



OFFICE OF STATEWIDE BROADBAND

Connect Maryland:

***FY24 Home Stretch - Difficult to
Serve Properties***

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

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Introduction and General Information

The Connect Maryland: FY24 Home Stretch – Difficult to Serve Properties (HS-DSP program) is a new program that will utilize \$24,223,815 of Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CPF) to provide financial assistance to local jurisdictions to further the state’s digital access efforts. This grant opportunity will fund projects focused on bringing high-speed internet access to premises that have difficulty obtaining service due to their remoteness, distance from broadband infrastructure or other geographic issues that may discourage an ISP from delivering broadband service. The Office of Statewide Broadband (OSB), housed within the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) manages the HS-DSP Program.

OSB plans to provide funding not to exceed \$1,100,000 per eligible applicant that is working to further the goals of the OSB. Most ISP’s have a limit to the distance they will construct to connect a premise to their existing network (drop). This drop distance typically varies from 250 feet to 800 feet depending on the ISP. If a property owner’s premise is beyond that distance, the ISP may require a contribution from the property owner for the additional cost of providing the connection.

While many unserved property owners can afford the ongoing monthly costs associated with service, they cannot afford the upfront connection cost. This grant opportunity will ensure equitable broadband connectivity.

Program Purpose

Many unserved locations are unserved not due to a lack of nearby infrastructure, but due to the difficulty and cost of installing service. To address the issue of the enabling difficult to serve premises to connect to broadband infrastructure that is available nearby, but not easily accessible, the OSB is introducing the HS-DSP program. The funding source for this budgeted expense is the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Capital Projects Fund (CPF) administered by the United States Treasury. All requirements of the funding source must be adhered to.

Program Approach

This grant opportunity will provide access to high-speed internet at a minimum of 100Mbps download and 100Mbps upload speeds or, with proper certification, 100Mbps download and 20Mbps upload, with a maximum latency of 50 milliseconds to our most difficult to serve premises. The grant opportunity is reserved for connection of an unserved premise to an existing broadband network. The program will provide funding directly to local county jurisdictions that will use the funds to compensate an ISP that installs the service connection and provides broadband service. End user subscribers will be responsible for their ongoing internet subscription costs.

OSB recognizes that each jurisdiction has its own requirements and potential partner ISP(s). To satisfy these varying issues, applicants will develop their own jurisdictional specific funding program and present them in their application to the OSB. The program presented must require a match from the jurisdiction, ISP and/or the property owner that will receive service. The program must include an outreach component to promote the program. The applicant will be required to discuss how they will treat financially distressed owners in their program plan. One option for property owners that can show that the match is not

financially feasible is for the local jurisdiction or ISP contributing the match on their behalf, other options are allowable so long as they are fully explained. ISP's participating with the local jurisdiction are required to participate in the federal ACP program. ISP's must promote ACP and provide assistance to those wishing to utilize the program. More detail is provided in the RFA response section.

Eligible project costs will include capital costs related to the deployment of internet facilities capable of delivering 100Mbps download and 100Mbps upload with a maximum 50ms latency to individual difficult to served premises beyond what the serving ISP typically constructs for serviceable premises. ISP networks that cannot deliver the required speeds due to geography, topography, or excessive cost will be permitted to deliver 100Mbps download and 20Mbps upload with a maximum 50ms latency. ISP's taking advantage of this lower threshold are required to ensure the network is scalable to a minimum of 100 Mbps symmetrical for download and upload speeds as new technology becomes available. ISP's seeking to deliver the lower speed must certify the reason for their inability to deliver the preferred speeds and that they will upgrade their network as the new technologies are available.

Both wireline and wireless technologies may be considered for this grant so long as the required connection speed and latency is reliably met. When considering wireless technologies that can meet the program requirements, often the topography, building location or tree cover impacts successful delivery of service. In many circumstances, a taller antenna mast, enhanced receiving equipment, or a more robust antenna array may be necessary to serve a premise. These costs would be eligible for funding.

