



# NextLevel Connections

## Broadband Grant Program

State of Indiana

Office of the Governor  
Eric J. Holcomb

Office of the Lieutenant Governor  
Suzanne Crouch

Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs

<b>Application Issue Date</b>	August 11, 2021
<b>Submission Deadline for Letters of Intent</b>	September 24, 2021
<b>Submission Deadline for Challenges</b>	November 8, 2021
<b>Expected Date for Challenge Decisions</b>	November 24, 2021
<b>Submission Deadline for Full Applications</b>	January 6, 2022
<b>Submission Deadline for Competitive Applications</b>	January 31, 2022
<b>Expected Date for Selections</b>	March 2022

- Applicants must submit a Letter of Intent by 3:00 pm ET on the due date listed above to be eligible to submit a Full Application

Questions about this program and application? Email [NLC@ocra.in.gov](mailto:NLC@ocra.in.gov)

# Table of Contents

I.	Grant Program Description .....	1
	A. Background and Context .....	1
	B. Award Information .....	1
	C. Requirements .....	1
	i. Eligible Broadband Service.....	1
	ii. Eligible Entities.....	2
	iii. Eligible Project Area.....	2
	iv. Eligible Costs .....	3
	v. Match Requirement.....	3
	D. Questions Regarding Eligibility.....	3
	E. Limitation on Submissions.....	4
II.	Application and Submission Information.....	4
	A. Application Process .....	4
	B. Content and Form of the Letter of Intent .....	5
	C. Content and Form of the Full and Competitive Applications.....	5
	D. Compliance Criteria .....	10
	i. Letters of Intent .....	10
	ii. Initial Full Application .....	10
	iii. Competitive Application .....	10
	E. Application Review Information.....	11
	i. Letters of Intent .....	11
	ii. Full and Competitive Applications .....	11
	F. Evaluation and Selection Process.....	14
III.	Award Administration Information.....	15
	A. Award Notification .....	15
	i. Ineligible Submission .....	15
	ii. Letters of Intent Notification .....	15
	iii. Successful Applicants.....	15
	iv. Potential Selection Determinations.....	16
	v. Unsuccessful Applicants.....	16
	B. Administrative Requirements .....	16
	i. Indiana Bidder Requirement.....	16
	ii. Reporting Requirements.....	16

iii. Invoicing..... 17

Appendix A – Application Checklist ..... 18

Appendix B – Applicant Affidavit ..... 19

# I. Grant Program Description

## A. Background and Context

The need for access to critical broadband infrastructure has been significantly magnified in 2020. From consumer-facing connectivity needs, to digital and remote learning, telehealth services, online commerce transactions and e-government shifts, compelling need exists in many areas of Indiana. Specific areas that lack broadband coverage (less than actual speeds of 25 Mbps downstream); areas that lack quality, reliable access to fixed terrestrial broadband; and areas with compelling need in the state are priorities to address through this third round of Next Level Connections (NLC) Grants.

The Office of Community and Rural Affairs is responsible for administering the Program on behalf of the Office of Lieutenant Governor Suzanne Crouch, and the Office of Governor Eric Holcomb. The Next Level Connections program is funded through Indiana's appropriation from the US Department of Treasury's Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. These funds are designed to provide emergency funding for state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments to respond to the pandemic and its economic impacts, including making necessary investments in broadband infrastructure.

In the third round, the Next Level Connections Grant Program will invest millions towards bridging the digital divide in Indiana. This program will provide a maximum of \$5 million per grant to fund projects that provide access to high-quality, reliable broadband throughout Indiana. Applicants are expected to engage their community – community leaders and stakeholders (libraries, education institutions, healthcare, businesses, non-profits, etc.) – in the development of projects that are strategic, scalable and bridge critical access gaps to support quality of life considerations and economic viability for Indiana citizens and communities.

## B. Award Information

OCRA may issue one, multiple, or no awards based on eligible applications. Individual award amounts may vary, up to \$5 million. Awarded projects must be completed within **24** months from the date of the executed grant agreement.

## C. Requirements

To be considered for a substantive evaluation, an applicant's submission must meet the criteria set forth below. If the application does not meet these initial requirements, it will be considered nonresponsive, removed from further evaluation, and ineligible for award in this current round.

### i. Eligible Broadband Service

The applicant must be able to provide a terrestrial connection to the Internet that provides an actual speed of at least 50 Mbps downstream and at least 5 Mbps upstream, regardless of the technology medium used to provide the connection.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Indiana General Assembly. 2021. "Chapter 38.5 Broadband Grants for Rural Areas." <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/laws/2019/ic/titles/004#4-4-38.5>.

However, actual speeds of at least 100 Mbps symmetrical upload and download will be more competitive for this round.

