OFFICE OF STATEWIDE BROADBAND

Connect Maryland:

FY22 Connected Communities Grant Program

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

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LARRY HOGAN
Governor

BOYD K. RUTHERFORD
Lt. Governor

KENNETH C. HOLT
Secretary

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Executive Summary

COVID-19 has further exposed the digital divide in Maryland and its consequences for all residents. Families who do not have access to the internet or cannot afford internet service are at an impossible disadvantage. The State of Maryland has approved $5 million in the FY2022 Budget for the Department of Housing and Community Development ("Department") to support the Office of Statewide Broadband ("OSB") in its efforts to assist in its digital equity efforts in Maryland. To address the issue of the digital divide, the Office is introducing the Connected Communities Grant Program (MD-GAPS). The funding source for this budgeted expense is the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds administered by the US Treasury. Funded Projects must comply with the ARPA requirements. All federal rules regarding this funding must be adhered to by the applicant should an award be made.

In order to best use the resources at its disposal, the OSB is looking to partner with local jurisdictions, nonprofit corporations, anchor institutions, and community based organizations seeking to close the digital divide in Maryland. This grant opportunity is designed to assist applicants in creating Gap Networks and Community Networks. These networks are designed to directly address the affordability challenge many low to moderate income household's face in subscribing to internet service. Given their purpose, the grant opportunity will help communities close existing gaps and lay the groundwork for improved broadband access, adoption, and utilization.

The OSB understands that technology and population distribution may require creative options for ubiquitous broadband deployment. As such, the OSB is technology neutral; any technology capable of meeting speed and latency requirements set forth in this document is permissible.

Participation in this RFA is voluntary. Neither the OSB nor the Department will pay for the preparation of any information submitted by an applicant in response to the RFA or for the OSB's use of that information.

1. Summary of Program Requirements

This is a summary of the Connected Communities Grant Program requirements.

Eligible Applicants

To be eligible to apply, an applicant must meet one of the following criteria:

- be a local government (Counties & Municipalities); or
- be a foundation, corporation, institution, association, or coalition that is— (i) a not-for-profit IRS approved 501(c) entity and (ii) providing services within the State of Maryland; or
- a community based anchor institution; or
- other community based organizations; and

- must be registered and, if applicable, in good standing with the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation.

Eligible Project Area

An area that is identified as having a need for additional broadband investment. This is to include lack of access to a connection that reliably meets or exceeds symmetrical 100 Mbps download and upload speeds, lack of affordable access to broadband service, or lack of reliable broadband.

Network Requirements

Projects must be able to provide a minimum internet connectivity of 100 Mbps down and 100 Mbps up with a maximum latency of 50 milliseconds measured at the served subscribers' location.

The OSB will support Projects that are able to provide a minimum internet connectivity of 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up with a maximum latency of 50 milliseconds measured at the served subscribers' location ("Broadband") only if the network is scalable to a minimum of 100 Mbps symmetrical for download and upload speeds based on future technology advances, with a maximum latency of 50 milliseconds measured at the served subscribers' location. The ISP will be required to submit a Certificate as to circumstances preventing the ISP from achieving the minimum connectivity required. The circumstances preventing the minimum connectivity from being provided must be related to geography, topography or excessive cost.

Covered Populations:

While the grant program and its funding offer the ability to serve all communities in Maryland the following covered populations who are most at need will receive priority:

- individuals who live a household with income less than or equal to 150 percent of federal poverty level;
- aging individuals;
- individuals with disabilities;
- individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who -
  - are English learners; and
  - have low levels of literacy;
- individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group;

Funding Limits

Minimum grant amount: $25,000

Maximum grant amount: $250,000

While not required, we highly encourage applicants to identify other funding sources to leverage the available grant funding.

Eligible Grant Purposes

The use of these funds are to make available equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, or digital network technology for **broadband services to covered populations at low or no cost**. This includes but not limited to:

- The building and deployment of new gap networks/community networks at the Broadband Grant Speed for covered populations.
- To upgrade or expand existing gap networks/community networks at the Broadband Grant Speed for covered populations.
- To operate and maintain new or existing gap networks/community networks at the Broadband Grant Speed for covered populations.
- Electronics necessary to deliver service to an end user including, but not limited to Optical Line Terminals (OLT's), Optical Network Terminals (ONT's), routers, switches, firewalls, wireless radio equipment, antennas, access points and modems and any necessary equipment shelters.

