



Broadband Pole Replacement Program

GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

(including Application and Reimbursement Instructions)

Funded by the American Rescue Plan Act

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ABOUT THE N.C. DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The mission of the N.C. Department of Information Technology (NCDIT or department) is to promote a stronger North Carolina that connects customers, citizens, business, education, and government. NCDIT provides technology services to state agencies and is charged with closing the digital divide by expanding availability of broadband services and promoting the adoption of affordable, high-speed internet through its Division of Broadband and Digital Opportunity.

The Broadband Infrastructure Office (office), housed within the Division of Broadband and Digital Opportunity, is responsible for administering the broadband infrastructure programs funded by the American Rescue Plan Act.

BACKGROUND

NCDIT's Broadband Pole Replacement Program (also referred to as the Make Ready Accelerator Program) was established by S.L. 2021-180 and launched in November 2023. The program sought applications for reimbursement for a portion of eligible pole replacement costs incurred by communications service providers in unserved areas of the state for the purposes of broadband expansion.

As broadband providers deploy infrastructure in remote areas, utility poles are critical resources. Fiber and other communications assets can be attached to utility poles within particular spaces and heights on the pole. Communications service providers deploying broadband may seek space for aerial deployments on poles owned by other entities. Some utility poles lack space for additional attachments or are unable to carry the additional loading resulting from newly added facilities. In such cases, a project may require existing utility poles to be replaced with new poles to increase the capacity to accommodate additional infrastructure attachments. The attaching communications service providers must pay the pole owners to implement these needed utility pole replacements. "Make-Ready Work" is that work needed to prepare the pole for attachments from a communications service provider. See [Appendix A – Explanation of Make-Ready Work and Pole Replacement](#) for additional information.

This program has been one of four broadband infrastructure programs funded with American Rescue Plan Act dollars appropriated by the N.C. General Assembly. Funding for these broadband programs comes from State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) plus \$273 million from the Capital Projects Fund (CPF), both from U.S. Department of the Treasury and administered by the office as follows:

- GREAT grant program (\$350 million, SLFRF)
- Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) program (\$400 million, SLFRF and CPF)
- Stop-Gap Solutions Program (\$86 million, SLFRF)
- Pole Replacement Program (\$100 million, SLFRF Revenue Replacement)

The primary function of the GREAT grant, CAB and Stop-Gap Solutions programs is to provide funding for broadband deployment to unserved or underserved households and businesses across the state. Since late 2023, minimal reimbursements have been requested through the Broadband Pole Replacement Program. Program legislation required a qualified project in the program to be a project undertaken by a communications service provider seeking to provide qualifying internet access service in an unserved area. Because it has been running simultaneously with other infrastructure programs, many of the unserved areas across the state

have been a part of other grant programs resulting in less demand for this program. In addition, due to timelines sometimes required for access to poles and other benefits to “burying” fiber and communications assets, some broadband infrastructure projects began placing more facilities underground in certain cases.

In August 2025, legislation became law (S.L. 2025-89) that changed the program in the following ways:

- Reimbursements may be requested for pole replacements, as previously outlined, but may also now be sought for placing facilities underground.
- Poles eligible through the program were expanded with the addition of utility poles and the allowance of cooperatively organized entities that are affiliated with a pole owner.
- The definition of a qualified project now includes underserved areas, instead of solely unserved areas.
- The definition of unserved areas now includes areas that have become unserved due to natural disaster.

In addition, up to \$50 million of the program fund may now be utilized for Hurricane Helene recovery for broadband, meaning the pole replacement fund may be limited to \$50 million depending on demand for each program.

