

SUMMARY

The North Carolina Department of Information Technology's Broadband Infrastructure Office (BIO), as authorized under S.L. 2018-5, is providing grants to private providers of broadband services to facilitate the deployment of broadband service to unserved areas of the State. The Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) Program funds eligible projects in economically distressed Tier One counties. The enclosed application materials and program guidelines are for use when applying for the GREAT Program and have been developed based on the enabling legislation for the GREAT Program within S.L. 2018-5. Applicants will apply for funding through the Department of Information Technology's online grants management system.

The GREAT program is designed to expedite the terrestrial deployment of broadband within unserved areas of Tier One counties, with transmission speeds of at least 10 Mbps download, and at least one Mbps upload. Deployment of speeds of 25:3 Mbps or greater is encouraged.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Eligible Recipient – Eligible grant recipients are private providers of broadband services, including cooperatively organized entities, or any partnerships formed between cooperatively organized entities, private providers, or any combination thereof, on or after January 1, 2018.

Partnerships – Projects involving partnership or affiliation by a private provider with a nonprofit or not-for-profit, or a for-profit subsidiary of either; that is required to enable certain partnership activities, or any combination thereof, where the partnership or affiliation will facilitate deployment and reduce cost per housing unit by utilizing the resources, facilities, and infrastructure of the partner or where the nonprofit or not-for-profit partner provides only financial support.

Eligible Economically Distressed County – A county designated as a development Tier One area as defined in N.C.G.S. 143B-473.08.

Department of Commerce's 2018 Tier Designations can be found here:

<https://www.nccommerce.com/research-publications/incentive-reports/county-tier-designations>

Eligible Project - An eligible project is a discrete and specific project located in an unserved area of an economically distressed county (Tier One) seeking to provide broadband service to homes, businesses, and community anchor points not currently served. Eligible projects do not include middle mile, backhaul, and other similar projects not directed at broadband service to end users.

Broadband Service - For the purposes of the GREAT Program, terrestrially deployed Internet access service with transmission speeds of at least 10 Mbps download and at least One Mbps upload (10:1). Terrestrially deployed technologies are generally understood to include: wired infrastructure (such as fiber, coax, copper) and fixed wireless.

Unserved Area - A designated geographic area that is presently without access to broadband service, meaning terrestrially deployed Internet access service with transmission speeds of at least 10 Mbps download and at least 1 Mbps upload, offered by a wireline or fixed wireless provider. *See definition for ineligible areas.

Ineligible Areas

Areas where a private provider has been designated to receive funds through other State or federally funded programs designed specifically for broadband deployment shall be considered served if such funding is intended to result in construction of broadband in the area within 18 months.

Project areas comprised of census blocks, or portions thereof, within which a broadband provider is receiving State or federal matching funds to deploy technologically neutral scalable broadband service within the next 18 months are ineligible for the GREAT Program. Failure on the part of a provider to submit the listing of census blocks to the BIO by the required annual deadlines shall result in those areas being eligible for inclusion under this program during the relevant program year. The deadline for this program year was August 30, 2018.

See further information in *Section II- Identifying Eligible Areas*.

Awards

- One application should be submitted for each county in which deployment is being proposed. An application should encompass any/all proposed services within that county. A broadband provider should submit multiple applications if applying to deploy in multiple counties.
- A single grant award shall not exceed \$2,000,000.
- No more than one grant may be awarded per fiscal year for a project in any one economically distressed county.
- Matching funds are required (*see detail in Section III – Application Materials*).

The primary award requirements are detailed under *Section VI - Grant Awards / Award Agreements*. Awarded projects require a five-year service agreement.

Deployment Project Period – For awarded projects, the Deployment Project Period is the time from execution of the Grant Agreement to the time that service is available to the targeted households and businesses under the grant. The preferred timeline for this construction period is completion within one year from the execution of the award. However, exact timelines for deployment schedules are subject to negotiation during execution of the grant agreement.

5-Year Service Agreement –For awarded projects, all executed agreements are required to have a 5-Year Service Agreement. This term is understood to mean a five-year grant agreement. Following the deployment phase, service must continue to be made available to those households and businesses for the remainder of the five-year agreement period.