BROADBAND POLE REPLACEMENT PROGRAM

APPLICATION AND REIMBURSEMENT INSTRUCTIONS

Funded by the Federal American Rescue Plan Act

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to outline the application process and reimbursement process for prequalified Communications Service Providers ("applicants") who wish to apply for the Broadband Pole Replacement program ("program") administered by the Broadband Infrastructure Office ("office" or "BIO") with the Division of Broadband and Digital Equity within the N.C. Department of Information Technology ("NCDIT").

2. QUALIFICATION UNDER STATEWIDE 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 is the creation of a Statewide IT Convenience Contract (09 NCAC 06B .0701(c)) 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.

Applicants for the Broadband Pole Replacement program must be approved under the Convenience Contract with the NCDIT to participate in the program. The RFP and resulting Convenience Contract set out the state and federal terms and conditions for this program. Applications for reimbursement must be submitted to the Broadband Infrastructure Office through the processes outlined below.

3. SCOPE OF WORK

The North Carolina Department of Information Technology's Broadband Infrastructure Office is requesting applications from prequalified communications service providers to speed and facilitate the deployment of broadband service to individuals, businesses, agricultural operations, and community access points in areas unserved with broadband. NCDIT's Broadband Infrastructure Office seeks applications for reimbursement for a portion of eligible pole replacement costs incurred by communications service providers in unserved areas for the purposes of broadband expansion as funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF).

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. Communications service providers may submit eligible costs incurred after June 1, 2021.

This Scope of Work ("SOW") is part of North Carolina's Broadband Pole Replacement Program which is set out in North Carolina Session Law 2021-180 and amended in S.L. 2022-6. Additional requirements for this program are outlined in the Broadband Pole Replacement Program Guidance Document at https://www.ncbroadband.gov/polereplacement along with any updates or FAQs published on this page.

4. APPLICANT INFORMATION

Applicants must submit the program application and request for reimbursement materials through the NCBIO Data Exchange outlined in Section 7 of this instruction document. Companies must designate a specific individual with the responsibility and authority to upload these documents and provide contact information for this person. Secure login credentials and instructions for use of the NCBIO Data Exchange will be provided individually to this contact. These credentials can then be used to upload documents required for the program application and for subsequent 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). (https://www.sosnc.gov/divisions/business_registration)

- 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. (https://sam.gov/content/home)

- Provide an updated corporate organizational chart identifying the parent company and any subsidiaries or affiliates that will be performing work in North Carolina. The prequalified vendor should be the entity able to contract, receive and implement grant awards in North Carolina.

- Submit a Substitute W-9 Form and Vendor Electronic Payment Form as part of the application to receive payments from the state (unless this entity is already set up as a vendor within the NCDIT system).

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

Applicants must be registered as official companies with the N.C. Office of the Secretary of State and cannot appear on the Suspension of Funds list under the N.C. Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) or be debarred from receiving federal or state funds.

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.

All terms and conditions from the Broadband Expansion and Access Request for Proposal (RFP # 41-500280 and Requisition # WS687900762) 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.

EXHIBITS / ATTACHMENTS

Applicants must complete and submit the following documents as part of the Application Form. Templates can be found at www.ncbroadband.gov/polereplacement on the application page. Any exhibits or attachments to this application should be uploaded with the Application Form into the NCBIO Data Exchange.

- Updated Corporate Organizational Chart (no template provided)
- Documentation of Affordability Program
- Byrd Anti-Lobbying Form
- Substitute W-9

- Vendor Electronic Payment Form

5. ELIGIBLE BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT AREAS

Applicants to this program must be seeking reimbursement for costs of removing and replacing an existing pole in connection with a qualified project as defined in the Guidance.

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 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 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 locations using private funds.

The office will confirm that proposed project areas are qualified projects before processing requests for reimbursement for those projects. Project areas may be submitted prior to requests for reimbursement so that a project area may be approved as eligible before submitting pole locations within the area.

A. Pole Replacement Program Eligible Areas Mapping Tool

Applicants must utilize the Pole Replacement Program Eligible Areas Mapping Tool to help inform the approved relevant project areas within which pole reimbursement requests can be made. This map displays a grid of H3 Level 7 hexagons statewide, specifically those that:

- Are part of a federal or state funded broadband infrastructure project, and/or
- Contain one or more broadband serviceable locations (BSL's) that are unserved (no service reported via [as-of date] FCC BDC data at max speeds of at least 25mbps download/3mbps upload).

Broadband providers have the option to temporarily load their own file containing a list of pole location coordinates, to visualize which of these fall within approved eligible project areas. The eligible hexagons layer can also be downloaded for use within other mapping systems.

For state or federally funded project areas, providers can use information from the interactive hexagon layer of the map to describe the qualifying project in application materials, including fields such as project ID and project name in the data template provided by NCBIO. For privately funded projects, providers are asked to select, export, and upload hexagons/CSV of hexagon IDs from the eligibility layer that most closely depicts the entire project within which pole reimbursements are being requested.

Pole replacement costs from projects dating back to June 1, 2021, are potentially eligible for reimbursement if located in a project area hexagon associated with at least one location that was unserved on or after June 1, 2021.

6. REQUEST FOR REIMBURSEMENT

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.

Requests for reimbursement must be completed on the BPRP_PoleReimbursementTemplate_YYMMDD provided at https://www.ncbroadband.gov/polereplacement on the application page. This template captures data on the broadband project areas, the specific poles for which reimbursement is being requested, total costs and amount requested. Requests may only include eligible poles for which the pole placement is already completed. 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.

In addition to the Pole Reimbursement excel template, the request 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 as well as evidence showing pole replacement 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.

7. SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION AND REIMBURSEMENT MATERIALS

A. Timing of Submissions

Applications are being accepted on a rolling basis. 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 application is considered to be complete and approved. Applicants can then submit requests for reimbursement on a rolling basis.

B. Utilization of NCBIO Data Exchange

To support the exchange of information for the program, the office has established cloud storage folders for the secure upload of files to private folders only accessible to the broadband provider to which they are assigned.

These folders should be used by broadband providers for the following data exchange purposes:
- Submission of Application Form and accompanying Exhibits / Attachments
- Submission of requests for reimbursement, mapping information and back-up documentation

The Project Contact 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 mapping data within the NCBIO Data Exchange. Upon the identification of this Authorized Representative, secure login credentials and instructions will be provided individually to this contact. These credentials can then be used to upload the necessary files from an internet browser. Files should be uploaded using the NCBIO Data Exchange Web Application at https://assets.gis.nc.gov/apps/ncbio-data-exchange/index.html.