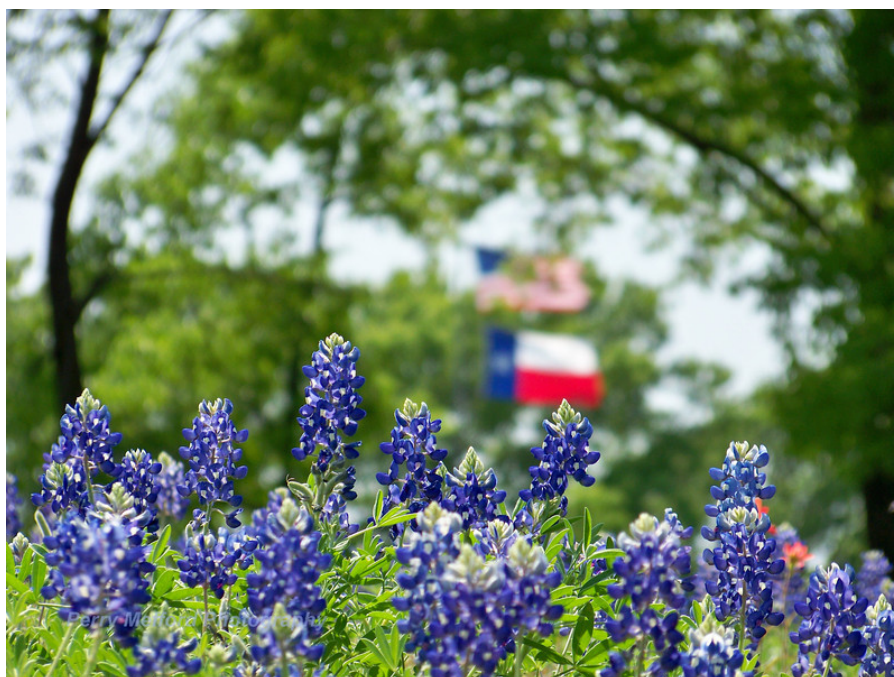


Communities Working Together to Accomplish What One Community Cannot Do Alone

The **E—Update**



"We each have an opportunity to make a difference in our cities and in the lives of others, and it's not all about money. It's about giving. Giving our time. Giving our respect."

Amon Carter, creator and publisher of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, and a nationally known civic booster for Fort Worth



Make Plans to Join Us for the April 30th Membership Meeting

Join us as we continue to delve into some of the most pressing concerns/interests of you, our members - Code Enforcement, Housing, Quality of Life and Workforce.

Planned topics for our April meeting include presentations on TCEQ's Nuisance and Abandoned Building Landfills ("Monofills") Program and related Council of Governments Programs, The Value of Community Housing

Studies, and Understanding Broadband. We will also hear from representatives of [Mentors](#)

[Care](#) and [Raise Your Hand Texas](#) on the programs and services their respective organizations can offer our local communities.

Again, TMCN's goal is to ensure timely discussions of topics important to our members. The meeting will begin with a delicious lunch and a short TMCN business meeting followed by these presentations. We'll conclude the meeting with our ever popular roundtable discussions. To get the most out of this meeting, we encourage you to reach out to your fellow community leaders and bring them with you. We look forward to seeing you!

FMI and to Register [click here](#). Attendees registering by noon on Friday, April 24th will have a chance at a cash drawing at the meeting. The Meeting will be held in the upstairs Conference Room of the Shelton Building at Hendrick Health System - Cost is \$15/person.

Newly Elected Official Seminar Scheduled for July

In partnership with the West Central Texas Council of Governments' Community Health and Development Center TMCN will again host the annual Newly Elected Officials Seminar on July 14th at the COG.

This seminar is intended for newly elected City Council/Commission members - many of which come into office following the May Election - as well as any city official wanting a refresher on the best practices of public service.



The Seminar will be facilitated by Cisco City Manager Darwin Archer and include the following topics: Effective Working Relationships, Making Dollars Count in Your Budget, Parliamentary Procedure/Open Meetings Act, Ethics and Conflicts of Interest, Maximizing Your Economic Development Power and Developing Viable Communities Using Grants. We have also invited Representative Stan Lambert to discuss Representing Your Constituents and provide some key insights of priority issues leading into the 2021 Legislative Session.

The Seminar will be held in the Large Conference Room of the WCTCOG beginning at 8:30 am and ending by 4:30 pm. The cost is \$25 and includes refreshments and lunch. FMI [Click Here](#) or email us at tmcn@tmcn.org.



2020 Leadership TMCN Class

Enthusiastic Representation Kicks Off Leadership TMCN

As with each of our five past years, the students and communities represented by the Class of 2020 are no doubt destined for success. In meeting our seventeen high school Juniors in **Session I**, we were impressed by their current active participation at their school. Many of them are officers on student council and are members of their respective school's National Honor Society, FFA, FCCLA, UIL, band and sporting activities.