## ii. Eligible Entities

The lead applicant must be a “qualified broadband provider,” which is defined as a company, firm, corporation, partnership, or association that, at the time of submission of the grant application:

- 1) either:
  - A) Has been providing broadband service to at least 100 residences and businesses in Indiana for at least three (3) consecutive years; or
  - B) is:
    - (i) a corporation organized under IC 8-1-13; or
    - (ii) a corporation organized under IC 23-17 that is an electric cooperative and that has at least one member that is a corporation organized under 8-1-13; and
- 2) has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of OCRA:
  - A) financial;
  - B) technical; and
  - C) operational capability in building and operating a broadband network.<sup>2</sup>

Applicants are highly encouraged to partner with other entities to deliver the entire solution.

## iii. Eligible Project Area

Broadband infrastructure projects are eligible if they are extending the deployment of eligible broadband service to areas and addresses in which:

- Internet connections are unavailable; or
- The only available connections to the Internet are at actual speeds of less than 25 Mbps downstream<sup>3</sup>

Determination of the available broadband service is based on the following:

- The most recent available data from the FCC Form 477 will be used as a starting point for determine existing service levels;
- The data above is collected on a census block level and can overstate the availability of services, an applicant is permitted to provide additional information to demonstrate that the proposed service area is actually not served at actual speeds of 25 megabits per second downstream;
- Additional information must be sufficient to conclude that an area is eligible and may include but is not limited to:
  - Statistically significant survey data for each address to be served within the project area which may include, but is not limited to, speed testing at the address level data, or;
  - Documentation of the location of existing infrastructure that do not provide 25/3 speed levels within the proposed project area.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

Non-contiguous areas may be submitted in a single application.

Ineligible areas include:

- Service addresses that previously received Next Level Connections Broadband Grant program funds; and
- Service addresses where actual speeds of more than 25 Mbps downstream for which funding has been allocated from the federal Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF), Connect America Fund (CAF), Broadband Technology Opportunities Fund, State Broadband Initiative or from any other similar federally funded program.<sup>4</sup>

#### **iv. Eligible Costs**

The NLC Broadband Grant Program can pay up to 80% of the eligible costs for a qualifying project, up to \$5 million. Eligible broadband project expenses are terrestrial capital expenses directly related to a qualified broadband project, including design, engineering, permitting, construction of “last mile” infrastructure expenses and validation of service expenses. Last mile is defined as the final leg connecting a broadband service provider’s network to the end-user customer’s on-premise telecommunication equipment.

Middle mile expenses are eligible for grant funding only when they are necessary for the provision of the last mile services described in the application. Maintenance or operating expenses related to the project do not qualify as eligible costs.

#### **v. Match Requirement**

The applicant must provide at least 20% of the total allowable project costs to deploy the proposed broadband infrastructure project. The match can be derived from private and public sources available to the applicant but cannot include any other state or federal funds applied to the same area. In-kind expenses will not be considered as match contributions.

The match must be available at the time of application submittal and documentation to support the match is required as part of the application. Examples may include: a letter of credit, letter from a financial institution, board resolution committing funding, or loan documentation. If there are additional financial partners for the applicant match, please also provide documentation for their match portion. Match contributions must be specified in the project budget, and verifiable from the applicant’s records.

### **D. Questions Regarding Eligibility**

OCRA will not make eligibility determinations for potential applicants prior to the date on which Letters of Intent to this funding opportunity must be submitted. The decision whether to submit a Letter of Intent in response to this opportunity lies solely with the applicant.

---

<sup>4</sup> Indiana General Assembly. 2021. “Chapter 38.5 Broadband Grants for Rural Areas.” <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/laws/2019/ic/titles/004#4-4-38.5>.

## E. Limitation on Submissions

An entity may submit more than one Letter of Intent and initial Full Application to this opportunity, provided that each application describes a unique project area and provided that an eligible Letter of Intent was submitted for each initial Full Application. However, a competitive application may be submitted during the full application phase if an applicant submits a lower grant request for a project area that was reviewed and met all requirements during the LOI and Challenge phases.

## II. Application and Submission Information

### A. Application Process

The application process will include two phases: a Letter of Intent and a Full and Competitive Application phase. At each phase, OCRA will perform a compliance review of the applicant submissions to determine whether they meet the requirements of Section II.D. OCRA will not review or consider submissions that do not meet the eligibility requirements of Section I.C.

All submissions must be submitted via [NLC@ocra.in.gov](mailto:NLC@ocra.in.gov) and, as applicable, an FTP site for large files, and must conform to the following form and content requirements:

- Each must be submitted in Adobe PDF format (unless otherwise stated);
- Each must be written in English;
- All pages must be formatted to fit on 8.5. x 11 inch paper with margins not less than 1” on every side, font not smaller than 12 point; and
- The Full Application must include the Control Number issued by OCRA in the upper right corner of the header of every page, and page numbers must be included in the footer of every page.