Timeframe

Applications are due on or before March 31, 2022. It is the OSB's intent to award funds beginning in May 2022. Projects must be completed by December 31, 2023.

2. Application Criteria

Through the MD-GAPS program, the OSB will provide funding to selected applicants to assist in the implementation of projects that create community based gap networks or community networks. The OSB will review submitted applications to ensure that the information contained therein is complete and proposes an eligible gap/community networks project. While the Department will provide financial resources to help fund the Project, the applicant will be responsible for the overall funding, implementation and operation of the Project.

Application Form

The application form must be completed in its entirety. Any missing information may result in the application being deemed ineligible. Instructions for the application form are provided to help guide applicants.

Project Summary

Responses should explain how the Project will further the OSB's goal of closing the digital divide and ensuring covered populations have access to no-cost or low-cost internet access. While there is no minimum or maximum length of the required response, please be concise and limit your response to the information requested. If some of the information requested is not available at this time, please state this in your response.

Failure to completely address each of the following sections or failure to provide the indicated information may result in the application being deemed ineligible.

Executive Summary: The executive summary should provide a brief, comprehensive summary of the overall project, the needs of the population to be served, how the project area was chosen and how the funding will contribute to a solution.

Statement of Experience: Applicants must provide a written narrative describing their demonstrated capability and experience, if any, as it relates to the proposed project. The applicant must include principal employees' relevant work experience that would ensure the success of the project. Describe any past network deployments and successes.

Network Design: The description of the network to be constructed should provide the network speed, latency capabilities and backhaul requirements. The description should discuss pole attached vs. underground for wired networks and tower type and equipment expectations for a wireless network. Identify whether the network build-out will be performed by the applicant, or if contracted services will be utilized, or a combination of the two. While it is anticipated that the applicant will ultimately own and operate the network constructed, please confirm the operations and any restrictions to be placed on the future use of any equipment and network constructed as part of the Project.

Community Profile: Provide a description of the community and any existing internet service in the area as well as demographic data relating to the community and residents of the Project area. Please also provide information on how many residents you plan will utilize the network. If offering service plans please provide information on how many subscribers you expect to enroll.

Subscriber Cost (if applicable): Provide a listing of subscriber service options for the Project, their costs and any limitations of service such as data caps.

Potential Barriers: Discuss any barriers you might encounter.

Partners and Local Engagement: Applicants should include a list of community and local government partners and describe their involvement in the building and deployment of networks. Partners may include but are not limited to: entities of local jurisdictions (city and county personnel), educational institutions (K-12, community colleges and universities), libraries, businesses, nonprofit

organizations, internet service providers, and faith groups. We encourage applicants to reach out to any partners in advance of developing their application.

Intended Outcomes and Sustainability: Describe the intended outcome(s) and metrics for the project. How will this project be sustained over the next four years? Discuss how you will define success.

Schedule: Describe the proposed schedule for implementing the Project, assuming a Summer 2022 start. Provide a timeline with key milestones.

Funding Scope and Budget: A scope of work related to the funding must be provided. The scope of work should be specific to the funding requested.

Please include a simple budget that shows how you plan to spend the funding. The budget should be in the following categories:

- Operations (equipment, payroll, supplies, materials etc.)
- Contracted services (payments to independent contractors, external organizations, etc.)
- Travel (must be related to program deployment)
- Please also include any other funding necessary for the project including the anticipated source of the funds.

3. Additional Information

1. The OSB reserves the right to waive any formalities of the RFA process, to re-issue the RFA, to amend the RFA, to extend the dates provided herein, or to suspend the RFA as the OSB may determine, at its sole discretion, is in the best interest of the OSB.

2. No reimbursement will be made by the OSB for any costs incurred in responding to this RFA, developing or submitting responses to the RFA, or attendance at meetings or interviews.

3. The OSB reserves the absolute right to conduct such investigations as it deems necessary to assist in the evaluation of any response to the RFA, to establish the claimed participant experience, the responsibility, reliability, references, reputation, business ethics, history, qualifications and financial ability of the applicant, proposed partner(s), independent consultants and suppliers.

