coverage

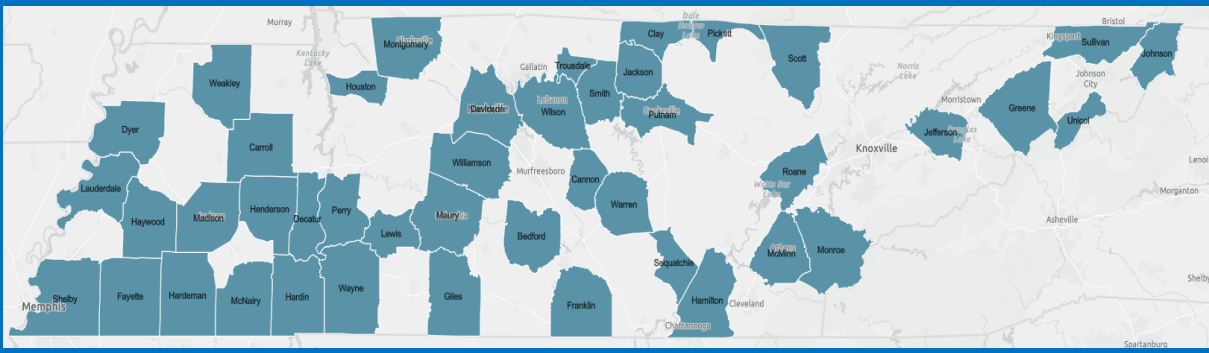
BRC



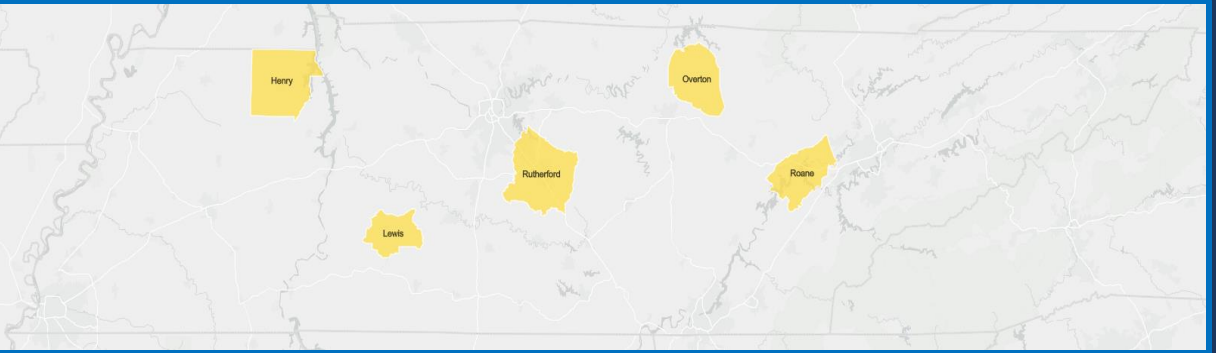
DSEW



CCF



TCAT



Existing Gaps in Digital Opportunity Programs



DSEW 1.0 and 2.0

- Projects are overly concentrated in **urban communities**
- Emphasis on **digital skills rather than broader workforce development** or education initiatives.
- **Difficulties for long-term sustainability** of funded projects, which limits their impact and scalability.



CCF 1.0 and 2.0

- Projects often require **extended timelines for completion**, which can pose challenges in maintaining momentum and achieving timely outcomes.



BRC 1.0 and 2.0

- BRC initiatives face challenges as some **communities struggle to identify a starting point**, resulting in a lack of direction.
- Difficulties to support and maintain local efforts over time.

Open Discussion: Gaps

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What additional gaps do you see or identify?

leader focus bold
creative
fast transpiration
inspiration

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Top Challenges

Highlighted by the **Taskforce Survey**, the items are listed in order from the most frequently mentioned to the least frequently mentioned.

1. Lack of Affordable Internet Access

- **Internet costs** remain a barrier for many households.
- Even where service is available, **affordability** is a major obstacle to adoption.

2. Infrastructure Limitations in Rural Areas

- Gaps in reliable coverage for **rural and remote communities**.
- While outside today's focus, these gaps impact **adoption and opportunity**.

3. Digital Literacy Gaps

- Many Tennesseans lack **basic digital skills** to access opportunities.
- Especially **challenging** for aging populations and first-time users.

4. Cost of Devices and Technology

- **Affordability** of reliable devices (*computers, tablets*) continues to be a major hurdle.
- Without devices, **connectivity** efforts fall short.

5. Need for Trusted Community-Based Support

- Communities trust local organizations to provide **training and access**.
- **Building partnerships** with libraries, nonprofits, and faith-based orgs is critical.

Open Discussion: Challenges

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What aspects or needs are being excluded or not addressed by these programs?

All responses to your question will be shown here

Each response can be up to 200 characters long

Turn on voting to let participants vote for their favorites



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Open Discussion: Challenges

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How effectively are these programs positioned to meet the needs of our state?



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Open Discussion: Challenges

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Mentimeter

What critical challenges are we overlooking or underemphasizing?

All responses to your question will be shown here

Each response can be up to 200 characters long

Turn on voting to let participants vote for their favorites

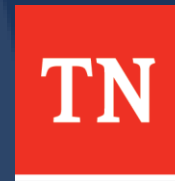


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3. STRATEGIES FOR COLLABORATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIPS



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Unlocking Rural Opportunities Through Partnerships

Educational Institutions & Extension Services

- Develop curriculum and deliver hands-on digital training.
- Engage students and families early to build generational digital literacy

Private Sector & ISPs

- Offer affordable bundles and device programs.
- Co-create training materials and fund local initiatives.