If an FTP site is needed to submit Full and Competitive Application files, please contact OCRA at [NLC@ocra.in.gov](mailto:NLC@ocra.in.gov) by December 1, 2021 to receive access to submit large files. Applicants are responsible for meeting each submission deadline. **Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit their Letter of Intent and Full and Competitive Applications in advance of the individual submission deadlines.** Once the Letter of Intent or Full or Competitive Application is submitted, applicants may revise their submission until the expiration of the applicable deadline.

OCRA urges applicants to review their Letters of Intent and Full and Competitive Applications carefully and to allow sufficient time for the submission of required information and documents. All Full Applications that pass the initial eligibility review will undergo comprehensive merit review according to the criteria identified in Section II.E.

Applicants must submit a Full and / or Competitive Applications by the specified due dates and time to be considered for funding under this Announcement. Applicants must complete the following forms that accompany this document, in accordance with the instructions.

The application forms and instructions are available on the OCRA website. To access these materials, visit <https://www.in.gov/ocra/nlc.htm>. Files in excess of 20 MB in aggregate cannot be emailed and should be uploaded to the FTP site.

## **B. Content and Form of the Letter of Intent**

To be eligible to submit an initial Full Application, applicants must submit a Letter of Intent by the specified due date and time. Letters of Intent will be utilized to plan for the Challenge process and allow applicants an early notice of possible challenges to proposed address level data. The address level data will be published on the NLC website along with the grant request amount and the brief abstract about the project. The letters should not contain any proprietary or business sensitive information. The letters do not commit an applicant to submit a Full Application.

Each applicant must provide the following information as outlined in the Letter of Intent template:

- Project Title;
- Name of Applicant Organization;
- Project Manager;
- Business Contact (if applicable);
- Registered Business Information including ID, creation date and Indiana Bidder Number;
- Total Indiana Customers Served for the previous three years (2020, 2019, 2018)
- Speed level to be provided;
- Grant request and local match amounts;
- Brief Abstract – the abstract provided should not be more than 200 words in length, and should provide a truncated explanation of the proposed project; and
- Address List with proposed address level data to be served per census block (Excel spreadsheet template) **This excel list will be published on the NLC website for comment.**

## **C. Content and Form of the Full and Competitive Applications**

Applicants must submit a Full and / or Competitive Application by the specified due dates and time to be considered for funding under this Announcement. Applicants must complete the following application forms identified in Table 1 that accompany this document, in accordance with the instructions

Applicants will be provided a Control Number after Eligibility Decisions are provided. Applicants will have approximately 59 business days after the decision, and 26 business days after Challenge Decisions are published to prepare and submit a Full Application. **Regardless of the date the applicant receives the Challenge notification, the submission deadline for the initial Full Application remains the date and time stated on the cover page.**

All initial Full Application documents must be marked with the Control Number issued to the applicant. Initial Full Applications and any Competitive Applications must conform to the following requirements:



**Table 1. Full Application Documents**

Component	File Name
Project Narrative	Control Number_Lead Organization_Project Narrative
Project Schedule	Control Number_Lead Organization_Schedule
Technology Specifications	Control Number_Lead Organization_Tech Specs
Proposed Area Maps	Control Number_Lead Organization_Maps
GIS Shapefile or Google Earth KMZ	Control Number_Lead Organization_GIS
Address Data List (Excel template)	Control Number_Lead Organization_Address Data
Budget Table (Excel template)	Control Number_Lead Organization_Budget
Summary for Public Release	Control Number_Lead Organization_Summary
Authorizing Affidavit and Partner Affidavits	Control Number_Lead Organization_Affidavit
Funding Commitments	Control Number_Lead Organization_Funding Letters
Letters of Community Need and Support	Control Number_Lead Organization_Community Letters
Five Year Standalone Financial Plan	Control Number_Lead Organization_5 Year Plan
Current Financial Statement	Control Number_Lead Organization_Current Financials
(Optional) Survey Results from Speed Tests [Excel template]	Control Number_Lead Organization_Survey Results

**Competitive Applications.** Competitive Applications may be submitted after the publication of the initial Applications for a period of 14 business days. An applicant can submit a Competitive Application in response to a published initial application indicating the competitive applicant could provide eligible broadband service to the same project area as the initial application. The competitive applicant must refer to the original application control number in their email submission to [NLC@ocra.in.gov](mailto:NLC@ocra.in.gov). To be considered for funding, the Competitive Applicant's grant request must be lower than the initial application for at least the same service level. The initial applicant will have the opportunity to also modify their grant request in response to the Competitive Applicant application. All Competitive Applications will need to conform to the following requirements at the time of submission.

