



Carter County uses  
**AT&T phone and internet solutions**  
to assist residents during the COVID-19 outbreak

- **Business needs** - Carter County needed a reliable, easy to manage telephone system that would support the important work of county employees.
- **Networking solution** - AT&T Hosted Voice Service is an easy-to-manage solution that delivers advanced calling features.
- **Business value** - This turnkey solution simplified administration and offered features that gave employees the ability to work from home.
- **Industry focus** - County government
- **Size** - Population: 48,111

## About Carter County

Carter County is a major oil and gas center in South Central Oklahoma, very close to the Texas border. Before Oklahoma became a state in 1907, Carter County was part of Pickens County in the Chickasaw Nation of Indian Territory. Today its residents have access to beautiful parks, trails and playgrounds, 3 hospitals, and 9 public school districts. County officials are proud of the area's low taxes, low cost of living, and excellent business opportunities.

## The situation

When Carter County began planning to relocate some offices to a new building, it found that it couldn't move its aging telephone system. Officials decided to invest in a new system that would be easier to manage and offer county employees features the old system lacked, such as voice mail and call forwarding.

## Solution

AT&T Hosted Voice Service is a Voice over IP (VoIP) solution that provides advanced communication tools and calling features. When many government offices were shuttered during the COVID-19 outbreak, Carter County employees were able to work from home thanks to the county's new phones. The phone system from AT&T easily forwards work calls from employees' desktop phones to their personal cellphones so they can continue to assist county residents.

## Preserving the past, preparing for the future

Carter County is a lively community with an interesting mix of history, industry, and recreation. Many of its buildings, including the neoclassical county courthouse and much of downtown Ardmore, its county seat, are on the National Register of Historic Places. Residents' commitment to architectural preservation adds a great deal of charm to the neighborhood.

While Carter County is committed to honoring its past, it is also working to build a prosperous future. The county is home to major oil and natural gas production facilities, national distribution centers, the country's largest independent agricultural research institute, and thriving business districts. Its plentiful recreational opportunities include Lake Murray, a crystal lake fed by mountain springs that's part of Oklahoma's largest state park.

Like most local governments, Carter County is careful about spending taxpayers' money. It had used an outdated phone system for years. When the county

finally replaced its aging phones, it turned out to be good timing. The new system would enable workers to continue to serve the needs of the people of Carter County when COVID-19 struck.

“With AT&T, we got internet to the new building on fiber, we got a phone system, the phones, and all their support behind it.”

**Jimmy Allen**  
IT Director, Carter County

## Old phones, new challenges

Jimmy Allen is a technologist who started with Carter County as its mapping coordinator. Five years ago, he added Information Technology (IT) to his duties. “I cover all facets of IT,” he said. “I make sure the network is up and running and do any kind of technical troubleshooting that needs to be done with our cameras, firewalls, and computers.” He's also responsible for the county's telephony.

“We had a really old phone system,” he said. “One of the phone technicians that came in to help me out one time said the system was old enough to vote.”

Upgrades made over the years added layers of complexity and made the phones difficult to use. “At some point the county had installed a Plexar phone system and later added separate PBX systems for the

county commissioners, the courts, and the assessors,” Allen said. “A lot of times to make a call you had to dial two nines to get out of the PBX and then the Plexar system.”

It was clear that Carter County needed a better phone system to serve residents’ needs. “When I took over as the county’s IT person, one of the first things they told me they wanted was new phones,” Allen recalled.

The need was exacerbated when an oil and gas company donated its building to the county. As plans were made to move some offices from the county courthouse into the new building, Allen learned he would not be able to move the current phone system. He began researching new telephony.

## Tools to keep the county in business

Allen initially looked for a traditional phone system but was unable to find any providers that offered the old copper-line systems that Carter County was accustomed to using. “Our only option was to go to Voice over IP,” he said. After researching voice products from AT&T and those of a local cable provider, Allen chose AT&T Hosted Voice Service (HVS).

Thanks to HVS, the county had tools that enabled it to continue to provide many essential functions when COVID-19 forced the county to implement restrictions. Many county offices have been closed to the public, but essential staff are able to work from home thanks

to the county’s AT&T solution. This is important, Allen said, because many residents and businesses need to access county offices for permits, licenses, and tax concerns.

It was a simple matter for Allen to forward calls from employees’ desk phones to their cellphones. He was even able to set restrictions that forward work-related calls only during regular business hours. “After that time the phones won’t ring, but the caller will get a pop-up message indicating that the county office is closed,” Allen said. “It was all relatively easy.”

Despite the pandemic, people are still buying houses and starting construction projects. “It may seem like life has come to a stop, but people are still doing stuff,” Allen said.

Thanks to the new phone system, county employees are in a position to continue to serve residents without potentially exposing residents or themselves to the coronavirus.



## A turnkey system with AT&T support

Allen is pleased with the unified solution that integrates Carter County's communications. "From where I sit as the IT director, everything's good," Allen said. "So far, with everything up and operational, I think it's great." He appreciated that AT&T offered a complete package, including the phone system and AT&T Dedicated Internet service.

"We chose AT&T because they let us keep our phone numbers, and because I'm a big fan of turnkey services," he said. "With AT&T, we got internet to the new building on fiber, we got a phone system, the phones, and all their support behind it." Allen is impressed with the internet service. "It's fast," he said. "Our phones have priority on the network, but I've never once seen a problem as far as speed or reliability."

Billing for the county's hosted voice services is much simpler than with its previous phone system. "I can track everything," Allen said. The phone bills are broken out by department, so he can tell managers

which features their employees are using and how much each feature costs. The precise billing helps department managers see places to save money. Fax machines, for instance, don't need any special features. "Before, it was a nightmare," Allen said. "Now I know what we're paying for."

Managing the new phone system is also much easier. "We have a lot more turnover than I expected within our state's departments," Allen said. "I'm constantly changing names and resetting mailboxes. I tell employees to just unplug their phones, walk them to their new offices, plug it in, and let me know. Then I just go in and I move the numbers. It's super easy."

Employees appreciate the new system, Allen said. "They like the features and the service is great. The calls are crisp and clean, and they love having a voice mailbox."

Thanks to the AT&T solution, Carter County officials can continue keeping an eye on taxpayer money while offering residents improved services and employees a better work environment—even in the face of a pandemic.