This full guidance as well as the legislation itself should be reviewed for full explanation of these key changes.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

NCDIT's Broadband Infrastructure Office seeks applications for reimbursement for a portion of eligible pole replacement costs or undergrounding incurred by communications service providers in unserved and underserved areas for the purposes of broadband expansion. As authorized by statute, the purpose of the program is to speed and facilitate the deployment of broadband service to individuals, businesses, agricultural operations, and community access points in areas unserved and underserved with broadband. A communications service provider that pays for or incurs the costs of removing and replacing an existing utility pole in connection with a qualified project may apply to the department for reimbursement in an amount equal to 50% of eligible pole replacement costs paid or incurred by the applicant or \$10,000, whichever is less, for each pole replaced. Additionally, a communications service provider who pays or incurs the costs of placing facilities underground to better protect the critical infrastructure from natural disasters, in connection with a qualified project, may apply to the department for reimbursement in an amount equal to fifty percent (50%) of such costs. Communications service providers may submit eligible costs incurred after June 1, 2021.

These program guidelines are for use by communications service providers when applying for reimbursement through this program. [Pages 6-7](#) contain key definitions relevant to the administration of the program. The office has developed these guidelines based on the authorizing session laws for the Broadband Pole Replacement program and applicable federal guidance. The guidelines may change in accordance with any changes to state or federal laws, rules, or regulations. Participants in the program will be notified of any changes via email and posting on the division's website at ncbroadband.gov.

Disclaimer

The information contained in this document is not legal or professional advice. While the office is available to answer questions and will attempt to help resolve any concerns, we cannot provide legal advice to applicants.

Funding Source & Funding Availability

N.C. Session Law 2021-180 and the corresponding appropriations committee report, as amended by S.L. 2022-6, S.L. 2024-55 and S.L. 2025-89, appropriated \$100 million from the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 for the Broadband Pole Replacement program. This appropriation has been designated by the N.C. Office of State Budget and Management in the revenue loss eligible use category. The NCDIT Division of Broadband and Digital Opportunity's Broadband Infrastructure Office will administer these funds in accordance with the requirements of state law, the SLFRF Treasury Guidance relevant to revenue loss funds, and applicable provisions of the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200) for contractors.

Section 4.3 (f) of N.C. Session Law 2025-89 states that NCDIT may use up to fifty million dollars (\$50,000,000) of the funds available from the Broadband Make Ready Accelerator appropriation (also known as the Broadband Pole Replacement program appropriation) in S.L. 2021-180 for emergency broadband funding associated with Hurricane Helene. Therefore, the Broadband Pole Replacement program may be limited to \$50 million depending on demand for each program.

State and federal Terms and Conditions for use of this funding will be outlined in the Broadband Expansion and Access Statewide IT Convenience Contract (see Section 4 of this guidance). The department may use up to 1% of the funds appropriated for the program, not to exceed the total sum of \$250,000 in each fiscal year, to administer the program.

Section 38.10(c) of S.L. 2021-180 states that funds appropriated for this program shall be held by the department in a special fund and shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain available to reimburse communications service providers as authorized until Dec. 30, 2026, if reimbursements shall comply with applicable federal guidelines for the use of these recovery funds.

Eligible Applicants/Recipients

Eligible applicants are "Communications Service Providers" as defined in N.C.G.S. § 62-350(e). That statute defines "Communications Service Provider" as "a person or entity that provides or intends to provide: (i) telephone service as a public utility in Chapter 62 of the General Statutes or as a telephone membership corporation organized in Chapter 117 of the General Statutes; (ii) broadband service, but excluding broadband service over energized electrical conductors owned by a municipality or membership corporation; or (iii) cable service over a cable system as those terms are defined in Article 42 of Chapter 66 of the General Statutes."

Program funding is available to communications service providers that have incurred eligible pole replacement costs in connection with qualified projects to provide qualifying internet access service in unserved areas of the state. For purposes of this guidance, communications service providers also may be referred to as broadband providers, providers, applicants, or respondents.

Eligible providers also must be prequalified through the Broadband Expansion and Access Convenience Contract. See the next section of this guidance.

Required Qualification under Statewide IT Convenience Contract

Participation by communications service providers in the Broadband Pole Replacement program requires a two-phase application process. NCDIT released a request for proposals (RFP) for Broadband Expansion and Access to qualify broadband providers for participation in infrastructure programs such as the Completing Access to Broadband program, the Broadband Pole Replacement program, and additional infrastructure programs.