**Table 2. Competitive Application Documents**

Component	File Name
Project Narrative	Competitive_Lead Organization_Project Narrative
Project Schedule	Competitive_Lead Organization_Schedule
Technology Specifications	Competitive_Lead Organization_Tech Specs
Proposed Area Maps	Competitive_Lead Organization_Maps
GIS Shapefile or Google Earth KMZ	Competitive_Lead Organization_GIS
Address Data List (Excel template)	Competitive_Lead Organization_Address Data
Budget Table (Excel template)	Competitive_Lead Organization_Budget
Summary for Public Release	Competitive_Lead Organization_Summary
Authorizing Affidavit and Partner Affidavits	Competitive_Lead Organization_Affidavit
Funding Commitments	Competitive_Lead Organization_Funding Letters

Letters of Community Need and Support	Competitive _Lead Organization_ Community Letters
Five Year Standalone Financial Plan	Competitive _Lead Organization_ 5 Year Plan
Current Financial Statement	Competitive _Lead Organization_ Current Financials
(Optional) Survey Results from Speed Tests [Excel template]	Competitive _Lead Organization_ Survey Results

OCRA provides detailed guidance on the content and form of each component below.

**Project Narrative:** The applicant must complete the Project Narrative template for their proposed project. The narrative includes questions and fields relative to the project description, impact, community engagement, and additional metrics. The Project Narrative template is available on the OCRA NLC website under Application Documents. Save the Project Narrative in a single PDF file using the following convention for the title: “ControlNumber\_Lead Organization\_Project Narrative”. For Competitive Applications PDF name must be “Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Project Narrative”.

**Project Schedule:** The applicant must provide a detailed schedule outlining the activities, durations, resources, and schedule constraints for the overall project. Applicants may utilize a Gantt chart or other similar methodology to indicate the tasks, subtasks, milestones, and final deliverables, and their associated start and complete dates (month and year). The tasks and milestones should align with the information provided in the Project Narrative. The project schedule must not exceed **24** months in length. One of the final tasks on the schedule should indicate the date on which service to the last passing will be available or installed on the premise. Save the Project Schedule in a single PDF file using the following convention for the title: “ControlNumber\_Lead Organization\_Schedule”. For Competitive Applications PDF name must be “Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Schedule”.

**Technology Specifications:** The applicant must provide a preliminary technical evaluation of the proposed broadband infrastructure project. This could include, but is not limited to, engineering design and drawings, maps, block flow diagrams, etc. ***The technical evaluation must be certified by a Professional Engineer.*** The applicant must demonstrate that the installed infrastructure provides capacity for transmission at the actual speed proposed. ***This information must be certified by the manufacturer or a Professional Engineer.*** Certifications should be on the certifying engineer’s letterhead and/or stamped. The documentation should be submitted in an Adobe PDF format. Save the Technology Specifications in a single PDF file using the following convention for the title: “ControlNumber\_Lead Organization\_Tech Specs”. For Competitive Applications PDF name must be “Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Tech Specs”.

**Proposed Area Maps:** The Applicant will also include a map of the proposed project area. A map of a last mile project should include the service area boundaries and also include place names, boundaries, buildings, road/street names or other features that clearly identify the project coverage area. The application should also include the census block numbers and the passings clearly marked. For projects that include middle mile, the map should also indicate the location of the middle mile facilities that will be placed. The maps should be submitted as high-resolution, color, and detailed maps in a single PDF file. Save the proposed area maps using the following convention for the title: “ControlNumber\_Lead Organization\_Maps”. For Competitive Applications PDF name must be “Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Project Maps”.

**GIS Shapefile or Google Earth KMZ:** The Applicant will also include a GIS file of the proposed project area. The file format can either be a shapefile (.shp) or a Google Earth KMZ (.kmz or .kml). Facility information is **not** required, only the proposed project area boundary. A shapefile is the preferred file type, please only submit one GIS file per application. Save the GIS file using the following convention for the title: "ControlNumber\_Lead Organization\_GIS". For Competitive Applications PDF name must be "Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Project GIS". ***In this round applicants are required to provide GIS files outlining the proposed area and a PDF is still required (see section above).***

**Address Data List:** The applicant must complete a spreadsheet of all of the address level data in the proposed project area per census block. The Address Data List contains an instructions tab that goes into detail what is needed for submission. The Address Data template is available on the OCRA NLC website under Application Documents. Save the Address Data List in a single Excel file using the following convention for the title: "ControlNumber\_LeadOrganization\_Address Data". For Competitive Applications Excel file must be "Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Address Data".

**Budget Table:** The applicant must complete a project budget table indicating the sources, budget categories, and amounts of the funds that will be eligible project expenses. Please use the recommended budget categories, an applicant may **not** include additional rows where anticipated expenses do not fall within one of the recommended categories. The Budget template is available on the OCRA NLC website under Application Documents. Save the Budget in a single Excel file using the following convention for the title: "ControlNumber\_LeadOrganization\_Budget". For Competitive Applications Excel file must be "Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Budget".