We would also consider projects that included funding of satellite receiving equipment for satellite providers that can meet the program requirements including the speed and latency requirements. For the most remote locations that lack access to internet facilities, satellite service may be the most judicious solution.

Projects that are funded by the OSB under other administered funding programs allow costs for difficult to served premises to be included as part of the program funding. The OSB will review applications to ensure that there is no duplication of funding from either federal or state sources. Other state or federal funds as permitted can be used for the required match since that would not be duplication, but a complementary use. Additionally, applicants will be required to pay all non-capital expenses related to any required state and federal reporting and ongoing administrative costs for the duration of the project.

Target Capital Assets:

Grant funds provided by the program are to be used for new, non-depreciated, capital assets including the construction of service delivery, equipment, and materials necessary to serve an unserved difficult to serve premise.

Summary of Program Requirements

This is a summary of the HS-DSP program requirements. Additional requirements and details are contained in the topic specific section of this guide.

Eligible Applicant

A local county jurisdiction with an ISP partner or partners.

Eligible Locations

The grant opportunity is reserved for connection of an unserved difficult to reach premise to an existing broadband network.

Network Requirements

Projects must be able to provide access to high-speed internet at a minimum of 100Mbps download and 100Mbps upload speeds or, with proper certification, 100Mbps download and 20Mbps upload, with a maximum latency of 50 milliseconds to our most difficult to serve premises.

Funding Limits

Funding not to exceed \$1,100,000 per eligible applicant.

Funding not to exceed \$8,000 per eligible unserved location.

Required Match

25% of eligible capital construction costs. The match can be met by the local jurisdiction, their ISP partner, the owner of the premise or a combination of these sources or from other outside entities such as foundations or non-profit agencies.

Eligible Grant Purposes

Grant funds may be used to finance:

The construction of facilities used for connection of an unserved difficult to reach premise to an existing broadband network. This may include minor extensions of ISP's existing infrastructure; however, the maximum grant per location still applies.

Ineligible Grant Purposes

The duplication of any existing broadband service provided by other entities.

The duplication of any other state, local, federal funding provided for the location.

Middle mile infrastructure.

Expenses related to the provision of telephone or video service that is not necessary for the delivery of Broadband Service.

The purchase of land or towers, construction of buildings, towers, building renovations or tower improvements.

Operating expenses.

Home Stretch - Difficult to Serve Properties (HS-DSP) Funding Program

Through the FY24 Connect Maryland Broadband for Difficult to Serve Premises Funding Program , the OSB will facilitate the award of funding to selected Applicants to assist in the implementation of Projects that involve partnering with ISPs to extend existing broadband service to unserved difficult to serve premises. The OSB will review submitted applications to ensure that the information contained therein is complete and proposes an eligible and sustainable broadband HS-DSP Project. While the Department will provide financial resources to help fund the Project, and the OSB will provide technical assistance and oversight, the Applicant and/or its ISP Partner will be the owner of any facilities constructed as part of the Project, and will be responsible for the overall funding, implementation, and operation of the Project.

Any Applicant awarded funding under the Program must also commit to funding a portion of the Project's capital construction cost (Match) outlined in the Match section of this guide. The source of the Match must be identified in the Response. Projects for which the Match is comprised of funding from both the Applicant and the ISP Partner may receive greater consideration than those without ISP Partner or local jurisdiction contribution. Projects for which the Match commitment is greater than the required Match will receive greater consideration during the evaluation.

Eligible Applicants

A local county jurisdiction

Eligible Projects

Only Projects that will connect unserved difficult to serve premises to an existing broadband network are eligible for funding. An unserved premise is a premise lacking terrestrial, fixed internet service at speeds of 100 Megabits per second (Mbps) download and/or 20 Mbps upload and/or with latency above 50 milliseconds. All partnering ISP's are required to participate in the federal ACP program.

Timeframe

Applications are due on or before December 22, 2023. It is the OSB's intent to facilitate the award of funding in February 2024. Projects must be completed by December 31, 2025.