The outcome of the Broadband Expansion and Access RFP was the creation of a statewide IT Convenience Contract to identify broadband service providers that have the financial, operational, and technical capacity to deploy broadband infrastructure for the provision of internet service in unserved and underserved areas of the state. This RFP did not result in a direct project award but acts as a review of qualifications of broadband providers. Respondents were evaluated on a pass/fail basis to determine eligibility to participate in subsequent scopes of work for broadband deployment services needed by the state. Use of this Convenience Contract allowed broadband providers to be vetted at one time for these upcoming projects, thereby avoiding the duplication of efforts through multiple programs and projects.

Applicants for the Broadband Pole Replacement program must have participated and qualified through this Convenience Contract to be eligible for participation in the program. Qualifying applicants entered into a Convenience Contract with the N.C. Department of Information Technology that includes relevant state and federal terms and conditions.

All terms and conditions from the Broadband Expansion and Access Request for Proposal (RFP # 41- 500280) and the Convenience Contract resulting therefrom are incorporated herein. All information submitted to NCDIT pursuant to that RFP and in this application will be relied upon in consideration of this application.

Definitions

The following definitions apply to the Broadband Pole Replacement program, pursuant to S.L. 2021-180, Section 38.10(j):

- **Broadband service:** As defined in N.C.G.S. § 143B-1373(a). For the purposes of this section, terrestrially deployed Internet access service with transmission speeds of at least 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download and at least 3 megabits per second upload (25:3).
- **Communications service provider:** Defined in N.C.G.S. § 62-350(e) as “a person or entity that provides or intends to provide: (i) telephone service as a public utility in Chapter 62 of the General Statutes or as a telephone membership corporation organized in Chapter 117 of the General Statutes; (ii) broadband service, but excluding broadband service over energized electrical conductors owned by a municipality or membership corporation; or (iii) cable service over a cable system as those terms are defined in Article 42 of Chapter 66 of the General Statutes.”
- **Department:** The N.C. Department of Information Technology.

- **Eligible Pole Replacement Cost:** The actual and reasonable costs paid or incurred by a communications service provider after June 1, 2021, to (i) remove and replace a pole, including the amount of any expenditures to remove and dispose of the existing pole, purchase and install a replacement pole, and transfer any existing facilities to the new pole or (ii) place facilities, including lines, conduit, and related equipment, underground to better protect the critical infrastructure from natural disaster. The term includes costs paid or incurred by the party responsible for the costs of a pole replacement to reimburse the party that performs the pole replacement. The term does not include costs that the party incurs initially that have been reimbursed to the party by another party ultimately responsible for the costs.
- **Pole:** Any pole used, wholly or partly, for any wire communications or electric distribution, irrespective of who owns or operates the pole, including poles owned by a utility.
- **Pole owner:** A city or cooperatively organized entity that owns utility poles.
- **Qualified Project:** A project undertaken by a communications service provider seeking to provide or, due to natural disaster or other force majeure event, restore, temporarily or permanently, qualifying internet access service on a retail basis to one or more households, businesses, agricultural operations, or community access points in an unserved or underserved area. The project may be affiliated with a cooperatively organized entity that owns utility poles but shall not be affiliated with a city that owns utility poles. A pole owner whole affiliate seeks reimbursement for a qualified project shall not pass through the costs for which reimbursement is sought to unaffiliated communications service providers and shall schedule and perform all work in a nondiscriminatory fashion.
- **Qualifying Internet Access Service:** Fixed, terrestrial internet access service that is capable of speeds of 100 megabits per second or faster in both the downstream and upstream directions, pursuant to ARPA Guidelines from the U.S. Department of the Treasury.
- **Unserved Area:** An area in which, according to the most recent map of fixed broadband internet access service made available by the Federal Communications Commission, fixed, terrestrial broadband service at speeds of at least 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download and at least 3 Mbps upload is unavailable at the time the communications service provider requests access. An unserved area also includes an area that was previously served but has become unserved due to damage or destruction by a natural disaster. A pole or underground installation shall be presumed to be located in an unserved area if the pole is located in an area that is the subject of a federal or state grant to deploy broadband service, the conditions of which limit the availability of a grant to unserved areas or, in the case of a damaged or destroyed facility, was in such an area when the facility was originally constructed
- **Utility:** As defined by 47 U.S.C. § 224.