**Summary for Public Release:** Applicants are required to submit a one-page summary/abstract of the proposed project suitable for dissemination to the public. It should be a document that identifies the name of the applicant, the project title, the general geographic location and total estimate of passings, a brief description of the project, including the technology solution to be utilized, and the potential impact of the project (e.g., benefits, outcomes), and major participants (for collaborative projects). This document must not include any proprietary or sensitive business information as OCRA will make these summaries available to the public. The project summary must not exceed one page when printed using standard 8.5 x 11 paper with 1" margins (top, bottom, left, and right) with font no smaller than 12 point. Save the Summary for Public Release in a single PDF file using the following convention for the title "ControlNumber\_LeadOrganization\_Summary". For Competitive Applications PDF name must be "Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Summary".

**Authorizing Affidavit:** The primary Applicant must provide a signed, dated, and witnessed affidavit or resolution that shows official Applicant support for and approval of the application as well as a commitment to provide the Applicant's matching funding. If the application includes a funding partner or partners, a separate affidavit or resolution is required for each public or private partner that has committed to provide funding for the project. A sample affidavit/resolution is provided for the Applicant's use as specified in Appendix B. Please note that the Applicant may choose to reformat the sample document but must ensure that all the statements appear in the signed, final version. The documentation should be submitted in an Adobe PDF format. Save the Affidavit in a single PDF file using the following convention for the

title: "ControlNumber\_LeadOrganization\_Affidavit" For Competitive Applications PDF name must be "Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Affidavit".

**Funding Commitment:** The applicant must provide written funding commitments from all project funding partners, including public, private, and non-profit or philanthropic sources. The documentation should be submitted in an Adobe PDF format. Save the Funding Commitment letters in a single PDF file using the following convention for the title: "ControlNumber\_LeadOrganization\_Funding Letters". For Competitive Applications PDF name must be "Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Funding Letters".

**Letter(s) of Community Need and Support:** The applicant may provide evidence of community need and letter of community support for the proposed project. Examples include letters endorsing the project from residents, businesses, local units of government of the communities or counties within the project's proposed service area, legislators, congressional representatives, and local government resolutions. The documentation should be submitted in an Adobe PDF format. Save the Letters of Community Support in a single PDF file using the following convention for the title: "ControlNumber\_LeadOrganization\_Community Letters". For Competitive Applications PDF name must be "Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Community Letters".

**Five Year Financial Plan:** The applicant must provide a five year stand-alone financial plan/forecast for the proposed project to demonstrate the financial model with and without grant funding. This should include a description of how the costs and anticipated revenues will result in the financial viability of the project over time. The forecast should be completed with and without grant funding. The documentation may be submitted in an Excel sheet or an Adobe PDF. Save the Five Year Stand-alone Financial Plan in a single file using the following convention for the title: "ControlNumber\_LeadOrganization\_5 Year Plan". For Competitive Applications PDF name must be "Competitive\_Lead Organization\_5 Year Plan".

**Current Financial Statement:** The applicant must provide a recent financial statement, including an income statement and balance sheet, for the most recently completed fiscal year. The financial statements must demonstrate the applicant's financial stability and capacity to execute and maintain the proposed project. If the financial statements being provided by the applicant are those of a parent or holding company, additional financial information should be provided for the entity/organization. The documentation should be submitted in an Adobe PDF format. Save the Financial Statements in a single PDF file using the following convention for the title: "ControlNumber\_LeadOrganization\_Current Financials". For Competitive Applications PDF name must be "Competitive\_Lead Organization\_Current Financials".

**(Optional) Survey Data to challenge validly challenged addresses and / or addresses reported at 25/3 or above:** The applicant may submit the results of qualifying consumer surveys performed within the last 6 months by the applicant, or a unit of local government (town, city, county), or local or regional economic development corporation. The results shall be accompanied by a description of how the survey was administered and the survey questions asked. A qualified survey should name broadband providers offering service in the relevant area and ask about recent attempts by the consumer to obtain service at or below the 25 Mbps download threshold, including the result of the inquiry. The survey must also collect address-level information about areas served at less than 25/3 from the respondents. (see Excel

template) If the survey was commissioned or performed by the applicant, the applicant must also submit a letter of support from a unit of local government indicating that it has reviewed the addresses and believes them to be served at less than 25/3. The applicant must include the addresses identified by the valid challenge or was deemed ineligible due to FCC reporting speeds. For surveys to be validated, the applicant will need surveys for all of the proposed addresses passed for every census block that was successfully challenged or considered ineligible due to FCC reporting speeds. Survey results not meeting these requirements may be rejected. The actual survey documentation should be submitted in an on the Excel template provided. Save the Survey Results using the following convention for the title: Control Number\_Lead Organization\_Survey Results

***Information that contains trade secrets should be marked “Confidential” and saved in a separate file. Pursuant to IC 5-14-3-4(a)(4) these records may not be disclosed by a public agency.***

## **D. Compliance Criteria**

**Letters of Intent, Initial Full Applications and Competitive Applications must meet all Compliance Criteria listed below or they will be considered noncompliant. OCRA will not review or consider noncompliant submissions.** OCRA will not extend the submission deadline for applicants or challengers that fail to submit required information due to server/connection congestion.

