



2020  
2021



year in review

OHIO'S ELECTRIC  
COOPERATIVES

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives







**LEGISLATIVE AND GOVERNMENT  
AFFAIRS TEAM**



**COOPERATIVE  
DEVELOPMENT TEAM**



**SAFETY  
TRAINING  
& LOSS  
PREVENTION  
TEAM**



**COMMUNICATIONS  
TEAM**





# Legislative & Government Affairs

## ADVOCATING FOR AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE POWER AND EQUAL ACCESS TO BROADBAND TECHNOLOGIES

### ADVOCACY IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Throughout the year, electric cooperative leaders urged federal lawmakers to promote broadband expansion, encourage innovation in technology and infrastructure, and take a reasonable approach to energy and climate policies.

The White House and Congress spent much of the year working to develop a spending package. **It's not clear if any legislation will actually be signed into law**, but it's important that as long as legislation is being considered, America's electric cooperatives should be involved in discussing a number of issues that are urgent to electric cooperatives.

Priorities for Ohio's electric cooperatives:

- the ability to refinance USDA Rural Utilities Service debt at today's low interest rates

without penalties

- allowing co-ops to access direct-pay tax incentives for developing wind, solar, energy storage, carbon capture and sequestration, as well as nuclear energy
- establishment of a **voluntary** financial incentive program, funded at a minimum of \$30 billion, to assist in the co-op transition to lower carbon technologies
- recognition that including a clean energy standard in the package could jeopardize co-ops' ability to provide reliable and affordable electricity to their consumer-members.

Considering those factors, we've also insisted that any energy and climate policies considered by Congress must:

- include realistic, reasonable, and achievable timelines
- ensure an affordable, reliable electric supply for consumers
- incentivize investment in needed infrastructure improvements, including the sustained development of energy technology
- mitigate the financial impact of stranded assets
- limit the economic impact on our most vulnerable communities.

If legislation passes, it's important that electric cooperatives advance our priorities to preserve the affordable, reliable, and environmentally responsible supply of power that our members expect.



## ADVOCACY AT HOME

State leaders addressed the broadband inequality issue by establishing and funding a nearly \$300 million grant program to extend internet access to unserved and underserved parts of Ohio. Electric cooperatives achieved equal access to the broadband grant program, as well as language that allows electric easements to also house telecommunications equipment for broadband deployment. However, while House Bill 2 addressed broadband concerns for rural Ohioans, it also could shift the costs of broadband deployment onto our not-for-profit electric cooperatives.

House Bill 2 recognizes a subsidized pole attachment formula that will be disputed with telecommunications companies.

Governor Mike DeWine also signed legislation aimed at fostering greater communications and planning with local governments for large wind and solar installations in rural Ohio. The measure, sponsored by Senators Bill Reineke (R-Tiffin) and Rob McColley (R-Napoleon), passed in the final days before the legislature left for summer break. In a win for rural landowners, the new law enables a board of county commissioners to establish a restricted area that prohibits large wind or solar facilities or a significant

addition to an existing facility before becoming subject to Ohio Power Siting Board review. Senate Bill 52 will promote partnership and collaboration between project developers and the local community, ensuring that those projects are sited and supported in areas that make sense.

As we head into the new year, we need everyone — grasstops and grassroots supporters — to help advance our issues by engaging elected officials and fellow cooperative members with our story. Electric cooperatives can achieve great things when we stay together.