COORDINATION WITH POLE OWNERS

Section 38.10(g) and (h) of Session Law 2021-180, as amended by S.L. 2022-6, S.L. 2024-55 and S.L. 2025-89, outline the coordination required between a pole owner and communications service provider as providers seek access to poles.

A pole owner shall promptly review a request for access, perform surveys, provide estimates and final invoices, and complete, or require the completion by other attaching entities of, any make-ready work necessary for purposes of offering broadband service in an unserved area. A pole owner shall provide a good faith estimate for any make-ready costs to the communications service providers within 60 days after receipt of a complete application for access. If requested by the communications service provider, the pole owner shall provide accompanying documentation indicating the basis of all estimated fees or other charges, including, but not limited to, administrative costs, that form the basis of its estimate. A good-faith estimate shall remain valid for 14 days. To accept a good-faith estimate, a communications service provider must provide the pole owner with written acceptance and payment of the good-faith estimate.

Make-ready work shall be conditioned upon payment of the good faith estimate and shall be completed within a reasonable time frame mutually agreed to by the communications service provider and the pole owner. A pole owner may treat multiple requests from a single communications service provider as one application for access when the requests are filed within 90 days of one another. A pole owner may deviate from the time limits specified during performance of make-ready work for good and sufficient cause that renders it infeasible to complete make-ready work within the time limits specified. Any deviation from the time limits shall extend for a period no longer than necessary. A communications service provider shall promptly be notified, in writing, of the reason for a deviation and the new completion date estimate. A communications service provider shall provide notice, in writing, to the pole owner no later than 14 days after attaching equipment to the pole in an unserved area. The requirements outlined above shall not apply to poles owned by a utility.

A party subject to a dispute arising in G.S. 38.10(g) may invoke the dispute procedures authorized in G.S. 62-350 in the same manner as a party seeking resolution of a dispute in G.S.62-350(c), and the Utilities Commission shall issue a final order resolving the dispute within 120 days of the date the proceedings were initiated; provided, however, the Commission may extend the time for issuance of a final order for good cause and with the agreement of all parties. In such a dispute, the Commission shall apply the provisions outlined above, notwithstanding any contrary provisions of any existing agreement. The requirements outlined above shall not apply to poles owned by a utility.

The office does not have an active role in the coordination between these parties, except for working with pole owners and communications service providers to confirm eligible pole replacement costs for the purposes of this program, reviewing documentation of eligible costs, confirming completion of work, and reviewing the submission of other relevant documentation for the Broadband Pole Replacement program.

All payments made through the program are reimbursements based on the submission, review, and approval of the required documentation as outlined further in this guidance document. While the session law contemplates possible advance payments before completion of work because this is a reimbursement program, the office is requiring that all submitted funding requests include documentation sufficient to establish that the pole replacements or

undergrounding have been completed.

ELIGIBLE BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT AREAS

Planning Your Project Areas

Applicants to this program must be seeking reimbursement for costs of removing and replacing an existing pole or placing facilities underground in connection with a qualified project as defined above, and one that is an eligible broadband infrastructure project per the U.S. Department of the Treasury ARPA SLFRF rules.

Eligible broadband project areas may include:

- An area that is the subject of a federal or state grant to deploy broadband service, the conditions of which limit the availability of a grant to unserved or underserved areas;
- An area that is the subject of a county-funded grant to deploy broadband service, the conditions of which limit the availability of a grant to unserved or underserved areas; or
- An area where a broadband provider is deploying, or has deployed since June 1, 2021, a broadband project to build service specifically to unserved or underserved locations using private funds.