Authority

The local jurisdiction must have entered a partnership with an ISP partner or partners prior to entering into a funding agreement with the Department. It is the local jurisdiction's responsibility to acquire any legal authority necessary to do so. The OSB will not assist the local jurisdiction in negotiating or contracting with the ISP Partner.

Funding

The OSB will facilitate the award of funding to the Applicant for its development of a Project or Projects. Financial assistance for the capital construction cost, less required Match, of each application, in an amount not to exceed \$1,100,000 per application, may be available.

Match

The required match is 25% of eligible capital construction costs. The match can be met by the local jurisdiction, their ISP partner, the property owner or the combination of these.

The source of the Match must be identified in the Applicant's Response. Projects for which the Match is comprised of contributions from the Applicant and/or the ISP Partner will receive greater consideration than those without ISP Partner and/or applicant participation.

Projects for which the Match commitment is greater than the minimum requirement will also receive greater consideration during the evaluation. Match from the Applicant or any other source must be in the form of cash. In-kind matches are not acceptable.

Sufficient Match must be available for each reimbursement requested.

- Requests for reimbursement will be submitted in full and the Match will be deducted prior to reimbursement being made.

Network Requirements

The OSB will only support Projects that are 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 ("Broadband"). The network must be capable of providing the minimum connectivity to all subscribers. Proposed subscribers must all be offered the minimum connectivity or higher. Subscriber offerings of less than the minimum connectivity are allowable, but only in conjunction with offerings that include or exceed the minimum connectivity.

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 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.

Projects that propose speeds higher than the minimum speeds outlined above will receive greater consideration than those proposing only the minimum speeds.

RFA Response Requirements

Responses should explain how the Project will further the OSB's goal of ensuring that difficult to reach premises in unserved areas are to be provided access to High Speed Internet. 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 section or failure to provide the indicated information may result in the application being deemed ineligible.

Grant Application Form

Complete the Grant Application for the FY24 Connect Maryland-Broadband for Difficult to Serve Premises Project form, attached. A fillable pdf is also available on the program website at <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/broadband>.

Executive Summary

The Executive Summary for the Project should briefly provide an overview of the unserved difficult to serve premises expected to be served, how the unserved premises will be chosen and what problems the residents currently face. It should include how the proposed Project will help alleviate those problems, increase the resident's quality of life, and how the Project will provide enhanced opportunities for businesses and residents. Be clear and concise and provide convincing links between the Project and the benefits to the proposed premises.

Application Partnership

The Applicant's Response **must** name an ISP partner or partners. The Response should also describe what assistance or cooperation that the Applicant will offer to the ISP Partner, if any. If a grant is approved and the grantee wishes to add additional ISP partners at a later time, this will be permitted after notification of and approval by OSB.

Experience

Provide a statement of experience of the senior team that will participate in any funded Project, both from the Applicant and from the ISP Partner.

Network Discussion

Please describe the network of your ISP partner(s), identify the technology being utilized (FTTP, HFC, DOCIS version, licensed or unlicensed wireless, frequency, etc.), network speed capabilities, ISP offerings, etc.

Subscriber Profile

Provide a description of the unserved locations you expect to serve through the Project as well as demographic data relating to the project area and residents of the project area.

Subscriber Costs and Limitations

Provide a listing of the partner ISP's subscriber service options for the Project, their costs, and any limitations of service such as data caps.

- a. Include any low and moderate subscriber options.

Budget

Provide an estimate of the capital construction costs expected to be funded with HS-DSP funds. The estimate should include the common ISP's absorbed costs (first 300', etc.) as well as costs related to minor improvements of existing infrastructure.

Program Overview

Provide an overview of the program you plan to offer. The overview should include details of the program including, but not limited to, how end users will be selected, assistance to be offered to low income end users, the ISP's method of billing for the work, acceptable ISP costs, low income program, ACP assistance, and ACP promotion offered to subscribers by the ISP, etc. The program overview should be in sufficient detail to allow OSB to judge the effectiveness of the program in connecting unserved locations.