### **i. Letters of Intent**

Letters of Intent are deemed compliant if:

The Letter of Intent complies with the content and form requirements in Section II.B;  
and  
The applicant submitted all required documents by the deadline stated in the schedule.

### **ii. Initial Full Application**

Full Applications are deemed compliant if:

The applicant submitted a compliant Letter of Intent;  
The Full Application complies with the content and form requirements in Section II.C;  
and  
The applicant submitted all required documents by the deadline stated in the schedule.

### **iii. Competitive Application**

Competitive Applications are deemed compliant if:

The Competitive Application is in response to an initial Full Application and includes **ALL** the following:

- Lower Grant Request than initial full application
- Exact Project Area as initial full application
- Same address level data and census blocks as initial full application

- Provides equal or better speed service packages as initial full application;
- and
- The Competitive Application complies with the content and form requirements in Section II.C; and
- The applicant submitted all required documents by the deadline stated in the schedule.

## E. Application Review Information

### i. Letters of Intent

Letters of Intent are evaluated for compliance and eligibility only. Ineligible applicants will not be further reviewed or eligible to submit a Full Application.

### ii. Full and Competitive Applications

The State of Indiana will award grants to projects that provide the highest return in providing access to the unserved areas for the public costs incurred and meet all of the grant requirements.

Applications will be evaluated against the merit review criteria shown below. All sub-criteria are of equal weight. These criteria reflect information requested in the grant application package. There is a total of 250 points.

#### Criterion 1: Project Description and Readiness (0 to 65 points)

- Degree to which the proposed technology solution and the project area is clearly described;
  - Justification of a technology solution that does not deliver or can not be scaled to at least 100/100 speeds
    - Explain the geographical, topographical, or excessive costs justifications of not delivering scalable 100/100 speeds
- Sufficiency of detail in the application to assess whether the proposed solution is logical and capable of achieving the project goals;
- Degree to which the task descriptions are clear, detailed, timely, and reasonable, resulting in a high likelihood that the proposed scope of work will succeed in meeting the project goals;
- Identification of key execution risks and mitigation plan;
- Initial five year service (speed tiers and pricing) offered at or above speed stated in the application at affordable prices, including unbundled broadband service.
- Demonstration of overall project readiness. Examples include sound engineering and design plan, secured financing, permits and/or approvals secured or in place, thorough and complete project schedule and tasks, and evidence of readiness to build, manage and operate the project.
- Detailed Engineering Design and Project Area Map. Details regarding the technology, design, and network routes:
  - Clear, detailed boundaries of project area with passings indicated;
  - Census blocks clearly marked in project areas;
  - Clear, detailed network route map that is consistent with route miles;
  - Technology specifications that clearly indicate purported speeds and network indicators can be met;

- Vendors details (for new technologies);
- **Note:** Professional Engineering certification is required as a threshold factor.

**Criterion 2: Project Impact (0 to 20 points)**

- Extent to which the applicant provided evidence that the proposed project is for an area served at speeds lower than actual 25 Mbps downstream;
- The potential impact of the project on advancing economic development within the proposed project area, including agribusiness, other at-home businesses, and telework; and
  - Residents: ability to telework, remote learning engagement, new housing starts, etc.
  - Businesses: degree of competitiveness, market expansion, workforce development, job creation, attracting new business establishments, etc.
  - Farmers and agricultural use customers: farming efficiency and productivity, new applications for precision agriculture, etc.
  - Connected institutions: enhancement to capabilities to execute mission in more effective and efficient manner (across schools, libraries, hospitals, clinics, social service centers, community gathering centers, etc.)
  - Other: public safety improvements; other complementary infrastructure improvements; etc.
- Economic impact: workforce training and development, employment search, and other individual and community economic advances meeting the specific challenges resulting from the pandemic within the proposed project area;
- Social impact: improvements in educational, healthcare, and other individual and societal gains within the proposed project area;
- Degree to which the need for funding is described:
  - Financial metrics including rate of return and payback periods with and without the requested grant amount with all supporting details;
  - Details that quantitatively equate the specific grant amount to the gap in the business plan;
  - Demonstration of prior attempts to finance similar project, and explanation/evidence of shortcomings to raising capital.

**Criterion 3: Community Support and Engagement (0 to 15 points)**

- How the project supports the program objectives and previous broadband planning efforts in the proposed project area;
- Degree to which project fits into an existing community strategic plan;
- Recent survey data that covers broad spectrum of community with statistically meaningful results regarding level of need, gaps, and project support;
- Evidence of community support and demonstration of community engagement. This may include, but is not limited to, “personalized” letters of support, attendance at events/meetings demonstrating community engagement at-large, and planning/organizing events for community members; and
- Engagement with stakeholders outside of the project team, which may include residents, businesses, community leaders, project partners, elected officials,



- community broadband task force, etc.; and
- Degree to which project will include local hires and provide opportunities for local hires such as apprenticeship programs, job fairs, and training programs;
- Commitment to sustain the project for at a minimum of five years.