# Cooperative Development

## FOSTERING MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

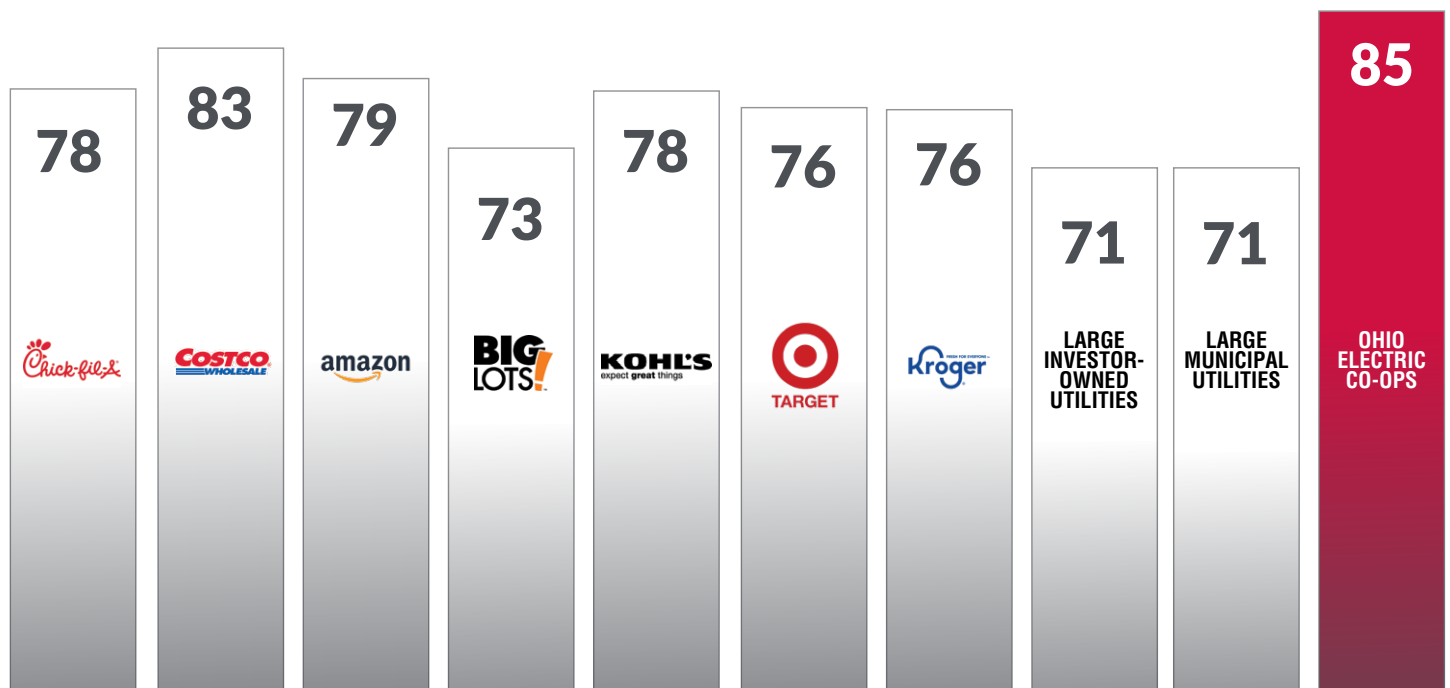
### COMPREHENSIVE COOPERATIVE CONTENTMENT

Coming off a globally unparalleled year that affected most, if not all, industries, Ohio's electric cooperative network emerged well above their investor-owned utility counterparts, as well as many retail industry

outlets, in the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) survey. ACSI is one of the oldest and most highly regarded industry satisfaction studies and publishes annual customer satisfaction results for more than 380 companies across 46 industries and 10 economic sectors,

based on roughly 250,000 customer interviews.

Ohio co-ops scored a comprehensive 85 of 100 points in 2021. Fourteen co-ops achieved their highest individual scores this year, with five scoring 90 or above.



Co-ops largely attribute scores to an unrelenting commitment to service reliability; member-focused staff; and the provision of reasonable rates and clear communication with consumer-members regarding energy costs, power generation resources, and the integrity of the cooperative business model.

## **PAYBACK**

Energy efficiency and savings go hand in hand with member service. In 2021, Ohio's Electric Cooperatives provided more than 2,500 incentives under its geothermal, heat pump, water heater, Cool Returns, insulation and air-sealing, appliance, charging units, commercial and industrial lighting, Be E3 Smart, and agricultural marketing programs.

## **EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND INFORMATION**

Year after year, Ohio's Electric Cooperatives' workforce and professional training classes continue to grow and advance, based on co-op staff demand and industry evolution. Whether through our Leadership Edge curriculum for emerging leaders, co-op employee/trustee orientations, director education courses, and technical or role-specific development syllabuses,

more than 700 co-op and OEC staff availed themselves of progressive learning opportunities in the past 12 months.

## **CLASS OF '21**

Ohio's Electric Cooperatives' commitment to community starts with its youngest members. With a nod to Ohio high school students who are seeking advanced education, as well as current college students and those enrolled in technical careers, Ohio's Electric Cooperatives awarded \$78,100 in scholarships in 2021.

## **SPONSORED BY ...**

Bringing resources to our members is a hallmark of Ohio's Electric Cooperatives. With financial stewardship in mind and an eye on value, our relationships with industry partners and supporters culminated in a yearly total of \$79,000 in event and directory sponsorships.

## **SPARKING GROWTH**

As community-led, -governed, -owned, and -engrained organizations, the delivering of jobs and industry to service areas is increasingly vital to electric co-ops. Co-ops are indisputable critical community partners.

Ohio's Electric Cooperatives awarded \$53,450 in economic and community development grants over the past year, within the service territories of:

- The Energy Cooperative, Newark
- Hancock-Wood Electric Cooperative, Findlay
- Lorain-Medina Rural Electric Cooperative, Wellington
- Mid-Ohio Energy, Marion
- Midwest Electric, St. Marys
- Union Rural Electric, Marysville
- Washington Electric Cooperative, Marietta

OEC promotes site development, job growth, broadband internet development, and community growth throughout Ohio by working with and fostering relationships among economic development organizations and community and cooperative leaders.

