Mainstream Fiber Networks (MSFN)

Crawford County Next Level Connection - County Wide Expansion

This Next Level Connections project will serve 2281 unserved households and 384 unserved businesses in the Crawford County. In a funding partnership with the State of Indiana and Crawford County Auditor, Mainstream Fiber Networks will improve unserved levels to 1 gigabits per second up and 1 gigabits per second down by June 30, 2021. Implementing a cost effective, Broadband strategy in Benton County will bring critical communication tools to businesses, households and public entities. It will allow for more educational effectiveness and opportunities, business growth and expansion, Agri-Tech opportunities for farmers, telehealth options, teleworking opportunities and increased quality of life and cost savings across Benton county. Total eligible project cost is $6,224,941. Mainstream Fiber Networks applicant match is $2,241,259 and the county match is $933,858 for a total project match of $3,175,117 (51%).

General Geographic Location

The Crawford County Broadband fiber solution includes both eligible census tracts and other underserved areas wrapping around the Hoosier National Forest. Crawford County has 65 census tracts noted as having no provider, of those 26 are eligible for NLC funds. The next 87 census tracts offer service from Frontier or TDS Telecom and do not offer minimum speeds at a 10 Mbps Down, 1 Mbps Up. 11 Census Tracts of those 87 are eligible for NLC funds. The remaining 196 census tracts are served by Frontier. The maximum speeds offered by Frontier are 12 and 24 Mbps Down for 195 of the 196 tracts.

Additionally, the Indiana Broadband Map located at www.indianabroadbandmap.com, updated in December 2017 shows approximately one census tracts in Crawford County with coverage when the criteria of wire-based coverage is selected.

Mainstream Fiber Network's Involvement in the Project to Date

Mainstream began working with Benton County in November of 2018. Initially MSFN Met with Economic Development, Community Foundation rep, Harrison County Community Foundation rep, Scott Rudd the Director of Broadband Opportunities and the CFO and Project Coordinator from Mainstream Fiber. In December, MSFN attended three community engagement/listening sessions to hear concerns and challenges directly from the stakeholders. Other meetings in February and April of 2019, were made to finalize details and opportunities and ensure the community could share in the matching portion of the grant and the proposed solutions met local needs. This summary only reflects in person meetings and not the countless phone calls and e-mails used to further the conversation and bring this application to completion.

Support for this project is significant as evidenced by letters of support from key Crawford leadership:

- Crawford County, County Commissioners
- Crawford County Chamber of Commerce
- Crawford County Community Foundation
- Information from a Community Meeting from December 2018, Town of English
- Petition from 62 Employees at Jasper Engines supporting the expansion of Broadband
- Mike Fischbach - Benton County
- Interstate Battery of Western Indiana
MSFN ability to manage and sustain the project
Mainstream Fiber Networks (MSFN) is the lead applicant for the Next Level Connection Grant and has been in existence since 2004. MSFN is a locally owned and operated internet service provider based out of Nashville, IN. Their mission is to provide customers in rural communities with affordable, reliable fiber optic service solutions and superior customer care. They currently provide broadband solutions in six counties and are seeking to expand services to another six counties.

MSFN provides a full service implementation strategy that starts with working one on one with local communities/counties to determine the need, the approach and put together the best financing strategy. It includes all aspects of project design, implementation and last mile consumer strategies and support. The Engineering and Design work is done in house making the transition from plan to construction quick and seamless. As the project moves into construction, the Network Construction is primarily handled by in-house employees reducing implementation times. As new counties are added, the Network Operations and Customer Servicing Facing employees are local individuals hired for those roles, bringing jobs to local communities, as well as a local face to help solve consumer needs. Additionally, Mainstream prides itself on becoming a local community partner, investing time, talent and treasure with the communities it serves.

MSFN has the experience, the financial wherewithal, and demonstrated successes in implementing and completing complete Fiber solutions for rural businesses and households. They are installing in ground line that has a proposed 40 year life and have committed to providing service for at least five years but plan on providing service in perpetuity.

MSFN delivers a complete Fiber high-speed solution that allows for families to enhance its quality of life. As noted in Gallardo, Beaulieu and Kumar’s Research and Policy Insights for Purdue Center for Regional Development March 2018, "From a quality of life perspective, reducing the digital divide will bring benefits to the state. Aside from the benefits to the business sector, a bridged digital divide would allow local governments to leverage digital platforms that would be more effective in responding to residents and take advantage of telework, telehealth, and other broadband applications that will continue to transform the Hoosier landscape."

Without the Next Level Connection Broadband grant, the Crawford County project would not be able to be implemented to reach as many households as projected. The state resources greatly assist in bringing Broadband to multiple areas in the county. If the resources were not available, the county would not be able to make up the difference and MSFN may not be able to finance all of the dollars required (because of the projections). This would reduce the households and businesses that can be served and ultimately decrease the reach of the service. As a state, Indiana needs to be better to serve its rural communities by bringing Broadband services to Crawford County to help them grow. As noted in a public hearing in December 2018, by Mike Thissan notes, "Crawford County is both noted by the FCC as having 100% coverage and is last in Broadband Access." Let's help close the digital divide for Crawford County and move them up the list, we owe it to those families and businesses in Crawford County to not leave them behind.