**Criterion 4: Technical Qualifications and Resources (0 to 10 points)**

- The capability of the Project Manager and the proposed team to address all aspects of the proposed work with a high probability of success. The qualifications, relevant expertise, and time commitment of the individuals on the team;
- The availability and sufficiency of the facilities and equipment to support the work;
- The availability and sufficiency of any proposed work force that will be contracted to complete the project;
- The reasonableness of the budget for the proposed project and objectives; and
- Demonstrated the financial capacity to complete the proposed project scope.

**Criterion 5 – Economically Disadvantaged Student Household Service Packages (0 to 15 points)**

- Service offerings and price points reflect to meet unique needs of economically disadvantaged student households and their affordability levels;
- Upload speeds that reflect unique circumstances of increased remote learning;
- Special rates and discounts for devices that enable remote learning;
- Offerings that enable purchase of unbundled Internet at reasonable price points without obligations.

**Criterion 6: Objective Scoring (total of 125 points)**

Household, businesses, and anchor institutions passed (0 to 60 points)

	<b>Download Speed After Build</b>				
<b># of Passings</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>1GB</b>
<b>1-50</b>	0	3	6	17	30
<b>51-250</b>	1	4	10	20	34
<b>251-500</b>	2	5	14	24	37
<b>501+</b>	3	6	17	27	40

	<b>Upload Speed After Build</b>				
<b># of Passings</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>1GB</b>
<b>1-50</b>	0	1	4	8	15
<b>51-250</b>	0	2	5	10	16
<b>251-500</b>	1	3	6	11	18
<b>501+</b>	1	4	8	13	20



Grant Request Amount (0 to 65 points)

Match Percent of Eligible Project Costs	Points
20-49%	15
50-59%	30
60-69%	40
70-74%	50
>75%	65

## F. Evaluation and Selection Process

The evaluation process consists of multiple phases; each includes an initial eligibility review and a thorough technical review. Rigorous reviews of eligible submissions are conducted by state agency officials. The program considers the recommendations of the reviewers, along with other considerations such as program preferences outlined in the legislation, and proposed project areas that have been subjected to the challenge process, in determining which applications will be selected to receive a grant award.

### Letter of Intent

An applicant must submit a completed Letter of Intent and the Address Data List Excel table by the due date and time. The LOI will be reviewed for eligibility and compliance. Eligible applicants will have their Abstract and Address data and Census Block List published and subject to a 30 day Challenge period.

### Challenge to Application Areas

Challengers will have 30 days to review the information and submit a Challenge to the address data. A Challenge will consist of a Cover Page, an Excel template identifying the address data, census blocks, affidavit, technology specifications and construction information, and maps of the service area. OCRA will review the challenges and determine if they are valid based on the information supplied and publish the decisions on the website for applicants to utilize in their planning and decision making for the submittal of a Full Application. Communication between the applicant and the potential challenger is highly encouraged.

Additional details regarding the Challenge Process are provided in the NLC Challenge Phase.

### Initial Full Application

An applicant must submit the required documentation as outlined in Section II.C., by the deadline stated in the schedule. Eligible applicants will have their Public Summary and Address Data List published and subject to a 30 day Competitive Application period.

Initial Full Applications will be evaluated against the merit review criteria in Section II.E.ii by a scoring panel comprised of State agency officials to determine whether an application can successfully meet the objectives of the program.

### **Competitive Application**

Competitive Applications may be submitted after the publication of the initial Applications for a period of 30 days. An applicant can submit a Competitive Application in response to a published initial application indicating the competitive applicant could provide eligible broadband service to the same project area as the initial application. The competitive applicant must refer to the original application control number in their email submission to [NLC@ocra.in.gov](mailto:NLC@ocra.in.gov). To be considered for funding, the Competitive Applicant's grant request must be lower than the initial application. All Competitive Applications will need to conform to the requirements at the time of submission as indicated in Section II.C. Competitive Applications will be evaluated against the merit review criteria in Section II.E.ii by a scoring panel comprised of State agency officials to determine whether an application can successfully meet the objectives of the program.

### **Response to Competitive Applications by Original Initial Applicant**

The initial applicant will have 5 days to modify their grant request in response to the Competitive Applicant application. Only the original initial applicant may modify their grant request in response to the Competitive Application. The only modification the original applicant may submit is a new grant request amount and speed level package, if different in the competitive application, in response to the Competitive Applicant grant request amount. No new comment period will be allowed after response from original initial applicant.

OCRA will utilize the outcome of the challenge process, and any new competitive applications accepted along with the merit review assessments to determine which applications will be recommended for selection of a grant award.

