



OFFICE OF STATEWIDE BROADBAND

Neighborhood Connect

***FY22 Maryland Broadband
Funding Program***

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Prepared by: Kenrick M. Gordon, P.E., Director

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LARRY HOGAN
Governor
BOYD K. RUTHERFORD
Lt. Governor
KENNETH C. HOLT
Secretary
OWEN McEVoy
Deputy Secretary



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1. Executive Summary

The State of Maryland's approved \$15.18 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 expansion of broadband into unserved areas of Maryland. A minimum of \$13 million is available for this program. The funding source for this budgeted expense is the American Recovery Act (ARP) administered by the US Treasury. Funded Projects must comply with the ARP 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 limited resources at its disposal, the OSB is looking to assist local jurisdictions (County or Municipal) in implementing solutions to the problem of delivering broadband to unserved residents and businesses (the proposed solution is referred to as the "Project"). It is expected that the local jurisdictional applicant ("Applicant") will have a strong incumbent service provider ("ISP") with whom the Applicant will partner ("ISP Partner") in implementing the Project. The ISP Partner will have the means and desire to provide service to the Applicant's unserved residents and businesses. The Applicant and the ISP Partner will be responsible for the overall implementation of the Project. The Applicant or its ISP Partner will be the owner of any facilities constructed as part of the Project.

The OSB understands that geography 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.

This Request For Applications ("RFA") is issued to allow interested local jurisdictions and their ISP partners to request funding for broadband expansion Projects utilizing existing networks. Evaluation of the response to this RFA ("Response") will guide the OSB in determining which local jurisdictions may receive funding in support of a Project. With adequate future budgetary allocations to the Department, additional funding may be made available for additional Projects. However, the OSB is under no obligation to provide assistance to any local jurisdiction responding to this RFA.

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.

2. Summary of Program Requirements

This is a summary of the Neighborhood Connect Broadband Funding Program requirements. Additional requirements and details are contained in the topic specific section of this guide.

Eligible Applicant

A local jurisdiction with an ISP Partner

Eligible Project Area

An area that is lacking terrestrial, fixed internet service at speeds above 25 Megabits per second (Mbps) download and/or 3 Mbps upload and/or with latency above 50 milliseconds.

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. A reduced network requirement is allowable under certain circumstances; see Section 3.6 for additional information.

Funding Limits

Minimum grant amount: \$50,000 per application

Maximum grant amount: \$500,000 per application

Required Match

Wired Infrastructure Project Required Match:

Fewer than 8 households per mile: 10% of eligible capital construction costs

8 or more, but fewer than 15 households per mile: 20% of eligible capital construction costs

15 or more households per mile: 30% of eligible capital construction costs

Wireless Infrastructure Project Required Match:

Fewer than 40 households per tower: 10% of eligible capital construction costs

40 or more, but fewer than 70 households per tower: 20% of eligible capital construction costs

70 or more households per tower: 30% of eligible capital construction costs

Eligible Grant Purposes

Grant funds may be used to finance:

1. The construction of facilities used to deploy service at the Broadband Grant Speed to ALL end users located within the Proposed Funded Service Area ("PFSA").
2. The construction of middle mile infrastructure directly necessary to provide service to an end user including interconnections between non-contiguous service areas.

3. 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, antennae, access points and modems and any necessary equipment shelters.

Ineligible Grant Purposes

1. The duplication of any existing Broadband Service provided by other entities.
2. Middle mile infrastructure not directly necessary to provide service to an end user.
3. Expenses related to the provision of telephone or video service which are not necessary for the delivery of Broadband Service.
4. Engineering design services whether in-house or consultant-based.
5. The purchase of land or towers, construction of buildings, towers, building renovations or tower improvements except as noted as a Match Exception; see section 4.8 for additional information.
6. Operating expenses.

3. Neighborhood Connect Broadband Funding Program

Through the Neighborhood Connect Broadband Networks Funding Program (“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 into unserved areas. The OSB will review submitted applications to ensure that the information contained therein is complete and proposes an eligible and sustainable broadband expansion Project. The OSB may coordinate with other State Agencies on the use of State assets where they may feasibly benefit the 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 may also receive greater consideration during the evaluation.

