



Newsletter

-----April 2026-----



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April is National Safe Digging Month – Call 811

April is National Safe Digging Month

Spring's longer daylight hours and warmer weather spark increased energy, often dubbed "spring fever," motivating people to start gardening, landscaping, and exterior home improvement projects like installing fences or digging a foundation for a deck. It is important to remind people that for any outdoor project requires a call to 811 to check for underground utilities. This simple reminder can potentially save a life.

811 is the nationwide, FCC-designated toll-free number in the United States used to contact local "one-call" centers before digging. It connects homeowners and contractors with local utility companies to request and mark underground lines preventing damage and injury.

Why is Contacting 811 so Important?

Digging without knowing what's underground can be dangerous. Damaging an underground utility line can lead to fines, repair costs, service outages, and potentially serious injuries or death. Once a call has been made to 811, trained professionals will mark the approximate location of underground utilities.

Contacting 811 is Simple, Free and the Law

A quick call or online request to 811 helps protect members within your community. These simple steps help keep everyone safe.

Step 1: Submit a “Locate Request”

The first step is to submit an underground utility “locate request” at least two full business days (excluding the day the request is made) before any digging can begin. Once the request is received, 811 will issue a locate request to member utilities, including those who provide electric, natural gas, telephone, cable, water, and/or sewer service. The flags and/or painted lines are color-coded by the Uniform Color Code identifying which utility is being marked.

The American Public Works Association (APWA) Uniform Color Code (ANSI Z535.1) is used to identify underground utilities to ensure excavation safety. The standard colors are red (Electric Power Lines, Cables, Conduit, and Lighting Cables), yellow (gas/oil), orange (telecom), blue (potable water), green (sewer), purple (reclaimed water), white (proposed excavation), and pink (survey markings). These standardized colors are applied via paint or flags.

Step 2: Receive a “Positive Response”

Once locating has been performed, a ‘positive response’ will be sent from all utilities to the requester. The verification will be sent via email, or notification can be made via an online portal. Once a confirmed positive response is received, it is safe to dig.

Step 3: Dig with Caution

Even though a positive response has been issued from all utilities, it is important to tell clients that pipelines and cables do not always run in straight lines between the marks or flags. For this reason, a ‘tolerance zone’ is established around each marked utility. The tolerance zone includes the width of the underground utility plus an additional 24 inches on each side.

Utilities should remind clients that they should:

- Never dig directly on the marks or flags
- Always dig outside of the marks or flags
- Use hand tools or other non-intrusive methods if they must dig within the tolerance zone
- Keep in mind that the depth of underground lines also can vary

The three-step process is simple and important to all involved. It saves time, money, and potentially lives.



The First Stop for Public Power Solutions



Are you Overwhelmed by Vendor Outreach? Unsure which Technologies are Vetted for Public Power?

Many utilities don't realize that they already have a dedicated resource designed specifically for them. Hometown Connections, Inc. is the public power industry's own staff extension—a "Partner Hub" that brings you vetted, reliable, and cost-effective services.



Don't reinvent the wheel. Before you look anywhere else, check the HCI Toolbox first. We are stronger together than we are apart.

One Call. A World of Solutions. Hometown Connections, Inc.
 Visit: www.hometownconnections.com
 Contact your State Association or Joint Action Agency and ask for the HCI solution.

The Hometown Connections "First Stop" Partner List

Acumen	Cyber & Physical Security, Regulatory Compliance, and Operational Technology
DivDat	Utility Payment Solutions (Kiosk, Mobile, Web)
Energy Southeast	Energy Supply & Natural Gas Solutions
Exacter	Grid Reliability & Predictive Analytics
GreatBlue Research	Market Research & Customer Surveys
Katama (KTI)	Technology Planning & IT Infrastructure
Leverage Leadership	Professional Development & Training (TRP)
Marsh	Utility Business, Cyber Liability, & Risk Insurance
MFP Connect	Strategic Communications & Public Relations
PowerSecure	Microgrids & Distributed Energy Infrastructure
Quanam – DAPLAN	AI-Driven Financial & Data Analytics
Questline Digital	Content Marketing & Key Account Communications
SpryPoint	CIS, Billing, & Mobile Field Service (SaaS)
Stem	AI-Driven Clean Energy Storage Solutions
The Energy Authority	Energy Trading, Risk & Resource Management
Utility Financial	Cost of Service, Rate Design, & Financial Planning
HCI Consulting	Board of Governance & Strategic Planning