Session I kicked off with facilitators [Kevin Tutt](#) and [Mike Daggs](#) helping students understand the value of creating community buy-in and the opportunity they have to make an impact in their communities. They also began exploring ideas for local projects and the various steps to ensure the project's success.

This first session included students and mentors representing the communities of Anson, Baird, Breckenridge, Coleman, Early, Haskell and Stamford. Several other communities have

expressed interest in joining us in **Session II** which will be held on **April 15th**.

All TMCN member communities are eligible to participate in this Program. Students must be enrolled as a Junior at the local high school and be one who exemplifies leadership, character and desire to improve their community. The participation fee is \$150 per participant (students and business leader/owner). These fees are typically provided by local businesses, chambers and, in many cases, by economic development organizations as the sessions are focused on initiatives to promote economic sustainability.

Thank you for TMCN Marketing Partner [Jacob & Martin](#) who are again hosting this year's sessions.

To learn more about the **Leadership TMCN Program** [click here](#) or give us a call at 325-795-8626.



Merkel Business Mural

This Past Month's Most Engaging Texas Midwest Facebook Posts Stirs Hometown Pride

Last month, while delivering the 2020 Edition of the Texas Midwest Travel Guide, we shared a photos of our member communities along the way. Two of these photo posts reached 36K people - Merkel, a community approximately 20 miles east of Abilene, and Clyde, a community approximately 20 miles west of Abilene. An interesting common theme in the comments was the community murals.

"The brick streets, a cast iron stop sign, and vintage water tower in the City of Merkel provide a wonderful look back in time while a state of the art medical facility and education center depicts a community full of opportunity and success!"

Merkel's mural is downtown on the side wall of a local business. We discovered that the artists are local - Jimmy and Patsy Valdez - who have worked with other local artists, Jeff Thompson and Renae McFadden, to do a number of other murals in and around Merkel. Jimmy stated that he loved his town and his art was a way to share that love with the community.

"We found a beautiful pocket park in the City of Clyde's downtown which includes another of Calina Mishay Johnson's amazing murals. The mural depicts interesting historical tidbits like the community's nickname of "Little California" so called for its bountiful fruit and vegetable crops which were shipped across Texas by rail. It also recognizes J.H.Burkett who discovered and successfully grew the Burkett pecan tree. Oh and did we mention the angel wings near the public library?"

Clyde's mural is located in a pocket park across the street from the Clyde Chamber of Commerce. The artist is Calina Mishay Johnson, an Abilene resident who grew up in Rule. The mural depicts the history of Clyde and has been the backdrop of many prom, formal and graduation photos. You can find Calina's art



Clyde Pocket Park

in a number of our TMCN member communities including Abilene, Coleman, Eden, Haskell and Roscoe to name a few.

To explore our member communities and catch up on the various events and activities throughout the Texas Midwest region, go to our [Facebook Page](#) and like us!

Texas Department of Agriculture to Replace Texas Capital Fund with New Programs

After extensive review and stakeholder feedback, TDA is proposing in its action plan to replace the **Texas Capital Fund (TCF) Program** with two new economic development programs. The Rural Economic Development (RED) Strategy and Project Programs are designed to fund proactive economic development strategies and effectively meet the unique needs of rural communities throughout the state.



The **RED -Strategy Program** provides grant funding to assess the current and long-term community needs, recommend business retention & expansion strategies and identify potential projects and funding sources to support sustainable economic growth.

The **RED - Project Program** provides construction/implementation grants to fund projects identified in the community's economic development plan. More flexible than TCF, a RED - Project can meet any of HUD's National objectives including - LMI job requirements, provide goods/services, job training, removal of slum and blight or micro-enterprise support. For more information, please visit TDA's [website](#).

Your Invitation to Respond to the 2020 Census Is in the Mail by Texas Counts

Chances are you live in one of the ninety-five percent of households that will receive an initial invitation to respond to the 2020 Census in the mail starting on March 12th. Depending on how likely your area is to respond online, you'll receive either an invitation encouraging you to respond online or an invitation along with a paper questionnaire. In areas where 20 percent or more of the households need Spanish assistance, the invitations will be in both English and Spanish.



Since most areas of the country are likely to respond online, these households will only receive a letter asking you to complete the Census questionnaire online or by phone. However, areas that are historically less likely to respond online will receive a paper questionnaire along with their invitation. This invitation will also include information about how to respond online or by phone.

What happens next is up to you! With your invitation to respond in hand , you can use [our guide](#) to completing the Census to submit your responses.

USDA Extends ReConnect Application Deadline to March 31st by ConnectedNation

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development Bette Brand announced USDA has extended the deadline (PDF, 245 KB) for ReConnect Pilot Program applications to March 31.



