

**Mainstream Fiber Networks (MSFN)**  
**Benton County Next Level Connection-County Wide Broadband Project**

This Next Level Connections project will serve 2281 unserved households and 384 unserved businesses in Benton County. In a funding partnership with the State of Indiana and Benton County Commissioners Mainstream Fiber Networks, LLC will improve unserved and underserved levels to up to 1 gigabit per second up and 1 gigabit per second down by June 20, 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 \$6,279,246. MSFN Applicant match is \$2,136,278 and the county match is \$1,066,538 for a total match of \$3,202,816 (51%).

**General Geographic Location**

The project is located throughout Benton County, targeting rural households, businesses and public entities. There are 600 census tracts that are noted as not being eligible for NLC grants funds but 563 of the census tracts are covered by a Mobile Wireless or Fixed Wireless Provider that does not guarantee speeds (either Transworld or Watch) and Mobile wireless is not considered a solution for rural areas.

**Mainstream Fiber Network's Involvement in the Project to Date**

Mainstream began working with Benton County in November of 2018. Initially MSFN and the Economic Development Representative met an CCA Breakout Session: "Indiana Broadband... Is your County Ready?" A follow up meeting was held in December with the Economic Development Representative, County Commissioners, the REMC and the Wabash Health Innovation Network where MSFN presented an initial set of design and implementation options for Benton County. Other meetings in January 2019 included analyzing using fixed wireless as a cost effective solution to meet more families and to take in further considerations of the local leadership team. A final in person meeting was held in February to discuss the potential of the Next Level Connection program and match responsibilities. This only reflects in person meetings and not the countless phone calls and e-mails used to further the conversation and bring this application to fruition.

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

- Boswell Clark Treasurer
- Oxford Clerk Treasurer
- State Representative Sharon Negele
- Wabash Heartland Innovation Network
- Letter from Warren REMC
- Letter from Newton REMC
- Otterbein Library
- Benton Central Junior/Senior High
- 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 Benton 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 Benton County to help them grow. The Indiana Broadband Map located at [www.indianabroadbandmap.com](http://www.indianabroadbandmap.com), updated in December 2017 shows approximately three census tracts in Benton County with coverage when the criteria of wire-based coverage is selected. We owe it to Benton County to help them cross the rural digital divide and advance their County.