## **III. Award Administration Information**

### **A. Award Notification**

#### **i. Ineligible Submission**

Ineligible submissions will not be further reviewed or considered for an award. OCRA will send a notification letter by email to the technical and administrative contact designated by the applicant. The notification letter will state the basis upon which the Letter of Intent or Full Application is ineligible and not considered for further review. The applicant may elect to participate in a feedback meeting with OCRA staff to discuss the contents of the letter.

#### **ii. Letters of Intent Notification**

OCRA will notify applicants of its determination via a notification letter by email to the technical and administrative points of contact designated by the applicant. The notification letter will inform the applicant whether or not it is eligible to submit a Full Application.

#### **iii. Successful Applicants**

OCRA will notify applicants of its determination via a notification letter by email to the technical and administrative points of contact designated by the applicant. The

notification letter will inform the applicant that its Full Application is selected to receive a grant award. Receipt of a notification letter selecting a Full Application for award negotiations does not authorize the applicant to commence performance of the project. If an application is selected for an award, it is not a commitment by OCRA to issue an award. Applicants do not receive an award until the grant agreement is fully executed.

#### **iv. Potential Selection Determinations**

An applicant may receive a notification that its application was not selected for award at this time and OCRA designated the application to be an alternate. As an alternate, OCRA may consider the Full Application for funding in the future based on clarifications as needed. A notification letter stating the Full Application is designated as a potential selection does not authorize the applicant to commence performance of the project. OCRA may ultimately determine to select or not select the Full Application for a grant award.

#### **v. Unsuccessful Applicants**

OCRA shall promptly notify in writing each applicant whose application has not been selected to be published in the Challenge process, or to receive a grant award. The notification letter will state the basis upon which the Full Application was not considered for further review or an award. The applicant may elect to participate in a feedback meeting with OCRA staff to discuss the contents of the letter.

### **B. Administrative Requirements**

#### **i. Indiana Bidder Requirement**

In order to participate in many State of Indiana procurement processes, businesses are required to have a Bidder Profile with the Indiana Department of Administration. The Bidder Profile creates a unique ID for businesses that is used for supplier diversity certifications and contract monitoring. For further information, please visit:

<https://www.in.gov/idoa/2464.htm>

#### **ii. Reporting Requirements**

Written progress reports will be submitted to the State on a quarterly basis and shall contain details of the progress or performance on the project as is requested by the State.

Quarterly reports may include, but are not limited to, the following details:

- Budget, scope and schedule status of any funded broadband projects;
- Direct and Indirect Passings completed and type of end user;
- Adoption rates;
- Speed levels offered;
- Number of locations, including address-level information for newly connected locations;
- Expenses incurred; and
- Overall progress of the deployment of broadband infrastructure

Annual performance reports on the projects may be required up to three years following the close of the grant.

### **iii. Invoicing**

Funds will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis and such disbursements will be proportional to the grant-to-total eligible projects costs ratio. Invoices can be submitted once every 30 days and will be reimbursed per state guidelines. Final payment of 10% of the grant amount will be subject to a grant close-out process.

***Any questions? If you have further questions after reviewing the application and supporting documentation, please submit an email to [NLC@ocra.in.gov](mailto:NLC@ocra.in.gov). Questions must be submitted no later than three business days prior to the application due date and time.***

***All questions and answers will be posted in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document available on the website. OCRA will attempt to respond to a question within three business days, unless a similar question and answer has already been included in the FAQ.***

## Appendix A – Application Checklist

- Read the entire application package
- Public application is complete and file name meets the standard
- Non-Public application is complete and file name meets the standard
- Attachments are organized and file names meet the outlined standard
  - Attachment 1: Project Narrative
  - Attachment 2: Project Schedule
  - Attachment 3: Technology Specifications
  - Attachment 4: Proposed Area Maps
  - Attachment 5: Address Data List
  - Attachment 6: GIS Shapefile or Google Earth KMZ
  - Attachment 7: Budget Table
  - Attachment 8: Summary for Public Release
  - Attachment 9: Authorizing Affidavit
  - Attachment 10: Funding Commitments
  - Attachment 11: Letter(s) of Community Need and Support
  - Attachment 12: Five Year Stand-alone Financial Plan
  - Attachment 13: Current Financial Statement
  - Attachment 14: Survey Data (Optional)

***Information that contains trade secrets should be marked “Confidential” and saved in a separate file. Pursuant to IC 5-14-3-4(a)(4) these records may not be disclosed by a public agency.***

NOTE: Attachments must be submitted following the designated naming structure. Applicants are to use the name of their organization followed by the attachment number and file type as outlined in Section II. C. (e.g. Control Number\_ABCTelecom\_Project Narrative.pdf)

## Appendix B – Applicant Affidavit

*I, \_\_\_\_\_, certify that I am duly authorized by the governing body of the lead applicant to submit this application and included materials; that the applicant has the capacity to carry out the proposed project; that the proposed project is designed to meet the identified needs of the project area; that all the information submitted as part of this application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge; and that I am an authorized agent of the applicant.*

*Signature*

*Print Name:*

*Title:*

*Email:*