

2026 TOC CONFERENCE AGENDA

REGISTRATION **Hotel Lobby, Fargo Holiday Inn**
Tuesday, May 12 – 8am to 5pm
Wednesday, May 13 – 8am to noon

TUESDAY, MAY 12 – USER GROUP MEETINGS

7:30am-11:45am **Calix ConneXions at Local**
Harvest Hall 7:30-8:30am: Breakfast, 8:30-11:45am: Session.

9:00am-11:45am **Ribbon Rural Business and Technology Conference**
Executive Specialty Buffet Breakfast Served at 9:00am

8:30am-11:30am **Office Professionals Meeting**
Mezzanine 1-2

12pm-5pm **702 Communications (By Invitation Only)**
Dakota Hall

TUESDAY, MAY 12 – HARVEST HALL

1:00pm **Opening Remarks**
Ryan Thompson, 2026 TOC Chairman, Host State SD
General Manager/CEO, Santel Communications

1:15pm **Opening Keynote – Industry Updates**
Mike Romano, CEO, NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association
The broadband marketplace and Washington DC are both evolving at breathtaking paces. NTCA CEO Mike Romano will discuss how rural providers can navigate accelerating change and position themselves for success in the face of new opportunities and challenges.

2:00pm **Bless Your Heart: How You're Accidentally Helping Competitors Win**
Jeremy Graves, President, Pivot
AI isn't the threat. You might be. While large carriers and low-earth-orbit satellites quietly get better, faster, and cheaper, too many rural broadband providers are confusing 'being local' with a competitive strategy. Jeremy will pull back the curtain on three uncomfortable truths about where this industry is headed and make the case that the only thing standing between your customers and your competition is the experience you either deliberately deliver... or accidentally don't.

3:00-6:30pm **Exhibits Open – Great Hall & Pool Area**
Food & Refreshments (Keg Beer)

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13 – MORNING SESSIONS

Sessions 1 through 6 begin at 8:00-9:00am. Each session repeats at 9:15-10:15am and 10:30-11:30am.

Session 1. Conference

Okay, So Now What? Turning Uncomfortable Truths Into an Actual Plan **Jeremy Graves, President, Pivot**

The keynote told you what's coming. This session is where you decide what to do about it. We'll move from awareness to accountability and explore what operationalizing customer experience looks like when you're short-staffed, resource-constrained, and competing against companies with billion-dollar AI budgets. Spoiler: you don't need their budget. Let's ditch the damn excuses and have some discipline, accountability, and execution. Bring something to write with, an open mind, and enough honesty to admit where your own organization might be the problem.

Session 2. Directors

Broadband Meets AI: Innovation, Responsibility, and the Road Ahead **Chris Reiser, Professional Services Operations Broadband Manager, NISC**

Artificial Intelligence is transforming industries worldwide, and broadband is no exception. This session will explore how generative and agentic AI can drive new efficiencies, improve customer service, and support operational excellence for providers. We'll also discuss security, compliance, and ethical design considerations to ensure AI is implemented responsibly. Attendees will walk away with practical ideas for getting started and a clear view of what's coming next.

Session 3. Board

Network Planning/Aging Fiber **Trent VanRoekel, Broadband Project Manager, Vantage Point Solutions** **Fallon Woods, Senior Analyst, Vantage Point Solutions**

Join us as we discuss how aging fiber and strand constraints influence network planning, restoration readiness, and capacity growth. This session will cover best practices for assessing fiber health, managing utilization, and planning augments, while taking into consideration end of life and fully depreciated assets. The session will also address the practicality and cost of adding capacity, and how smart investment decisions support resilient, long term operations.

Session 4. Executive

Workforce Development for the Digital Economy: Transforming Subscriber Support in a Competitive Broadband Market **Noah Southerland, Senior Vice President, JSI**

In today's digital-first world, delivering exceptional subscriber support is not just a service, it's a strategic advantage. As subscriber expectations grow, Network Operations Centers (NOCs) and Contact Centers serve as frontline ambassadors for quality service. This session explores how providers can develop a digitally fluent workforce to support the needs of today's broadband subscribers, whether in rural or urban communities. Attendees will learn how workforce development and advanced support models are essential for operational excellence, digital equity, and long-term competitiveness in the broadband market.

Session 5. Prairie

Cyber Resilience **Benjamin Prill, Cybersecurity Engineering Analyst, Vantage Point Solutions**

Join Benjamin Prill as he explores the concept of cyber resilience and its significance in ensuring operations continue despite cyber threats. Various methods to safeguard your organization from cyberattacks will be discussed, including intrusion detection and prevention systems, data backups, and more. He will also showcase frameworks and standards for implementing cyber resilience, including real world examples.