HCI's Annual Gathering

The HCI Annual Gathering was a significant success, marked by high attendance and a vibrant exchange of ideas. Each year Hometown Connections, Inc. hosts a gathering for all Affiliates and Partners, and this year's event was held in Denver, Colorado from April 8-9. The meeting focused primarily on the Affiliates and provided thought-provoking speakers with quality insights, several engaging interactive sessions, and several excellent networking opportunities.

A major highlight of the event was the keynote address by Scott Corwin, President and CEO of APPA, whose insights set a high standard for the discussions that followed. The core of the meeting was centered on "What Keeps Affiliate Members Up at Night", fostering deep dives into the most pressing operational challenges and exploring potential Partner solutions to address them.

On the first night of the conference, a nautical-themed dinner was hosted by HCI and HCI's Partners. First prize for best outfit was awarded to Houston Andreades from SpryPoint. Just as the event set a seafaring tone, the following days focused on how public utilities can navigate the choppy waters of daily operational challenges. Key to the success of the meeting was the robust Affiliate participation and the first-rate speakers. Intense discussions regarding the daily challenges provided unique perspectives and paved the way to better solutions.



Scott Corwin, CEO APPA, Marc Gerken, CEO of HCI, and Jeff Haas, Sr. VP of Membership and Marketing for APPA.



HCI members participated in a round table discussion.



Brandon Kelley, AMP's Senior Vice President of Strategy and Innovation and Chief Strategy Officer made a presentation at the meeting.



(L to R), Jeff Haas, APPA, Michael Vigeant, Great Blue; Monty Hanks, NCPA; and Kevin Gaden, retiree, gathered to discuss potential solutions to problems.



Doug Healy, Healy Law Firm, presented to the group on Data Centers.



(L to R, Top to Bottom) Randy Howard, GM for NCPA, Scott Corwin, CEO APPA, and Marc Gerken, CEO HCI.



Robbie Tugwell, PowerSecure and Mark Ennis, Energy Southeast discussing issues of the day.



Bob Blank, UFS, presented on finance.

Strategic Planning: Charting a Course to Excellence

Effective utility leadership begins with a simple truth: organizational resources and will are finite. The most important responsibility of leadership is to focus on what matters most.

Hometown Connections, Inc. (HCI) Executive Consultant for Strategic Planning, Mark McCain, has developed a proven strategic planning process that helps organizations develop a road map to guide decision making and resource allocation.

HCI's system is a four-part process:

- Brainstorming potential goals and strategies in advance of the workshop.
- Ranking potential goals and strategies in a survey to provide quantitative information.
- Shortlisting the highest priorities for board consideration.
- Deciding final priorities at an in-person workshop.

Mark likens an organization without a clear strategy to paddlers drifting downriver without coordination. “Our process gets everyone rowing in sync and moving ahead efficiently and on course.”

Board members and senior level staff are typically involved in the process. Most organizations go through the process once every three to five years with opportunities to revisit the plan as necessary.

While some organizations choose a do-it-yourself approach, an experienced third-party facilitator can add value. An independent facilitator brings objectivity, fresh perspective, and insights drawn from work with other organizations.

Move Beyond “Old-School” Planning

Traditional strategic planning often relies on a single-day session—brainstorming and decision-making happening simultaneously. In those situations, a small number of participants can dominate.

HCI's approach separates idea generation from decision-making, allowing time for reflection, better input, and stronger alignment. “It's easy for organizations to take on too many initiatives—trying to boil the ocean. Our approach is to focus on four or five areas that matter most.,” said Mark.

