



Nebraska Broadband Grant Program Guidelines

Purpose

The Nebraska Broadband Grant Program was created to provide high-speed broadband internet access to unserved and underserved Nebraskans who have been directly impacted by COVID-19. Impacted communities or households are those hindered in their ability to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 due to a lack of broadband (as defined by the Federal Communications Commission [FCC] standard of 25/3 Mbps download/upload speeds), thus impacting the ability to work from home, participate in online learning and/or access healthcare via telehealth.

The fund shall be used to provide financial assistance to install and deliver broadband infrastructure and service in the state.

Governor Pete Ricketts allocated \$40 million from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) for administering the Nebraska Broadband Grant Program to assist COVID-19 impacted individuals, families and communities. Enhanced broadband infrastructure is an important tool for enabling Nebraskans to address the challenges resulting from this public health crisis.

NOTE: Per U.S. Department of the Treasury guidelines, project costs for any project not expected to enhance capacity until *after* the health emergency has passed are ineligible. Therefore, costs related to infrastructure that would not facilitate internet access prior to December 30, 2020, are not eligible.

Goals and Priorities

DED has established a system to score applications and award grants to providers and communities on the basis of level of need, project timeline, infrastructure type, affordability of monthly service and speed.

Priority will be given to projects that will provide service in areas of the state that are unserved, i.e., have no advanced telecommunications or internet availability beyond dial-up and satellite services, or, those that are underserved as defined by the aforementioned FCC standard of 25/3 Mbps download/upload speeds.

Grant Applications

All applications must be submitted by broadband providers, and shall include, at minimum:

- **LOCATION OF THE PROJECT AND MAP.** Attach a map of the project area, depicting the number of households and businesses the project area would include.
- **EVIDENCE OF COMMUNITY NEED.** Attach evidence of need. Explain how the community's households and businesses are hindered in their ability to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 due to a lack of broadband (as defined by the FCC standard). This involves essential activities such as working from home, online learning and telehealth. A letter providing evidence must be signed and endorsed by a community official, including but not limited to the mayor, city administrator, county supervisor, superintendent, hospital administrator, etc.
- **BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE/SCOPE.** Describe the type and scope of broadband (e.g., cable, DSL, fiber, satellite, wireless, etc.) to be deployed or extended directly into housing and/or business units for the project, including expected speeds to be achieved (download and upload), monthly price/packages of the service offered, and whether low-income pricing will be available.
- **BROADBAND PROVIDER'S EXPERIENCE.** Provide evidence that the provider has successfully completed and has the ability to build/deploy the requested type of infrastructure on-time and on or below budget.
- **PROJECT TIMELINE.** Describe a realistic project timeline and milestones (project **MUST** be completed by December 30, 2020, to qualify).

- **DETAILED COST OF PROPOSED PROJECT.** Describe an itemized cost breakdown to include all upfront requirements, cost of building and/or extending infrastructure to the premises, and approximate build cost breakdown per housing unit and business.
- **FUNDING BREAKDOWN.** Have any other federal, state or private funding sources been pursued for this project? If so, what are they and how much funding will be provided by the applicant, community and/or private entities?
- **OTHER.** Detail any other authorizations, permits, funding or activities necessary prior to the commencement of the project, including right of way.
- **LEASE/FRANCHISE AGREEMENT, if applicable.** Attach any lease agreement associated with this project. Final draft or executed copy only.

DED Grant Applications

Applications will be available beginning June 22, 2020, with applications due by 3 pm (CDT) on July 2, 2020. Applications received after the deadline will **NOT** be considered.

Eligible/Ineligible Activities

Any project currently under contract or under construction is not eligible to apply. Areas eligible for Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) and or approved for Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF) funding are not eligible for this grant. A provider may submit more than one application; however, the provider must provide evidence that each project will be completed by December 30, 2020. More than one application can be submitted per community; however, all must be accompanied by evidence of need and support from the community.

Additional Funding

Applications including additional capital provided by a provider, community, or private entity will be given additional points in the scoring process.

Disbursement of Funds

Once a project has been approved by DED and a contract between the community and the provider is signed, 1/3 of the grant shall be funded. Upon 60 percent completion another 1/3 of the grant shall be funded. Upon inspected completion (including speed tests), the final 1/3 of the grant shall be funded and the project will be listed as closed.

Reporting Requirements and Right to Audit

The provider will be required to report the status of the project, including delays, every 30 days, and must notify DED immediately if delays are identified or when outlined milestones are met.

At any point, DED reserves the right to audit the project, ensuring that funds are spent appropriately and timelines are met. Following project completion, an undetermined amount of internet speed tests will be required throughout various parts of the community.