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Session 6.

Frontier

Spacious Productivity

Jason Henkel, Founder and Chief Balance Engineer, Focus to Evolve

A keynote experience that ensures both immediate and lasting impact. This session invites a shift in how to approach productivity, wellbeing, and work itself. This content addresses the underlying patterns driving distraction, overwhelm, and the inability to get meaningful work done. Replacing them with practical, human-centered ways to work with greater clarity, higher potency, focus, and optimized productivity. This is an instigation to real change that sustains. This is not about working more hours. It's about working better hours while accomplishing far more and keeping wellbeing at center stage.

11:30am-1:15pm

Lunch Break (On Your Own)

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13 – AFTERNOON SESSIONS

Sessions 7 through begin at 1:15-2:15pm and repeats at 2:30-3:30pm in the same room.

Session 7.

Conference

Beyond Broadband: How Rural Providers Win with Bundles and Mobility

Dani Pinon, Territory Account Manager, Comtrend

As broadband buildouts become saturated, rural providers are entering a new competitive phase—one where connectivity alone isn't enough. This segment examines how local and regional providers can stay ahead by expanding beyond the broadband line. From introducing mobile and managed Wi-Fi services to building creative local bundles that tie everything together, we'll explore how to strengthen customer loyalty, defend market share, and transform connectivity into a complete, community-driven experience.

Session 8.

Directors

The Importance of Broadband Mapping

Paul Nesenson, Director of GIS Analytics, JSI

Broadband mapping has become a critical tool for shaping connectivity policy, directing funding, and ensuring equitable access to high-speed internet. Accurate mapping informs infrastructure investment, guides regulatory decisions, and enables service providers to identify underserved areas. As policymakers, community leaders, and industry stakeholders seek to close the digital divide, understanding the methodology, limitations, and impact of broadband mapping is more important than ever.

Session 9.

Board

The Future of Cost Recovery

Marlene Bennett, Executive Vice President, Consortia Consulting

Discover what's next for broadband cost recovery—how shifting rules, funding, and technology are changing the game. Learn what rural providers must do now to stay compliant and profitable.

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- Session 10.**
Executive
OSP Physical Plant Design Ribbon vs Loose tube/HH's vs Pedestal/GPON vs PON. Asking the Correct Questions on your Plant!
Doug Peterson, Co-Owner, Optical Xperts
OSP Plant Design and Engineering for physical site. Comparing HH's (Closures) to Pedestals (Standard-Multi-port-Dist split). Cable advantages of Loose Tube-Ribbon-Rollable Ribbon. Active VS. PON and GPON systems. "The Correct questions to ask and the correct way to ask them."
- Session 11.**
Prairie
Workforce Trends: What Makes People Want to Come to Work Today?
Kimberly Nunnally, Vice President of People, NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association
Learn about the latest workforce trends with Kimberly Nunnally, the Vice President of People for NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association.
- Session 12.**
Frontier
Building Your Company Story
Steve Riat, Director of Sales, Nex-Tech
Stories help build your brand, enhance your culture and ultimately sell your services but it is more than that! Many times we work really hard to serve our customers and do not celebrate the success. By having a story capturing process you can not only celebrate those important successes but ensure they are told in the future to new team members and to customers who can share in the experiences of the past. We will take an entertaining journey of storytelling for business and Steve will be sharing his personal stories that are guaranteed to get lots of laughs (And maybe some tears...)
- 3:00-6:00pm**
Exhibits Open – Great Hall & Pool Area
Keg Beer & Snacks
- 6:00 -7:30pm**
Supplier-Sponsored Reception – Harvest Hall
Open Bar & Hors D'oeuvres
The winners of the vendor booth drawings will be announced during the reception.

THURSDAY, MAY 14 – HARVEST HALL

- 8:00am**
Presiding
Ryan Thompson, 2026 TOC Chairman, Host State SD
General Manager/CEO, Santel Communications
- 8:15am**
The State of the Cyber Security Landscape
Thomas Blade, Advisory Sales Engineer, Arctic Wolf Networks
This presentation examines a real-world cyber attack to show how a single breach unfolded, what was missed, and why the impact escalated. From there, it zooms out to the current cyber landscape—highlighting how today's threat actors operate, where defenses commonly fail, and what this means for organizations right now.
- 9:00am**
Break
- 9:15am**
Closing Keynote – James Robilotta
- 10:15am**
Door Prize Drawings & Adjourn