Several times a year, OEC hosts workshops and key accounts events to bring together stakeholders for professional development and networking, as well as to attract commercial accounts to co-op service areas, spurring jobs and economic growth.

# Safety Training & Loss Prevention

## ADAPTING TO MEMBER NEEDS TO ENHANCE OHIO'S SAFETY CULTURE

### TRAINING AND ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO OHIO LINEWORKERS THROUGH COLT PROGRAM

Like other business units at OEC, the safety department deliverables were widely affected by the pandemic, requiring the team to adapt to member needs to deliver safety training and regulatory compliance services. Following a good learning curve, members now can receive safety training in person, virtually, or recorded on demand. With enhanced safety protocols, all apprentice lineworker classes at the Central Ohio Lineworker Training (COLT) program are back on schedule.

The COLT program continues to grow and now boasts a third full-time instructor, as well as an opportunity for all past, present, and future students to obtain a college degree. The onsite lineworker development program was created to bring COLT

training and safe work practices to the field, where apprentice and journeyman lineworkers encounter real-life hazards and must work collaboratively to resolve those challenges.

Ohio's Electric Cooperatives and West Virginia University of Parkersburg signed an agreement that will allow all past, present, and future COLT students to obtain an Associate of Applied Science degree. The new opportunity provides students with 45 credit hours of combined, related instruction at COLT, along with the on-the-job training that they receive at the cooperative.

Students will be required to take an additional 15 credit hours in the areas of communication skills, quantitative skills, and general education electives. Following completion of the associate degree, students can choose to pursue a bachelor's degree in supervisory management. To date,

15 lineworkers have applied to the university in pursuit of the Associate of Applied Science degree.

### NEW TRAININGS OFFERED TO IMPROVE LINEWORKER SKILLS AND ENHANCE APPRENTICESHIP

The apprentice lineworker development best practices program was developed in response to concerns from Ohio's member distribution systems regarding proper development of apprentice lineworkers on the job. The new program removes barriers that hinder the development of the apprentice lineworker by helping the cooperative to install and maintain a semi-formal structure for healthy growth. Additionally, the initiative will provide best practices, tools, and ideas to aid co-ops to ensure that the actions of all associated cooperative employees are helpful with the process of apprentices reaching their fullest potential,



working safely and efficiently, and helping to improve the safety of all workers, while accomplishing a high level of work performance.

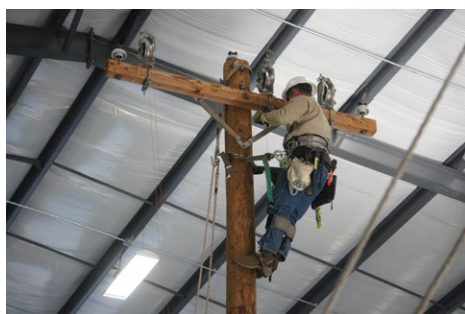
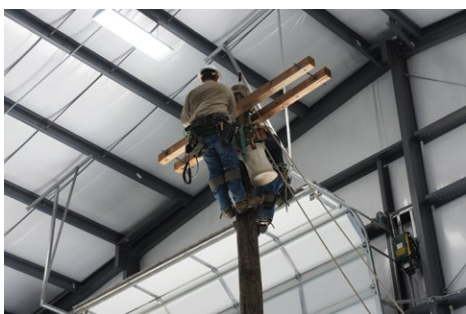
Additionally, online training for cooperative employees took a big step forward in 2021 with Vivid Learning Systems. The new online platform includes 23 technical linework courses that enhance the apprenticeship and provide refreshers for experienced personnel. Vivid also provides improved general safety courses and exams, including OSHA-required courses, and allows an

unlimited number of uploads at no extra cost; consequently, the OEC S.A.F.E. Talk series can be uploaded weekly onto the learning management system and assigned to cooperative employees, as requested. The cooperative can assign critical records through the system for improved documentation.

The hazard communication program was also significantly improved in 2021 as the chemical safety data sheets were moved to the Vivid platform. The new system provides enhanced features and easier access

to critical information in the event of an emergency.

Physical safety is critical; however, increased focus has been placed on cyber security. OEC will focus on assisting members with cyber security issues through the new Rural Electric Cooperative Cyber Advancement Program (RECAP), a peer review program that produces a cyber improvement plan for participating cooperatives.



# Communication Is Key

## READ ALL ABOUT IT

*Ohio Cooperative Living*, our stalwart monthly member publication, reaches 305,000 subscribers across the state and endures as the preeminent voice of Ohio's electric cooperatives. In partnership with the distribution cooperatives, *Ohio Cooperative Living* is a strategic alignment of lifestyle, entertainment, and industry feature stories with co-op specific news and events.