Eligible Grant Purposes.

Matching funds will only be considered if used for eligible grant purposes. Grant funds may be used to finance:

- a. The construction of facilities used to deploy service at the broadband grant speed to all difficult to serve premises.
- b. Electronics necessary to deliver service to an end user including, but not limited to Optical Network Terminals (ONT's), routers, switches, firewalls, wireless radio equipment, antennae, access points and modems and any necessary equipment shelters.

NOTE: All equipment and materials purchased for this Project must be new and non-depreciated.

Ineligible Grant Purposes.

Grant funds may not be used to finance:

- a. The duplication of any existing broadband service provided by other entities.
- b. The duplication of any other state, local, federal funding provided for the location.
- c. Middle mile infrastructure.
- d. Expenses related to the provision of telephone or video service that is not necessary for the delivery of Broadband Service.
- e. The purchase of land or towers, construction of buildings, towers, building renovations or tower improvements.
- f. Operating expenses.

NOTE: Costs incurred by the applicant, or others on behalf of the applicant, for facilities, installed equipment, or other services rendered prior to submission of a completed Response shall not be considered as eligible for grant or match purposes.

Schedule

Describe the proposed schedule for implementing the Project, assuming a Spring 2024 start. Provide a timeline with key milestones.

Response Process

Please submit one (1) electronic pdf copy of your Response to osb.md@maryland.gov on or before December 22, 2023. “Difficult to Serve Premises Grant Application” and the local county jurisdiction name must be included in the subject line of the email.

- All items included with the Response should be combined into one zip file (.zip) to ensure the submission is bound together and no portions are lost during transmission or review. If your application is too large for emailing, you may upload your files to a Google Drive or another cloud service and share the link with us.
- File names used should clearly identify the file contents.

Please identify any information contained in your Response that you contend to be proprietary or confidential. Should a request for this information be made under the Maryland Public Information Act, we consider the request for confidentiality.

Scoring Criteria

Applications will be scored and awards made based on high to low score as funding permits. The maximum score is 45 points based on the criteria presented below.

1. Need for Service and Project Benefits (up to 5 points)

The description of the community needs and the benefits to be provided to the community by the Project as presented in the Executive Summary will be scored.

2. Match Contribution Source and Percentage (up to 15 points)

The required match of 25% of total cost may come from any source. The source of the match indicates the level of commitment from the partners in the Project. Applicants are encouraged to contribute more than 25%. Points will be awarded for each of the following criteria:

a. Match contribution source (combined):

Some or the entire match provided by the local jurisdiction – 2 points

Some or the entire match provided by the ISP – 2 points

Some or the entire match provided by another source – 1 point

b. Match as percentage of total cost:

25% (Required) – 0 point

Greater than 25% and less than or equal to 40% - 5 points

Greater than 40% and less than or equal to 50% - 8 points

Greater than 50% - 10 points

3. Network Delivery Speed (up to 5 points)

Network Delivery Speed: Projects that propose speeds at or above the minimum broadband speeds will receive additional points. Points will be awarded for proposed networks meeting one of the following criteria:

$\geq 100\text{Mbps} \times 20 \text{ Mbps}$ but $< 100\text{Mbps} \times 100\text{Mbps}$ = 0 points

$\geq 100\text{Mbps} \times 100 \text{ Mbps}$ but $< 1\text{Gbps} \times 1\text{Gbps}$ = 2 points

$\geq 1\text{Gbps} \times 1\text{Gbps}$ = 5 points

4. Subscriber Options (up to 20 points)

Projects providing equity programs such as low cost service options and projects with lower cost of service will receive additional points. Projects that do not impose data caps or other subscriber limitations such as speed reductions based on data usage will receive additional points.

- a. Affordability and Service Limitations including low cost equity programs (ACP @ 100x20mbps required)

Low cost offering at reasonable speeds for low income subscribers (up to 10 points): The grantee offers a discounted plan for low income subscribers (may utilize ACP requirements for eligibility). Specify cost of service for different speed tiers for low income subscribers.