Committed to the future of rural communities.

"By extending the ReConnect Program application deadline, we are helping even more qualified organizations access the essential funding to make high-speed broadband connectivity a reality for rural communities across America," Brand said. "Under the leadership of President Trump and Agriculture Secretary Perdue, USDA has made deploying this critical infrastructure in rural

America a top-priority, because when rural America thrives, all of America thrives."

Background:

In March 2018, Congress provided \$600 million to USDA to expand broadband infrastructure and services in rural America. On Dec. 13, 2018, Secretary Perdue announced the rules of the program, called "ReConnect," including how the loans and grants will be awarded to help build broadband infrastructure in rural America. USDA received 146 applications between May 31, 2019, and July 12, 2019, requesting \$1.4 billion in funding across all three ReConnect Program funding products: 100 percent loan, 100 percent grant, and loan-grant combinations. USDA is reviewing applications and announcing approved projects on a rolling basis. Additional investments in all three categories will be made in the coming weeks.

These grants, loans and combination funds enable the federal government to partner with the private sector and rural communities to build modern broadband infrastructure in areas with insufficient internet service. Insufficient service is defined as connection speeds of less than 10 megabits per second (Mbps) download and 1 Mbps upload.

In December 2019, Agriculture Secretary Perdue announced USDA will be making available an additional \$550 million in ReConnect funding in 2020. USDA will make available up to \$200 million for grants, up to \$200 million for 50/50 grant/loan combinations, and up to \$200 million for low-interest loans. The application window for this round of funding opened on Jan. 31, 2020. Applications for all funding products will be accepted in the same application window, which will now close on March 31, 2020.

A full description of 2020 ReConnect Pilot Program funding is available on page 67913 of the Dec. 12, 2019, Federal Register (PDF, 336 KB). To learn more about eligibility, technical assistance and recent announcements, visit www.usda.gov/reconnect.

In April 2017, President Donald J. Trump established the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity to identify legislative, regulatory and policy changes that could promote agriculture and prosperity in rural communities. In January 2018, Secretary Perdue presented the Task Force's findings to President Trump. These findings included 31 recommendations to align the federal government with state, local and tribal governments to take advantage of opportunities that exist in rural America. Increasing investments in rural infrastructure is a key recommendation of the task force. To view the report in its entirety, please view the Report to the President of the United States from the Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity (PDF, 5.4 MB). In addition, to view the categories of the recommendations, please view the Rural Prosperity infographic (PDF, 190 KB).

Blended Learning Initiative by Raise Your Hand Texas

Blended learning refers to the blend of online learning and brick-and-mortar schooling. Blended learning takes place when students learn at least in part online, with some element of student control over the time, place, path, and/or pace of their learning, while also enjoying the benefits that come with education at a physical school (Christensen Institute).

Any fair look at education technology in U.S. K-12 schools must acknowledge that the nation has spent over \$100 billion on computers in the past few decades with very little to show for it in the way of results.



Blended learning is critically different from-but easily confused with-the much broader trend of equipping classrooms with devices and software. We believe that for Texas to lead the world in student achievement, our schools must be wise enough to look beyond the technology trap and, instead, pursue a more strategic and focused blended learning strategy.

Blended learning has three components. **First, blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace.** Some element of student control is critical. The technology used for the online learning must shift content and instruction to the control of the student in at least some way for it to qualify as blended learning from the student's perspective, rather than just the use of digital tools from the classroom teacher's perspective.

The **second part of the definition is that the student learns at least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home.** In other words, the student attends a physical school with teachers or guides and benefits from the important social, educational, and extracurricular experiences and mentorships that physical campuses can provide.

The **third part of the definition is that the modalities along each student's learning path are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.** Most blended learning programs use a computer-based data system to provide continual formative assessments, track each student's progress, and help to match the modality-whether it is online, one-on-one, or small group-to the appropriate level and topic.

Raise Your Hand Texas - Blended Learners Districts across the state are showcasing how they are uniquely impacting student achievement through their student-centered blended learning pilots. One of these showcases will be held right here in our region at Cisco ISD's Elementary and Junior High Campuses on March 26th. Please pass this on to your local educators and ISD administrators and encourage them to take the tour. Perhaps your ISD could be selected as a Blended Learner District. FMI [Click Here](#).