From Strategy to Execution

A well-developed plan is only the beginning. The implementation phase translates strategy into action by defining the “what, who, and when” for each priority. Accountability is addressed in this process as well and is often associated with performance reviews. Periodic reports are presented to the Board as leadership keeps the plan at the forefront of the organization's efforts.

Want to Know More?

To learn more about how Hometown Connections can assist your organization with Strategic Planning, please contact Mark McCain at mmccain@hometownconnections.com.

Upcoming 2026 Conferences

- April 26-28** **Municipal Electric Systems of Oklahoma Public Power Conference, Tulsa, OK**
<https://meso.starchapter.com/meetinginfo.php?id=24&ts=1771610333>
- May 4-8** **APPA Spring Education Institute, San Antonio, TX**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/education-institute>
- May 6-7** **FMEA Hurricane & Storm Preparedness Forum, Saint Augustine, FL**
<https://www.flpublicpower.com/events/fmea-2026-hurricane-and-storm-preparedness-forum>
- May 6-7** **Missouri River Energy Services (MRES) Annual Meeting, Sioux Falls, SD**
<https://www.mrenergy.com/event/mres-annual-meeting-3/2026-05-06>
- May 11-13** **PLMA Spring Conference, Indianapolis, IN**
<https://flexload.org/conference/spring-2026-plma-conference/>
- May 18-21** **Northwest Public Power Association Annual Conference, Spokane, WA**
<https://www.nwppa.org/conferences/annual-conference-and-membership-meeting/>
- June 1-3** **Energy Southeast (SEEA) Annual Member Meeting, Reston, VA**
<https://www.seealliance.org/event/2026-annual-member-meeting/>
- June 1-4** **CleanPower 2026 Conference, Houston, TX**
<https://cleanpower.org/expo/>
- June 7-9** **Palmetto Power Cities Annual Meeting, Hilton Head, SC**
<https://www.masc.sc/event/palmetto-power-cities-annual-meeting>
- June 16-17** **NPPA Accounting & Finance Conference, Missoula, MT**
<https://www.nwppa.org/conferences/accounting-finance-conference/>
- Jun 26-Jul1** **American Public Power Association National Conference, Boston, MA**
<https://www.publicpower.org/national-conference>
- July 5-8** **ECA Annual Meeting and Governmental Affairs Conference, Gulf Shores, AL**
<https://www.electriccities.org/event/annual-meeting-and-governmental-affairs-conference/>
- July 14-16** **Florida Municipal Electric Association Annual Meeting, Palm Beach, FL**
<https://www.flpublicpower.com/events/fmea-2026-annual-conference>

To have your conference listed, please send information to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com

Upcoming 2026 Conferences (continued)

- July 14-17** Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association Annual Meeting, Knoxville, TN
TBD
- July 15-17** TMEPA Annual Meeting, Knoxville, TN
<https://tmepa.org/event/annual-meeting/>
- Aug 17-19** Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association Annual Summer Conf, Saint Cloud, MN
<https://www.mmua.org/summer-conference>
- Sept 23-25** Northern California Power Agency Annual Conference, Olympic Valley, CA
TBD
- Sept 29-30** Michigan Municipal Electric Association Annual Conference, Battle Creek, MI
Contact MMEA directly at (517) 323-8446.
- Oct 7-9** Missouri Public Utility Alliance Annual Conference, Branson, MO
<https://mpua.org/page/annualconference>
- Oct 12 -14** AMP Annual Conference, Columbus, OH
<https://www.amppartners.org/services/annual-conference/>
- Oct 19-21** Electric Cities of Alabama Engineering & Operations Conference, Birmingham, AL
<https://www.electriccities.org/event/engineering-and-operations-conference/>
- Oct 20-22** TMEPA Fall Engineering & Operations Conference, Nashville, TN
TBD
- Oct 25-28** APPA Customer Connections Conference, Nashville, TN
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/customer-connections-conference>
- Nov 3-4** FMEA Energy Connections Conference & Trade Show, Tampa, FL
<https://www.flpublicpower.com/events/fmea-2026-energy-connections-conference-and-trade-show>
- Nov 8-11** NARUC Annual Meeting & Education Conference, Puerto Rico
<https://www.naruc.org/events/all-events/2026-naruc-annual-meeting-and-education-conference/>