The Applicant may apply for funding for one or multiple Projects. Projects may be applied for in separate applications or Projects may be separate and located in distinct unserved areas within a single application. Each Application will be evaluated on its own merits. A \$50,000 minimum and a \$500,000.00 maximum funding limit will apply to each application selected for funding regardless of the number of Projects included in the application. The Match will be required for each application selected for funding. If one Project relies on another Project for proper networking, this must be fully explained and defined in the network requirements discussion section of the Applicant's Response.

3.1. Eligible Applicants

A County or a Municipality listed on the Maryland Manual On-Line website (<https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/html/locgov.html>) is considered a local jurisdiction and eligible to apply for funding.

3.2. Eligible Project areas

Only Projects that will serve an area unserved by broadband are eligible for funding. An unserved area is an area lacking terrestrial, fixed internet service at speeds above 25 Megabits per second (Mbps) download and/or 3 Mbps upload and/or with latency above 50 milliseconds.

The Response must identify a PFSA including the geographic Project area and community name or names. Project utilizing wired infrastructure must include the total route miles, total number of unserved households and businesses passed by the Project and average number of households and businesses per mile. Project utilizing wireless technology must include the number of towers to be utilized, total number of unserved households and businesses capable of receiving service at the broadband speeds proscribed herein and the average number of households and businesses capable of receiving said service per tower.

Projects may include one or more, or parts of one or more unserved areas. A graphical map outlining the PFSA and showing the limits of the properties being served must be included in the Response. A separate graphical map showing the infrastructure to be constructed also must be included in the Response. A GIS shp, kmz or kml file showing this information on separate layers or in separate files must be included in the application package.

The PFSA showing the served properties within the Project area will be published on the OSB website as part of the challenge process. Applicants will not be identified in the published information.

3.3. Timeframe

Applications are due on or before December 23, 2021. It is the OSB's intent to facilitate the award of funding beginning in April 2022. Projects must be completed by December 31, 2023.

3.4. Authority

The local jurisdiction must have entered into a partnership with an ISP Partner 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.

3.5. 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 \$500,000.00 per application, may be available.

Match will be determined based on the average number of households per mile (excluding middle mile facilities) for wired Projects or the average number of households per tower for wireless Projects. Matching funds will only be considered if used for eligible grant purposes as defined in Section 4.6.

3.5.1. Match

Wired Infrastructure Project Required Match:

Fewer than 8 households per mile: 10% of eligible capital construction costs

8 or more, but fewer than 15 households per mile: 20% of eligible capital construction costs

15 or more households per mile: 30% of eligible capital construction costs

Wireless Infrastructure Project Required Match:

Fewer than 40 households per tower: 10% of eligible capital construction costs

40 or more, but fewer than 70 households per tower: 20% of eligible capital construction costs

70 or more households per tower: 30% of eligible capital construction costs

The source of the Match must be identified in the Applicant's Response. Projects for which the Match is comprised of contributions from both the Applicant and 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 may also receive greater consideration during the evaluation. Match from the Applicant or any other source, except for match from the ISP, must be in the form of cash. In-kind matches from the Applicant or other non-ISP sources are not acceptable.

An ISP Partner's contribution to the Match may be comprised of a cash contribution or in-kind capital construction costs directly related to the Project. In-kind capital costs must be new and non-depreciated and may include last-mile facilities, subscriber installations, or other similar costs. An ISP's in-kind contribution must be documented in the construction budget and will require proof of expense when presented as match.

Sufficient Match must be available for each reimbursement requested.

- If cash Match is utilized, requests for reimbursement will be submitted in full and the Match will be deducted prior to reimbursement being made.
- If in-kind Match is utilized, the in-kind expense must be incurred prior to a reimbursement being made. For instance, if subscriber installations are proposed as an in-kind Match for the outside plant construction, the outside plant construction would not be reimbursed until the subscriber in-kind Match installations are complete.

3.6. 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 within the proposed Project area. 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 ("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.

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

4. RFA Response Requirements

Responses should explain how the Project will further the OSB’s goal of ensuring that residents in unserved areas, as defined in Section 3, 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.

4.1. Grant Application Form

Complete the Grant Application for the Neighborhood Connect Broadband Project form, attached. A fillable pdf is also available on the program website at <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/broadband>.

4.2. Executive Summary

The Executive Summary for the Project should provide an overview of the unserved area being served, how the unserved area was chosen and what problems the residents in the unserved area 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 provide convincing links between the Project and the benefits to the Proposed Funded Service area (PFSA).