4. Successful applicants will be chosen based on qualifications, evaluation of Responses, and a possible interview. The OSB reserves the right to conduct such discussions or negotiations as it deems necessary to assist in the evaluation of any proposal, to secure maximum clarification and completeness of any proposal, and to select the Responses that best meet the requirements of the OSB and the public interest.

5. All awardees will be required to execute a Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") that outlines the obligations of the awardee and State to the Project.

6. Questions should be addressed to Ronnie Hammond, Program Manager, Office of Statewide Broadband at ronnie.hammond@maryland.gov or 301-429-7514.

Definitions

- *Access* - The existence of broadband infrastructure and availability of reliable high-speed internet plans.
- *Adoption* – Percentage of the population that subscribes to a broadband service.
- *Affordability* – Ensuring that broadband service is not only available but can be obtained at reasonable pricing.
- *Community Network* – Networks that deliver access to underserved areas with infrastructure built, managed and used by local communities.
- *Digital Divide* - The gap between those who have access to technology, the internet, and digital literacy training and those who do not.
- *Digital Equity* – Condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy.
- *Digital Inclusion* - Activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of internet service.
- *Digital Literacy* - Ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.
- *Gap Network* – Networks designed to offer very affordable or no cost internet access for lower-income households with low broadband adoption rates.
- *Non-Profit* – Organization in which no part of the organization's net earnings can inure to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.

Instructions for completing the Digital Inclusion Grant Program application:

1. Applicant Name: this is the name on your W-9 form

2. Federal EIN Number: the Employer Identification Number assigned by the IRS.

3. DUNS Number for the applying entity

4. Address: this is the address of your office, not the project address.

5. Contact Information: please provide a contact for the application.

6. Project Information-Funding: enter the amount of funding being requested as well as the amount of funding being received from other sources.

7. Project Information-Project Use: identify the use of the project and describe the project briefly.

8. Application Narrative: narrative addressing all required items in the "Application Criteria" section of the application guide.
9. Budget: Simple budget indicating how you plan to spend the funding. Include any leveraged funding.
10. Applications and all correlating documents should be submitted to **OSB.MD@maryland.gov** please include in the subject line: "MD-GAPS: *Name of Applying Organization*"

OFFICE OF STATEWIDE BROADBAND
Connected Communities Grant Program
FY22 Grant Application Form

(additional information required – see RFA for all application requirements)

Applicant Information

Applicant's Legal Name (must match W9):

Federal EIN Number: _____   DUNS Number: _____

Attach a copy of your most current IRS W-9 Form & Certificate of Good Standing from the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation.

Address:

Street: _____

City: _____

County: _____

State: _____   Zip: _____

Contact Information

This should be the primary contact for the person coordinating all elements of this application for the Applicant. This is the person the Office will contact with any questions regarding the application.

Name: _____   Title: _____

Email: _____   Phone: _____

Project Information

Estimated Funding

    Applicant: _____ (funding provided by applicant)

    Local Jurisdiction: _____ (funding provided by local jurisdiction)

    State: _____ (funding requested from OSB)

    Other: _____ (funding provided by any other source)

    Project Total: _____

Proposed Project Area:

An area that is identified as having a need for additional broadband investment. This is to include lack of access to a connection that reliably meets or exceeds symmetrical 100 Mbps download and upload speeds, lack of affordable access to broadband service, or lack of reliable broadband.

Required Speed:

Projects must be able to provide a minimum internet connectivity of 100 Mbps down and 100 Mbps up, with exceptions.

Identify the Project Use Broadband Delivery Method (check all that apply):

☐ Gap Network – Delivery Method _____

☐ Community Network – Delivery Method _____

☐ Other _____

Please briefly describe what the funding will be used for:

_____

_____

Other Required Information

The following should be attached to your application:

1.   Project Summary
2.   Project budget
3.   Federal Form W-9 & Certificate of Good Standing

CERTIFICATION OF GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW

I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the information provided in this Application is true and correct. I further certify that I have reviewed the Request for Applications, FY22 Connected Communities Grant Program documentation including eligibility of costs.

_____   _____

Signed by Authorized Representative   *Date*

_____

Typed Name

_____

Title