Eligibility terms for how subscribers can qualify for the low cost offerings should be provided. It should also be clarified what the low cost offer is before applying ACP.

$\geq 100\text{Mbps} \times 20\text{Mbps}$ but $< 100\text{Mbps} \times 100\text{Mbps}$ for \$30 per month before Applying ACP
= 0 points

$\geq 100\text{Mbps} \times 100\text{Mbps}$ but $< 200\text{Mbps} \times 200 \text{ Mbps}$ for \$30 per month before Applying ACP
= 5 points

$\geq 200\text{Mbps} \times 200\text{Mbps}$ for \$30 per month before Applying ACP = 10 points

- b. Low cost offering for all subscribers (up to 8 points): Specify cost of service for different speed tiers for all subscribers regardless of income (Include all details about your pricing including one time fees, contracts, etc.) OSB will review your pricing as compared to other applications and assign points accordingly:

Low cost: 8 points

Medium cost: 4 points

High cost: 0 points

- c. No data or usage penalty based on service consumption – 2 points

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, to amend or revise the match requirements, 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 a Response, 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 establish the claimed staff experience, the unserved nature of the premises, the responsibility, reliability, references, reputation, business ethics, history, qualifications and financial ability of the applicant, proposed partner(s), independent consultants, and suppliers. This includes the public release of the information to allow objection to the unserved nature of the locations by others.
4. Successful applicants will be selected based on the scoring criteria outlined. The OSB reserves the right to conduct such discussions or negotiations with Counties or other entities, 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”. A sample “MOU” is available for review at <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/broadband>.
6. Questions should be addressed to Kenrick Gordon, Director, Office of Statewide Broadband at kenrick.gordon@maryland.gov or 301-429-7426. The OSB will do its utmost to timely answer questions related to this RFA.



**Connect Maryland: Home Stretch for Difficult to Serve
Properties
FY24 Grant Application Form**

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

Project Name: _____

Applicant Information

Jurisdictional Legal Name (must match W9):

Federal EIN Number: _____

Attach a copy of your current IRS W-9 Form

Unique Entity ID (SAM.gov) Number: _____

Address:

Street: _____

City: _____

County: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Project Information

Requested Funding:

Applicant: _____

ISP: _____

State: _____

Other: _____

Project Total: _____



Difficult to Serve Premises:

Difficult to serve premises benefitting from the funding must be unserved with no locations receiving broadband service at 100Mbps download by 20Mbps upload speeds with latency at or below 50ms.

Grant Speed:

Minimum service speeds of 100 Mbps download by 100 Mbps upload speeds (with exceptions) with a maximum of 50ms latency must be available to all end users provided funding.

Technology used to serve the subscriber:

Check all that apply

Fiber Optics to the Premise

Coax to the Premise

Unlicensed Fixed Wireless Frequency Band: _____

Licensed Fixed Wireless Frequency Band: _____

Other: _____

Number of Difficult to Serve Premises expected to be served:

Premises: _____



LOCAL JURISDICTIONAL APPLICANT

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, FY24 Broadband for Difficult to Serve Premises Funding Program documentation including eligibility of costs and expansion areas and have discussed these requirements with our ISP partner.

Signed

Date

Typed Name

Title

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: _____



LOCAL JURISDICTIONAL ISP PARTNER

CERTIFICATION OF GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW

I hereby certify that I am partnering with the Local Jurisdictional Applicant to provide the service outlined in the Application and have reviewed the Request for Applications, FY24 Broadband for Difficult to Serve Premises Funding Program documentation including eligibility of costs and expansion areas and have discussed these requirements with our Local Jurisdictional Partner. I further certify that I have reviewed the project capital budget, proposed project area, network design and construction and project schedule proposed in the Application and am in agreement with them.

Signed

Date

Typed Name

Title

Contact Information

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

Name: _____ Title: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____