

A. Background

➤ Overview: NTIA Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program

The federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act commits over \$45 billion to broadband deployment via the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), including through creation of the \$1 billion Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program – established for the “construction, improvement or acquisition of middle mile infrastructure.” NTIA stipulates:

The purpose of the grant program is to expand and extend middle mile infrastructure to reduce the cost of connecting unserved and underserved areas to the internet backbone. Eligible applicants include States, political subdivisions of a State, tribal governments, technology companies, electric utilities, utility cooperatives, public utility districts, telecommunications companies, telecommunications cooperatives, nonprofit foundations, nonprofit corporations, nonprofit institutions, nonprofit associations, regional planning councils, Native entities, or economic development authorities.

➤ Middle-Mile Expansion Program

Since 2020, the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and its Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB) administer the Connect Illinois program, the state’s capital fund to expand broadband access across Illinois. Currently appropriated with \$400 million, the program provides grants to Internet service providers to foster the deployment of last-mile networks across unserved and underserved communities in Illinois. Connect Illinois was included in the historic 2019 Rebuild Illinois program.

The State of Illinois recognizes that many unserved and underserved communities lack availability of high-speed middle-mile networks. To support the Connect Illinois program and all last-mile broadband expansion to Illinois households, businesses, and community anchor institutions, IOB is coordinating middle-mile infrastructure build out across the State

➤ Purpose of the RFI to Ensure State Collaboration

With considerable unserved and underserved areas, Illinois stands to benefit from coordinated expansion of middle-mile infrastructure – and the Illinois Office of Broadband intends to use the RFI process to help align applications, ensure quality, and position the state to make the most of this opportunity. Middle-mile fiber is incredibly important to the performance of local networks and it can contribute significantly to lowering the costs of deployment for providers and communities and the costs of service for residents. NTIA stipulates:

NTIA strongly encourages prospective non-state applicants to coordinate and consult with the State Broadband Office or other coordinating body located in the jurisdiction in which the eligible entity proposes to deploy middle mile infrastructure to ensure that the proposal is consistent with the state’s broadband plan and priorities. Please confirm collaboration and consultation.

➤ **Structure of Document**

Several questions are posed in the interest of identifying and coordinating Illinois applications for the NTIA Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program.

- Section 1: Background
Section 2: Key questions for applicant input
Section 3: Administrative considerations for filing comments

B. Key questions for applicant input

➤ **To ensure appropriate State Collaboration, please provide the following information**

1. Applicant name
2. Primary applicant type (Single Entity or Partnership)
3. Primary entity type (a State, political subdivision of a State, Tribal government, technology company, electric utility, utility cooperative, public utility district, telecommunications company, telecommunications cooperative, nonprofit foundation, nonprofit corporation, nonprofit institution, nonprofit association, regional planning council, Native entity, or economic development authority; or a partnership of two (2) or more entities)
4. Project details
 - a. Please indicate if application geography is Illinois-only or multi-state
 - b. Please list Illinois counties included in the proposed build (and, if applicable, other states)
 - c. Please provide an overview of the proposed route or service area(s), including information regarding rurality and socio-economic indicators in the area to be served by the proposed project.
 - d. Please describe the level of need in the proposed service area(s), including but not limited to communities considered unserved and/or underserved in the proposed service area(s), discussion of the competitive landscape in the area, variations among service areas if there are any, or the general economic conditions in the proposed funded service area.
5. Technical capabilities
 - a. Please describe targeted last mile service objectives, including last mile service provider letters of commitment, agreements, or contracts; and a description of the proposed service offerings, including the pricing of the services to be offered over the proposed facility.
 - b. Please describe existing middle mile offerings in the area, if any, including competitor data if applicable. This should include a description of the proposed service offerings, including the pricing and technology of the services to be offered over the proposed facility. Where possible, demonstrate a decline in middle mile costs that are likely to flow through to consumer broadband prices.
 - c. Please describe in detail the nondiscrimination, interconnection, and network management practices that would be adopted for the project facilities. Describe how it will comply with nondiscrimination and interconnection obligations, particularly with connectivity to the public Internet and physical interconnection for the exchange of traffic.
6. State collaboration
 - a. Please indicate if applicant is planning to seek a letter of support from IOB.
 - b. Please indicate if applicant is planning to share its application with IOB prior to the September 30, 2022, NTIA deadline.

C. Administrative considerations

➤ **Submission of RFI to DCEO**

The intent and goal of this RFI is to ensure appropriate State Collaboration with applicants to NTIA’s Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program. This RFI is for coordination and planning purposes only. Applicants should provide

➤ **Responses**

Parties are requested to respond to this RFI, particularly information regarding applicant name and type, as soon as possible by submitting an email response to broadband@illinois.gov. Please send any questions regarding the RFI to this email address.

➤ **Response and Format**

IOB appreciates and welcomes all feedback. Please ensure that your response includes:

- Name of organization
- Representative or contact name, title and/or affiliation
- Contact information, including address, phone, and email
- Signature of representative or contact

➤ **Confidentiality**

All information received through this request is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). However, if you include proprietary information, please mark it “confidential” to ensure it remains such.

➤ **Information in RFI**

If noted as confidential, the information provided in the RFI will be treated as trade secret information and not subject to publication or dissemination until otherwise made available by NTIA and/or the applicant.

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