To have your conference listed, please send information to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com

Energize Your Community with Prepayment Savings

Energy prepayment can help utilities reduce power costs by 7% or more, creating long-term stability and benefits for your customers and community. Energy Southeast, A Cooperative District, works alongside you and your financial partners to make the process straightforward, flexible, and achievable.

334.262.1126

energysoutheast.org

ENERGY 
SOUTHEAST
A COOPERATIVE DISTRICT®

HCI Blog

HCI Blog: A Platform for Collaboration and Innovation

<https://blog.hometownconnections.com/>

HCI warmly invites all its Partners and Affiliates to actively contribute to the blog. Whether it's sharing a recent project, providing commentary on industry trends, or offering advice based on your experiences, your input is highly valued. This collaborative effort will not only highlight the incredible work being accomplished across the network but also provide a valuable resource for continuous learning and development.

How to Contribute

Contributing to the HCI blog is straightforward. Interested Partners and Affiliates need to follow these simple steps:

- **Write your article:** Focus on topics that you are enthusiastic about and that would benefit the HCI community or public power in general.
- **Submit your article:** Send your completed article to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com.

Want to
STAND OUT
in a Crowd?



**Advertise on the HCI Blog and/or
in the HCI Newsletter!**

Reach a targeted and engaged audience by advertising in our professionally rebranded newsletter, distributed by HCI Affiliate members (Joint Action Agencies) to their utility customers. This is a fantastic opportunity to promote your company and services directly to decision-makers and create business opportunities across multiple communities.

Space is limited, so reserve your spot today and get your business in front of the right audience.



Hometown Connections, Inc. is a national, non-profit utility services organization specializing in the unique challenges facing community-owned utilities. For more than 25 years, HCI has helped municipal systems transform their processes and systems by facilitating access to industry-leading technology, services, and consulting.

Owners

- American Municipal Power, Inc.
- Energy Southeast
- Missouri Public Utility Alliance
- Northern California Power Agency
- Vermont Public Power Supply Authority

Marketing Affiliates

- Energy Northwest
- Florida Municipal Electric Association
- Illinois Municipal Electric Agency
- Indiana Municipal Utilities Agency
- Michigan Municipal Electric Association
- Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association
- Missouri River Energy Services
- Municipal Electric Systems of Oklahoma
- Nebraska Municipal Power Pool
- Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency
- Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association
- Texas Public Power Association

Sales Affiliates

- American Municipal Power, Inc.
- ElectriCities of North Carolina
- Energy Southeast
- Indiana Municipal Power Agency
- Missouri Public Utility Alliance
- Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority
- Piedmont Municipal Power Agency

Partners

- Acumen
- DivDat
- Energy Southeast, A Cooperative District
- Exacter
- Great Blue
- Hometown Connections
- Katama Technologies, Inc.
- Leverage Leadership
- Marsh USA
- MFP Connect
- PowerSecure
- Quanam
- Questline Digital
- SpryPoint
- Stem
- The Energy Authority
- Utility Financial Solutions

HCI Board of Directors:

- Brannndon Kelley, Chair
- Ken Nolan, Vice Chair
- Jeff Haas, Treasurer
- Jeff Haas, Secretary
- Randy S. Howard, Board Member
- Steve Stodden, Board Member

HCI Team

- Marc Gerken, P.E., President and CEO
- Nilaksh Kothari, P.E., Executive Consultant
- Mark McCain, Exec. Consultant for Strategic Planning
- Annette DuPont-Ewing, Director of Marketing
- Mike Mozingo, Director of Affiliate Relationships