In 2021, *Ohio Cooperative Living* was recognized by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) with a gold "Spotlight on Excellence" award for best graphic design for the June 2020 feature article "Bicycles built for you," as well as 12 "Excellence in Craft" awards from the Outdoor Writers of Ohio for the magazine's "Woods, Water, and Wildlife" series.

## TARGETED COMMUNICATION

The past year focused on the marriage of digital and traditional communications. With a prioritization to strengthen its social media influence, Ohio's Electric Cooperatives credits pointed missives on community engagement

and philanthropic initiatives, print and broadcast media stories, co-op member outreach efforts, and education about power generation with a surge to almost 13,000 followers across our various platforms.

## MEDIA

Forging mutually beneficial relationships with industry and general media outlets, the OEC communications team consistently monitors local, regional, state, and national news markets, publications, and channels to pitch stories that support the cooperative business model, power generation resource diversity, and humanitarian endeavors. In 2020-2021, our media alliances resulted in stories on the future of coal in Ohio; mutual aid; the COLT-West Virginia University partnership; rural broadband; and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library co-op affiliations on outlets such as Spectrum News Ohio; WCHS (Charleston, WV); WBNS (Columbus, OH); WTOV (Steubenville, OH); RFD-TV; and in *The Columbus Dispatch* and *RE Magazine*.

## IT'S A WRAP

The combined forces of innovative graphic design, video production, digital media, and storytelling expertise form a team that increases and inspires consumer-member engagement, while providing information that drives the evolution of the electric cooperative model. In the past 12 months, the OEC communications department united with the distribution cooperative network to roll out results-centered educational campaigns that motivate, support, and extend our foothold in the cooperative arena:

- Distracted driving
- Voices for Cooperative Power
- Rural broadband expansion
- Co-op annual meetings
- Social media pilots (Operation Round Up, Cool Returns, SmartHub, online voting)
- Website updates
- Who Powers You Ohio?
- Co-ops Vote

# The Foundation of Giving

The employee-led, -governed, and -funded Community Foundation of Ohio's Electric Cooperatives was established in 2017 for the dual purposes of mirroring the distribution cooperatives' charitable community outreach efforts and funding those central Ohio philanthropic organizations with which OEC staff are involved, whether as volunteers or via their financial contributions. Despite the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic, OEC staff were resolute in the determination that the company's altruistic efforts forge ahead.



The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's (LLS) Light the Night campaign has become OEC's primary humanitarian initiative. In our sophomore year of support, "Team OEC" surpassed its 2019 total of \$38,000 and raised \$51,000, becoming the second-highest fundraising team in LLS' central Ohio region. Subsequently granting OEC the "Ignite" award, LLS recognized Ohio's Electric Cooperatives as "the team that shined brightly in 2020. Ohio's Electric Cooperatives left no stone unturned, and what came through their fundraising efforts and their

collective energy, dedication, and passion in the fight against cancer embodies the hope and sense of community that Light the Night represents. The Ignite award goes to those whose enthusiasm and determination shine through day after day. From successfully implementing a vendor campaign to selling masks to wagers for a turtleneck contest, they pushed and pushed to the very end. Congratulations to Ohio's Electric Cooperatives! We're proud to recognize you with Light the Night's Ignite award." Tom Alban, vice president of power generation, whose campaign raised \$38,000, was named LLS' 2020 Columbus-area "Executive Challenge" champion.



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library/ Ohio Governor's Imagination Library is an initiative that reflects OEC's cooperative principle of "concern for community." Since partnering with the two organizations in 2020, OEC's affiliate program has provided 18,000 (and counting) books free of charge for children ages birth to age five in Highland County, with the

objective of fostering early childhood literacy. In 2021, the program was bolstered by a grant from the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio.

In addition, the Community Foundation of Ohio's Electric Cooperatives proudly provided in-kind or financial support to:

- Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives (hurricane relief)
- JR Memorial Cruise for a Cure
- Ovarian Cancer Alliance of Central Ohio
- Worthington Resource Pantry

We're just getting started. As the Community Foundation of Ohio's Electric Cooperatives expands, we look forward to our 2021 Light the Night campaign, continuing patronage of our Highland County literacy initiative, supporting the OEC staff's community-based endeavors, and fortifying our concern for community.





# OHIO'S ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives 

**Buckeye Power:** The wholesale power supplier for the 25 distribution cooperatives serving Ohio.

**Ohio Rural Electric Cooperatives:** The statewide trade and services association.

Together, we are **Ohio's Electric Cooperatives.**

[www.ohioec.org](http://www.ohioec.org)

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