Reimbursement of pole replacements or undergrounding costs that are part of projects undertaken to restore, temporarily or permanently, qualifying internet access service damaged due to natural disaster or other force majeure event, may also be considered in this program. Broadband providers would need to be able to demonstrate service lost and restored in this criteria.

Applications must have approval from the office that the broadband project areas are eligible areas before the office will process reimbursements for individual pole replacements or undergrounding costs within that project area.

Publication of Online Mapping Tool

The Broadband Infrastructure Office and its partner, the NCDIT Center for Geographic Information and Analysis, have published an Online Mapping Tool in the North Carolina Broadband section of the NC One Map at nconemap.gov/pages/broadband for use in the Broadband Pole Replacement program.

The [Pole Replacement Program Eligible Areas Online Mapping Tool](#) utilizes data from the Broadband Data Collection (BDC) system of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to identify locations unserved and underserved with broadband as defined in legislation for the program. While the BDC system provides foundational data, the office will evaluate technology types or other factors that may limit the ability to serve a location with broadband and will factor this assessment into the mapped data, consistent with U.S. Treasury guidance. The office will display eligible areas – unserved, underserved, and eligible projects as defined above – as aggregated hexagonal cells, or hexbins.

The purpose of this mapping tool is to allow applicants to view the eligible locations, filter the data by areas of interest, select relevant hexbins, and export the hexbin IDs to include in their applications. Applicants are also able to import their own pole location data to assist in hexbin selection. Applicants must utilize the published [Online Mapping Tool](#) to identify eligible broadband project areas for developing and submitting data on broadband project areas for

approval. Because applicants may submit reimbursement requests for eligible expenses dating back to June 1, 2021, some eligible locations may now show on the current BDC layer of the Online Mapping Tool as served. In such cases, the office may coordinate with applicants to examine earlier iterations of FCC broadband availability data to determine eligibility.

The Online Mapping Tool may be refreshed periodically based on changes in FCC data and other challenge processes, and the date of most recent edits will be shared in the Mapping Tool.

Areas with Federal or State-Funded Broadband Deployment Projects

The Broadband Pole Replacement Program Eligible Areas Online Mapping Tool will reflect areas where a broadband provider has been designated to receive funds through other federal or state-funded programs designed specifically for broadband deployment to unserved and underserved areas [such as the state's Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) grant and Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) programs or the Rural Digital Opportunities Fund (RDOF) program. The Tool will display federally funded areas as published in the FCC Broadband Funding Map. All federal or state-funded projects will be displayed as hexagonal cells, or hexbins, on the online mapping tool.

While these deployment project areas are often "protected" from additional broadband investments under rules of many infrastructure programs, they are allowable project areas for the program in certain instances. Pursuant to Session Law 2021-180, Section 38.10(j)(9), the office will consider an area that is the subject of a federal or state award to deploy broadband service, the conditions of which limit the availability of a grant to unserved or underserved areas, a qualified project area for purposes of the program. However, the following requirements must also be met:

- The rules or terms of the state or federal program funding broadband deployment in that area must not disallow these complementary pole replacement or undergrounding costs to be funded through the program; and
- The eligible reimbursement costs submitted for reimbursement under the program must not be reimbursed or otherwise included in the underlying broadband deployment grant award costs or matching funds for that program.

Providers are responsible for compliance with underlying funding programs, including but not limited to ensuring that the rules of the program do not prohibit reimbursement for pole replacement or undergrounding costs. Should the office become aware that a provider is not in compliance with the underlying program, the office may decline reimbursements for pole replacement or undergrounding costs in those areas, seek claw back of reimbursement costs previously paid, and/or pursue any other remedy available by law.

Areas with County-Funded or Privately Funded Broadband Deployment Projects

The online mapping tool will display aggregations of unserved and underserved locations from the latest FCC Broadband Data Collection within an area, represented with the H3 hexagonal (H3 cells) hierarchical geospatial indexing system (<https://h3geo.org/>). For county-level or privately funded broadband deployment projects, project areas should be mapped and submitted to the office at the location level, by the applicant. An applicant should confirm all locations to be served by the eligible broadband project, by sharing the location ID field from the fabric. Location IDs must be submitted to the office as part of the application. Applicants will need to obtain a no-cost, CostQuest Tier D license agreement to use the BSL fabric for this purpose. As applicants submit eligible broadband project areas to the office as an initial step in the application process, the office will review these areas with other mapped data to confirm eligibility for the program.