Community-Based Organizations & Faith-Based Partners

- Leverage trusted relationships to deliver digital literacy and device access.
- Culturally relevant and trusted messengers in local communities.

Libraries & Housing Authorities

- Serve as community hubs for training, device access, and program outreach.
- Expand classes and increase visibility of existing services.

Local Governments & Utilities

- Embed digital inclusion into existing community services.
- Provide physical locations for access points and outreach events

Digital Opportunity Projects



Number of Projects:



Underserved Populations in Tennessee

Based on Taskforce Survey Feedback, these are the most underserved populations in Tennessee.



Aging Individuals (60 and above)

- Identified frequently by survey participants.
- Challenges: limited digital literacy, accessibility needs, and trusted support.



Individuals in Covered Households

- Low-income households struggling with affordability (internet + devices).
- Often face multiple barriers: cost, digital literacy, and lack of awareness about programs.



Rural Communities

- Rural residents face fewer training and access points.
- Libraries and extension services often their only local resource.



Incarcerated Individuals & Reentry Populations

- Digital skills critical for re-entry into the workforce and society.
- Often left out of digital opportunity programs.



People with Disabilities

- Need accessible devices, software, and training methods.
- Programs must ensure ADA compliance and promote inclusivity.



Non-English Speaking and Multilingual Communities

- Language barriers limit awareness and engagement with digital opportunity resources.
- Opportunity to create multilingual materials and outreach campaigns.

ECD Programs for Tennessee's Target Populations



DSEW

- Aging Individuals (60 and above)
- Incarcerated Individuals & Reentry Populations
- Individuals in Covered Households
- People with Disabilities
- Non-English Speaking and Multilingual Communities



CCF

- Individuals in Covered Households



BRC

- Individuals in Covered Households



TCAT

- Rural Communities

External Digital Opportunity Programs

Library & Archives Digital Literacy Programs



- Local libraries offer digital skills workshops, job-seeking support, and computer access.
- Library networks continue to be critical community access points, especially in rural areas.

Hamilton County Schools EdConnect



- A partnership with EPB to provide high-speed internet access to low-income families in Chattanooga.
- The program ensures equitable access to online learning resources, benefiting approximately 16,000 students who qualify based on income criteria.

UT Extension: Digital Literacy Training & Device Programs



- University of Tennessee Extension provides device access and digital skills training.
- Focused on older adults and rural communities.

Tech Helps - Southwest Human Resource Agency (SWHRA)



- Free digital literacy training for seniors (60+) including a Chromebook, cybersecurity education, and low-cost internet assistance.
- Local volunteer-led classes with free transportation provided in select West Tennessee counties.

External Programs for Tennessee's Target Populations

Library & Archives Digital Literacy Programs

- Aging Individuals (60 and above)
- Individuals in Covered Households
- People with Disabilities
- Rural Communities

UT Extension: Digital Literacy Training & Device Programs

- Rural Communities
- Individuals in Covered Households
- Aging Individuals (60 and above)
- Incarcerated Individuals & Reentry Populations

Hamilton County Schools EdConnect

- Individuals in Covered Households

Tech Helps - Southwest Human Resource Agency (SWHRA)

- Aging Individuals (60 and above)

Open Discussion: Taskforce Collaboration Discussion

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What additional gaps do you see or identify?
skills

What projects or needs are being addressed or not addressed by these programs?

How effectively are these programs positioned to meet the needs of our state?

What critical challenges are our constituents or underlying funding?

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Please identify other organizations that you believe would be excellent partners for collaboration.

All responses to your question will be shown here

Each response can be up to 200 characters long

Turn on voting to let participants vote for their favorites

Why Partnerships Matter?

No single organization can close the digital divide alone- collaboration is the multiplier.



Survey feedback highlights three key priorities:

- Strengthen cross-sector collaboration.
- Leverage trusted, local organizations.
- Expand access points and amplify programmatic reach.

4. OPEN DISCUSSION



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Open Discussion

Q&A

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Reflecting on today's discussion, how would you rate your understanding of Digital Opportunity (DO) programs in Tennessee?



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Choose a slide to present

- What additional gaps do you see or identify?
skills
- What supports or needs are being met or not addressed by these programs?
- How effective are these programs positioned to meet the needs of our state?
- What critical challenges are we encountering in understanding/learning?

Open Discussion

Q&A

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Looking ahead, what steps or actions do you think we should prioritize to move forward effectively?

All responses to your question will be shown here

Each response can be up to 200 characters long

Turn on voting to let participants vote for their favorites



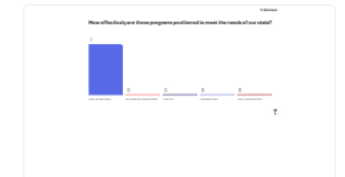
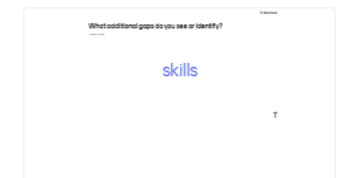
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Next Steps

★ DO Series Meeting 2 Survey Due on 4/25:

- Please complete the DO Series 2 Meeting Task survey (via Microsoft Forms), which will help inform the discussion for our next meeting. *Make your voice heard!*
 - DO Series 2 Meeting Task
- TNECD will share this deck as a PDF
- Keep an eye out for your DO Series 2 Meeting invite! DO Series 2 Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 15th



Thank you for your engagement!
Please email
ECD.Broadband@tn.gov
with any questions you may have.