4.3. Application Partnership

The Applicant’s Response **must** name an ISP Partner. The Response should also describe what assistance or cooperation that the Applicant will offer to the ISP Partner, if any.

4.4. 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.

4.5. Network Design and Construction

The description of the network to be constructed should provide the network speed, latency capabilities and backhaul methods and requirements. The description should discuss pole attached vs. underground for wired networks and tower type and equipment expectations for a wireless network. Identify whether construction will be performed by the ISP Partner's own crews, or if contracted services will be utilized, or a combination of the two. While it is anticipated that the ISP Partner will ultimately own the facilities constructed, please confirm the intended final ownership and any restrictions to be placed on the future use of any facility constructed as part of the Project.

A GIS shp, kmz or kml file showing the properties within the PFSA that will receive service must be included with the submission.

The network layout in a separate GIS file or on a separate layer within the PFSA file must be included with the submission.

4.6. Subscriber Profile

Provide a description of the unserved area you intend to serve through the Project and any existing internet service in that unserved area as well as demographic data relating to the Project area and residents of the Project area. Please also provide the Projected subscriber take rate within the PFSA. This section of the Response should offer an estimate of the overall number of unserved households and businesses in the geographic Project area that could receive service from the Project.

4.7. 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.

- Include any low and moderate subscriber options.

4.8. Budget

Provide a line item capital construction budget outlining cost of all major construction work to be performed including outside plant, electrical equipment, cabinets, customer premise equipment, etc. on the Capital Budget form attached (an electronic version of the form is available at <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/broadband>). A sample budget is included with the electronic version.

Failure to provide a line item breakdown of the work and material quantity and costs required for the Project may result in the application being deemed ineligible.

4.8.1. Affiliated transactions are allowable. OSB’s consent to reimburse costs for affiliated transactions will be limited to an amount which is the lower of cost or market rate and which is subject to verification by the Department and its representatives having access to the books and records of the Affiliate.

“Affiliate” or “Affiliated Company” of any specified person or entity means any other person or entity directly or indirectly controlling of, controlled by, under direct or indirect common control with, or related to, such specified person or entity, or which exists for the sole purpose of providing any service to one company or exclusively to companies which otherwise meet the definition of affiliate. This definition includes Variable Interest Entities as described in Financial Accounting Standards Board Interpretation (FIN) No. 46(R), Consolidation of Variable Interest Entities. For the purpose of this definition, “control” means the possession directly or indirectly, of the power to direct or cause the direction of the management and policies of a company, whether such power is exercised through one or more intermediary companies, or alone, or in conjunction with, or pursuant to an agreement with, one or more other companies, and whether such power is established through a majority or minority ownership voting of securities, common directors, officers, or stockholders, voting trust, holding trusts (other than money exchanged) for property or services.

Eligible Grant Purposes.

Matching funds will only be considered if used for eligible grant purposes.

Grant funds may be used to finance:

1. The construction of facilities used to deploy service at the Broadband Grant Speed to ALL end users located within the PFSA.
2. Middle mile infrastructure directly necessary to provide service to an end user including interconnections between non-contiguous service areas.
3. 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, antennae, access points and modems and any necessary equipment shelters.

Match Exception:

- The cost of construction of towers that are to be owned by the applicant and are

necessary to provide service to Project end users.

- The cost of tower structural improvements or engineering design related to tower structural studies necessary to provide service to Project end users. Use of in-house personnel for these services will be paid for at direct labor costs only for staff shown to be proficient in the work. No overhead costs will be allowed.

These costs may be included only as Match and should be clearly indicated as a line item in the budget. Proof of the final expense must be provided via invoices or records acceptable to the Department.

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

Ineligible Grant Purposes.

Grant funds may not be used to finance:

1. The duplication of any existing Broadband Service provided by other entities.
2. Middle mile infrastructure not directly necessary to provide service to an end user or interconnect non-contiguous service areas.
3. Expenses related to the provision of telephone or video service which are not necessary for the delivery of Broadband Service.
4. ***Engineering design services whether in-house or consultant-based*** except as allowed under Eligible Grant Purposes, Match Exception, above.
5. The purchase of land or towers, construction of buildings, building renovations or tower improvements except as noted as a Match Exception above.
6. **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.

4.9. Schedule

Describe the proposed schedule for implementing the Project, assuming a Summer 2022 start. Provide a timeline with key milestones. Include a description of how subscribers will be connected, whether phased construction and phased subscriber connection is expected, etc.