As with state and federally funded programs, providers are responsible for ensuring compliance with the terms of any county-funded deployment project, including ensuring that the terms do not prohibit reimbursement for pole replacement or undergrounding costs and that pole replacement or undergrounding costs are not otherwise included in the county award.

Locations of Individual Utility Poles

Reimbursement requests for this program will require applicants to certify that replaced utility poles for which reimbursement costs are being requested, or infrastructure placed underground, are located within or directly adjacent to the eligible broadband project area(s). Information that allows the office to identify specific locations of individual poles being replaced or facilities being buried, relevant H3 hexagons, or a list of the hexbin IDs, may also be required to describe specific portions of the qualifying project area where the pole replacement or undergrounding is needed.

APPLICATIONS FOR REIMBURSEMENT

Communications service providers approved in the Broadband Expansion and Access Convenience Contract that have incurred eligible pole replacement or undergrounding costs in connection with qualified projects to provide qualifying internet access service in unserved or underserved areas of the state may submit applications for Reimbursement to the office for this program. As part of the application form, applicants must certify that the work has been completed and is part of a qualified broadband project.

A communications service provider that pays or incurs the costs of removing and replacing an existing pole in connection with a qualified project may apply to the office for reimbursement in an amount equal to 50% of eligible pole replacement costs paid or incurred by the applicant or \$10,000, whichever is less, for each pole replaced.

Additionally, a communications service provider who pays or incurs the costs of placing facilities underground to better protect the critical infrastructure from natural disasters, in connection with a qualified project, may apply to the department for reimbursement in an amount equal to fifty percent (50%) of such costs. Communications service providers may submit eligible costs incurred after June 1, 2021.

Pursuant to S.L. 2021-180, Section 38.10(d), each applicant for reimbursement in the program shall provide the following as part of the application for reimbursement:

- Information sufficient to establish the number, cost and eligibility of pole replacements and the identity of the communications service provider attaching the broadband facilities.
- Documentation sufficient to establish that the pole replacements have been completed. *(While the session law contemplates possible advance payments before completion of work, the office is requiring completion of work prior to submission of funding requests. The office will re-evaluate the need for advance payments closer to the deadline for the expiration of the program or applicable federal deadlines, and it may revise this guidance accordingly.)*
- The amount of reimbursement requested and documentation or information justifying the amount requested.
- A verified statement from an officer or agent of the applicant declaring that the contents of the application are true and accurate.

- Any other information the office deems necessary for final review of the application and award of reimbursement.

Documentation to establish that the broadband project area is an eligible project area in this program must also be provided.

Application and Reimbursement Materials

Prequalified vendors wanting to be reimbursed for this program must submit materials in the three phases outlined below:

- **one-time application materials** primarily to provide general company information;
- information on **project areas** for which they deem to be eligible areas in this program; and
- reimbursement requests outlining **specific poles or undergrounding work** located in these eligible project areas.

One-Time Application Materials:

- [Broadband Pole Replacement Program Application Form \(version2\)](#)
- [Byrd Anti-Lobbying Certification](#)
- [Substitute W-9](#)
- [Vendor Electronic Payment Form](#)

The Broadband Pole Replacement program application form is for the prequalified vendor that will be participating in the Broadband Pole Replacement program to provide one-time information and certifications about the company prior to submitting requests for reimbursement.

Prequalified vendors applying to the program:

- Must be registered as a business with the N.C. Department of the Secretary of State (as required by the Convenience Contract)
sosnc.gov/divisions/business_registration
- Must have a Unique Entity ID with the federal government.
The Unique Entity ID is a 12-character alphanumeric ID used across the federal government and assigned to an entity by SAM.gov.
sam.gov/content/home
- Cannot appear on the Suspension of Funding list of the N.C. Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) or be debarred from receiving federal or state funds.
osbm.nc.gov/stewardship-services/grants-management/suspension-funding-list

The **Byrd Anti-Lobbying Certification** is a one-time submission from the prequalified vendor.