Upcoming Events & Application Deadlines

March 17 - Quickbooks Desktop: Basics, ASU SBDC, FMI

[Click Here](#)

March 24 - THC Social Media and Your Cultural

Organization Webinar, FMI [Click Here](#)

March 24 - Discover the Hidden Power of Quickbooks, Abilene SBDC, FMI Call 325-670-0300

March 26 - Raise Your Hand Texas, Blended Learning Tour, Cisco, FMI [Click Here](#)

April 3 - Nonprofit Marketing Conference, Community Foundation of Abilene, FMI [Click Here](#)

April 3 - Deadline for TDA's "You Art What You Eat Student Art Contest", FMI [Click Here](#)

April 3 - Deadline for KTB Youth & Educator Awards, FMI [Click Here](#)

April 29-30 - Rural Hospital Symposium, Big Country AHEC & Texas Rural Health Association, FMI [Click Here](#)

April 30 - TMCN General Membership Meeting, Hendrick Health System, FMI [Click Here](#)

May 7 - Leadercast Live 2020: Positive Disruption, ASU-SBDC, San Angelo, FMI [Click Here](#)

May 12 - Association of Rural Communities in Texas (ARCIT) Regional Meeting, Coleman, FMI [Click Here](#)

May 18-20 - Main Street Now Conference, Dallas, FMI [Click Here](#)

July 14 - Newly Elected Officials Seminar, WCTCOG, FMI [Click Here](#)

July 15 - Deadline for Texas Department of Agriculture's [Fire, Ambulance and Service Truck Grant](#) and [Planning and Capacity Building Grant](#), FMI Click on Respective Grant

July 28-30 - Stand Up For Rural Conference, Charleston, West Virginia, FMI [Click Here](#)

August 4th - Deadline for TDA's Downtown Revitalization and Main Street Grant, FMI [Click Here](#)



Registration for TMCN events is available [here](#)!

Professional Movements

Within Our Region

TMCN welcomes and congratulates the following individuals who have made professional changes within our region and wishes them well in their new roles:

Lynda Pack - Retiring as Executive Director for the Jacksboro EDC

Leslie Chalmers - Current Executive Director of the Jacksboro Chamber of Commerce moving to Executive Director of the Jacksboro EDC

Brooke Proctor - Current Executive Director for the Development Corporation of Snyder relocating to the Lubbock Area



Other Ways to Connect

Stay up to date on all the exciting events and activities going on in the region as well as upcoming educational opportunities by following us on [FACEBOOK](#).

Traveling the region and left your printed 2020 Travel Guide? You can now have it in the palm of your hand. [Access the Digital Guide](#) here.



TexasMidwest Facebook Page

Have a question of your peers within the region? Join and send your inquiries to the [TMCN Forum](#) for opportunities to learn from each other.

And finally, are you a recipient of our weekly "[Fun Things to Do This Weekend](#)" email blast? The blast provides a listing and links to all the TMCN community events found in the Texas Midwest Guide Calendar. If you'd like to be included in the weekly blast, simply go to our [website](#) and click the "[Fun Things to Do!](#)" tab in the top right corner and sign up. We'll be happy to include you!



Partner Highlight: Howard College - San Angelo Reported by Howard College

The new AEL Best in Class Award is a performance-driven, quality award focused on a grantee's performance toward meeting targeted measures, such as measurable skill gains, achieved credentials, and enrollment targets. This year, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) presented the \$40,000

award to six winners at an annual conference in Dallas. Howard College is proud to say, we were a recipient of one of the six Adult Education and Literacy Performance Quality Improvement Awards.

Howard College went above and beyond in meeting all of its grant requirements, earning the third top spot in the entire state. Both the Big Spring, and San Angelo campuses benefit from this grant award. The award money will be used to provide additional professional development to our teaching staff, which ensures that Howard College students will receive the highest caliber of teaching. According to Tammy Alexander, Director of Adult Basic Education in Big Spring, some of the training that will be provided to teachers will include conferences like the Texas Association for Literacy and Adult Education (TALAE) and the Literacy Texas

conference in San Marcos in August. Both conferences will contain a variety of different PD breakouts all related to adult education.

More information about Howard College Adult Education and Literacy programs can be found on the Howard College website under [Academics / Adult Education & Literacy](#).

For more information on the educational opportunities provided by TMCN Neighbor Partner **Howard College-San Angelo** [Click Here](#).

Thank You to Our Partners & Event Sponsors

The *Marketing & Promotions Opportunities Program* is one of the primary reasons for the continued success and sustainability of our organization. We proudly promote and recognize our partners' unwavering support given not only to our organization as a whole but the 50 communities who make up Texas Midwest Community Network. Please join us in offering our sincere gratitude for the longstanding and continued support of the following partners who have renewed for 2019 and, where possible, please demonstrate this appreciation by utilizing their services:



Champion: [Golden Spread Electric Cooperative](#) & [West Texas Rehabilitation Center](#)

Patron: [Hendrick Health Systems](#), [Jacob & Martin, LLC](#) & [Texas State Technical College](#)

Neighbors: [Atmos Energy](#), [AT&T](#), [Big Country Chevy Dealers](#), [Center for Community Health & Development](#), [Enprotec Hibbs & Todd](#), [Howard College - San Angelo](#) & [Tolar Systems, Inc.](#)

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