5. Response Process

Please submit one (1) electronic pdf copy of your Response to osb.md@maryland.gov on or before December 23, 2021. “Neighborhood Connect”, the local jurisdiction name and the “Project Name” must be included in the subject line of the email.

The following files must be included with the application package:

- The budget submitted with the Response must be submitted as a pdf as well as an excel spreadsheet.
- A GIS shape, kmz or kml file that clearly delineates the **properties** to be provided service. This shape file should be named to identify the PFSA it includes.

NOTE: The PFSA limits will be published on the OSB website as part of the challenge process. More information on the challenge process can be found on the OSB website.

- A separate GIS shape, kmz or kml file or information on a separate layer within the PFSA file showing the broadband infrastructure proposed for funding (line or tower locations).
- 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.
- 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.

6. Scoring Criteria

Applications will be scored and awards made based on high to low score as funding permits. The maximum score is 25 points based on the criteria presented below.

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

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

6.2. Match Contribution Source (up to 6 points)

The required match can come from any source. The source of the match indicates the level of commitment from the partners in the Project. Points will be awarded for each of the following criteria:

- Some or the entire match provided by the local jurisdiction – 2 point
- Some or the entire match provided by the ISP – 2 point
- Some or the entire match provided by another source – 1 point
- Total match exceeding required amount – 1 point

6.3. Network Delivery Speed (up to 10 points)

Projects that propose speeds at or above the minimum network speeds as outlined in Section 5.4 will receive additional points. Points will be awarded for proposed networks meeting one of the following criteria:

- At least 100 Mbps downstream by 20 Mbps upstream speed (required) – 0 points
- At least 100 Mbps downstream and at least 100 Mbps upstream speed – 3 points
- At least 1 Gbps downstream and greater than 100 Mbps upstream speed – 5 points
- Greater than 1 Gbps downstream and at least 1 Gbps upstream speed – 10 points

6.4. Subscriber Options (up to 4 points)

Projects providing equity programs such as low cost service options as outlined in Section 4.6 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.

- Low cost equity program(s) – 2 points
- No data or usage penalty based on service consumption – 2 points

7. Additionally 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 PFSA, 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 PFSA area(s) to allow objection to the unserved nature of the PFSA 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.



Neighborhood Connect Broadband Funding Program FY22 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 most current IRS W-9 Form

Address:

Street: _____

City: _____

County: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Project Information

Estimated Funding:

Applicant: _____

ISP: _____

State: _____

Other: _____

Project Total: _____



Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA):

PFSA must be unserved with no locations receiving broadband service at 25 Mbps download by 3 Mbps upload speeds with a latency at or below 50ms. The PFSA should be shown on an attached graphical map.

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 within the PFSA.

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: _____

Unserved Households and Businesses passed:

Households: _____

Businesses: _____

Other: _____

Describe the methodology used to determine the unserved locations (e.g. field review, survey results, etc.) _____

Average Number of homes and businesses per mile or per tower: _____



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, Neighborhood Connect FY22 Broadband 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, Neighborhood Connect FY22 Broadband Networks 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: _____

Capital Budget

Project Budget

BUDGET	Unit	No. of Units	Unit cost	Total	Grant	Other Funding	Description
<u>BROADBAND SYSTEM</u>	Note: These items are general in nature, applicants should modify and expand the form as required to describe their specific project.						
Outside plant (fiber, coaxial, copper, etc.)							
<i>Provide specific types of material to be funded</i>	LF			\$ -			
	LF			\$ -			
Towers – new construction (monopole, lattice, etc.)				\$ -			Grant funds may not be used for tower construction or improvements. However, tower construction or improvement costs can be used as match. <i>See RFA for additional information</i>
<i>Provide description of tower, study or structural improvement to be funded</i>	EA						
Electronic Equipment (cabinets, switches, routers, wireless radios, etc.)							
<i>Provide specific type of equipment to be funded</i>	EA			\$ -			
Customer Drops							
<i>Provide a description of drop material to be funded</i>	LF			\$ -			
Customer premises equipment							
<i>Provide a description of CPE to be funded</i>	EA			\$ -			
<i>Add lines as necessary to provide a full construction budget for the network</i>							
Total Broadband System							Note: Other funding must equal or exceed the amount of grant funding requested. Match must be expended prior to requesting grant funds.