The **Substitute W-9** and **Vendor Electronic Payment Form** allow the vendor to be set up to receive payments from the state. These two forms must be submitted unless the entity is already set up for payment as a vendor within the NCDIT system.

The legal entity name connected to the above registrations and documents should be the legal entity approved in the Statewide IT Convenience Contract for this program.

Project Areas and Reimbursement Form

The [Broadband Pole Replacement Program Reimbursement Template](#) is an Excel sheet with individual worksheets for Project Area Data, Pole Data and Undergrounding Data. Worksheet data will be evaluated to determine whether submitted project areas are eligible for the program. If a program area is determined to be eligible, corresponding worksheets for Pole Data or Undergrounding Data will be reviewed for eligibility for reimbursement.

The reimbursement template captures data on the broadband project areas, the specific poles or undergrounding for which reimbursement is being requested, total costs and amount requested. Requests may only include eligible poles or undergrounding for which the work is already completed. For pole replacements, costs may be submitted prior to removal of the original pole.

Eligible Pole Replacement Costs include the following as defined in legislation: The actual and reasonable costs paid or incurred by a communications service provider after June 1, 2021, to remove and replace a pole, including the amount of any expenditures to remove and dispose of the existing pole, purchase and install a replacement pole, and transfer any existing facilities to the new pole. The term includes costs paid or incurred by the party responsible for the costs of a pole replacement to reimburse the party that performs the pole replacement. The term does not include costs that the party incurs initially that have been reimbursed to the party by another party ultimately responsible for the costs.

For undergrounding, a communications service provider who pays or incurs the costs of placing facilities underground to better protect the critical infrastructure from natural disasters, in connection with a qualified project, may apply to the department for reimbursement in an amount equal to fifty percent (50%) of such costs. Communications service providers may submit eligible costs incurred after June 1, 2021. For undergrounding projects, applicants must also submit a shapefile or kmz file identifying the location of the undergrounded facilities to accompany the reimbursement template.

In addition to the reimbursement template, requests must include back-up documentation for all costs. Back-up documentation may include items such as invoices, agreements or other documentation with pole owners or contractors that reflect the work completed. Back-up documentation must reflect costs incurred and evidence showing costs have been paid by the communications service provider. Documentation should indicate that the pole replacements have been completed for all poles included in the reimbursement request, plus dates of work completed. Applicants agree to submit additional back-up documentation if requested by NCDIT. Payments are subject to the availability of funds. The Pole Reimbursement Template requests broad information on the broadband project for which the poles are being replaced (such as tech type, max speeds and number of estimated locations where broadband access is being made available). The office may periodically request updates on these broadband projects and final progress in completing these deployments.

Application materials and reimbursement requests are considered public information with certain exceptions defined within Chapter 132 of the N.C. General Statutes. It is the applicant's responsibility to identify documents or information that are not subject to public record laws.

Applicants utilizing earlier versions of the reimbursement template must provide any additional fields or required information as a separate attachment.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION MATERIALS

Broadband Infrastructure Office's (BIO) Data Exchange Instructions

Applicants requesting reimbursement should submit all application and reimbursement materials through NCDIT's BIO Data Exchange cloud storage folders for the secure upload of files to private folders that are only accessible to the broadband provider to which they are assigned. For context, the BIO Data Exchange has also been used to collect information from broadband providers for mapping data related to the other recent broadband infrastructure programs, for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program and the Broadband Recovery Program. These folders should be used by broadband providers for the following data exchange purposes:

- Upload the One-Time Application Materials
- Upload the BPRP Reimbursement Template
- Upload any additional supporting documentation

Authorized Representative and Upload of Information

The project contacts table in the application form requests designation and contact information for the person that will have the responsibility and authority to submit requests for reimbursement and supporting materials within the NCBIO Data Exchange. Upon the identification of this authorized representative, secure login credentials and instructions should be requested for this contact by sending an email to polereplacement@nc.gov including name, email and phone number of the designated individual requesting credentials. Upon the identification of the appropriate authorized representative at each participating broadband provider, secure login credentials and instructions will be individually provided. These credentials can then be used to upload the necessary files from an internet browser. Files should be uploaded using the NCBIO Broadband Data Exchange web application at assets.gis.nc.gov/apps/ncbio-data-exchange/index.html. Credentials should be requested at least three days prior to the submission deadline to ensure time for assignment of credentials and submission of materials.

Deadline for Submission

Prequalified vendors who wish to apply for reimbursement through this program must submit completed application and reimbursement materials **by 11:59p.m. on Jan. 26, 2026**, for the current round of funding. Incomplete applications and applications received after the deadline may be ineligible for consideration in the program unless funding remains available for an additional application round. Applications should be submitted through the Broadband Infrastructure Office's Data Exchange as outlined above. Please submit questions regarding the application process via email to polereplacement@nc.gov.

REVIEW & EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS FOR REIMBURSEMENT

Once an application form and the required attachments are received, the materials will be reviewed by the office. The office will work with the authorized representative identified within the application form on questions or clarifications on the application materials. The authorized

representative will be notified when the one-time application materials are considered to be complete and approved. Project areas will then be reviewed for eligibility. For prequalified vendors with complete and sufficient one-time application materials, and eligible project areas, the reimbursement materials will be reviewed to confirm appropriate back-up documentation and expenses. If the application establishes that the applicant has paid or incurred costs eligible for reimbursement through the program and there are sufficient funds in the program special fund, the office will reimburse the applicant as authorized.

If funding remains available after the January 2026 application deadline, the office will publicize a deadline to accept additional application and reimbursement requests. If funding is insufficient to reimburse all eligible reimbursement requests within one funding round, the office will prioritize pole replacement requests over undergrounding requests, in recognition of the original intent of the program. If funding is insufficient to reimburse all prequalified vendors for eligible costs in a single funding round, reimbursement requests will be fulfilled in a pro-rata fashion to ensure that all applicants with complete applications and eligible costs receive at least a portion of the broadband pole replacement funds.

Appendix A. Explanation of Make-Ready Work and Pole Replacement

Utility poles are crucial resources as broadband providers deploy infrastructure in remote areas – fiber and other communications assets can be attached to utility poles within particular spaces and heights on the pole. Communications service providers deploying broadband may seek space for aerial deployments on poles owned by other entities. “Make-ready Work” is the work needed to prepare the utility pole for attachments from a new communications service provider.

When these utility poles lack space for additional attachments or are unable to carry the additional loading resulting from added facilities, the project may require existing utility poles to be replaced with taller or larger poles to add space to accommodate the additional infrastructure attachments. This work is referred to as “pole replacement.” The attaching communications service providers must then pay the Pole Owners to implement these needed utility pole replacements.

In reviewing the process at a high level, a communications service provider will make plans to provide new service in an area. During the planning process, the service provider will identify routes and document those poles that need to be replaced to accommodate new broadband supporting cable. Below is a general description of typical make-ready and pole replacement steps necessary for coordination:

As part of planning for necessary make-ready work, a broadband provider will contact and provide a pole owner a request for make-ready including pole replacements and request an estimated cost for such work. The pole owner may conduct its own review including a determination of whether there is room for new cabling and equipment, and if there are safety or other issues to be resolved before construction can advance. The pole owner will, following its review, deliver to the broadband provider an estimate of the costs of make-ready including the cost of any pole replacements. The parties then work to reach a mutually acceptable agreement for the make-ready work including the pole replacement project. Typically, make-ready costs must be pre-paid before work begins.

Once an agreement has been reached, line crews for the pole owner will change out poles, relocate transformers, move wires on the pole, add new anchors to the poles, and perform other work to prepare for placement of the new fiber. The broadband provider can then install fiber/cable on the pole.