

Notice of Collaboration Opportunity

Accelerate Illinois Broadband Infrastructure Planning Program

Accelerate Illinois Broadband Infrastructure Planning Program

Up to 12 Applicants selected

Application period opens: November 22, 2021

Submission deadline: December 30, 2021

✓ Prepare program application

- Read this entire NOCO document carefully
- Complete project analysis and gather all documentation
- Follow the format templates to complete the project cover sheet and application body
- Attach and label all application appendices correctly

✓ Submit program application

- Submit the complete application package at any time during the open application period
- Applications must be submitted in electronic PDF copy submitted to broadband@illinois.gov by the application deadline

✓ Confirm receipt of your application

- Email receipt via broadband@illinois.gov to confirm application submission

✓ Any questions?

- Contact the DCEO Office of Broadband team at 217-782-5968 or broadband@illinois.gov
- Additional information regarding this program, including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), are available at: <https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/ConnectIllinois>. The website, including FAQ, may be updated during the application window.

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A. PROGRAM INFORMATION

1. Background

The \$400 million Connect Illinois Broadband Grant Program and emerging federal broadband funding programs create a historic opportunity to improve broadband access throughout Illinois. This funding will result in positive outcomes by communities that prepare in advance to set appropriate visions, gather critical information about their local marketplace and technology options, develop public-private partnerships, obtain financing, and implement projects.

This “Notice of Collaboration Opportunity” recognizes that not all communities are prepared to take advantage of these broadband funding programs. The Accelerate Illinois Broadband Infrastructure Planning Program (Accelerate Illinois, program) provides a platform for communities to build an inclusive broadband team, gather essential information, determine acceptable community roles, identify broadband provider partners, and implement broadband infrastructure projects.

2. Definitions

For purposes of this program, “community” refers to *any self-defined geographic area – such as a city, village, county, or multi-county region – within Illinois that is committed to working intensively to improve broadband infrastructure and services.*

3. Program Description

The Accelerate Illinois program seeks to provide selected Illinois communities with intensive technical assistance resources and programming to engage in community broadband planning and capacity building for improved broadband infrastructure.

To maximize the impact of the Connect Illinois broadband and federal broadband investment, this Notice of Collaboration Opportunity (NOCO) is designed to engage unserved and underserved communities, inspire and support community involvement in broadband planning, and build capacity in local leadership, resources, and informed engagement. This is a community self-help program designed to move communities through an intensive broadband planning process.

This program is made possible through collaboration between the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (the Department, DCEO), Illinois Office of Broadband (IOB), the Illinois-based Benton Institute for Broadband & Society, and other nonprofit partners. These organizations will provide the program framework, access to information resources and community broadband coaching to participating communities. All meetings will be online.

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The program requires the following community commitment:

1. Obtain the written commitment of a minimum of eight (8) community members to participate on the Accelerate Steering Team.
2. Meet weekly (8:30 am – 10:30 am with Accelerate Illinois staff over approximately 14 weeks. The first hour of each meeting will serve as a shared learning experience across the six communities with information provided by the Benton/IOB team and expert resources; the second hour will provide individual meeting opportunity for individual community teams to plan their upcoming tasks and to discuss learnings and prospective policies/strategies.
3. Watch an archived webinar at individual team members' convenience during the week prior to the Thursday meeting.
4. Create a shared broadband vision of the results to be achieved through the program.
5. Conduct a community survey to measure satisfaction with existing broadband services, existing broadband speeds, interest in improved broadband service and willingness to pay for enhanced services.
6. Interview existing providers as well as prospective competitive providers to ascertain their interest and ability to meet the community's broadband vision.
7. Review broadband maps and data.
8. Explore various technology options consistent with the community vision.
9. Understand federal, state and local broadband funding options
10. Create and deliver a final plan presentation to peer communities and community governing boards.

This program does not provide any direct or specific network engineering, finance, legal or business planning assistance. After program completion, communities may determine that acquiring these detailed professional services may be required as the next step in the broadband development process.

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B. Membership Information

The Department may award membership in the Accelerate Illinois program as a non-monetary award to select Applicants. Additional complementary programming and non-monetary resources maybe available for member communities.

The release of this NOCO does not obligate the Department to provide programming to any applicant.

C. Eligibility Information

1. Eligible Applicants. Eligible applicants for this program include any of the following Illinois-based entities: cities; villages; counties; or multi-county regions.

The Department complies with all applicable provisions of state and federal laws and regulations pertaining to nondiscrimination, sexual harassment and equal employment opportunity including, but not limited to: The Illinois Human Rights Act (775 ILCS 5/1-101 et seq.), The Public Works Employment Discrimination Act (775 ILCS 10/1 et seq.), The United States Civil Rights Act of 1964 (as amended) (42 USC 2000a-and 2000H-6), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC 794), The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 USC 12101 et seq.), and The Age Discrimination Act (42 USC 6101 et seq.).

D. Application Submittal Information

1. Address to Request Application Packet. Application forms are available at <https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/ConnectIllinois> or by contacting the Program Manager:

Illinois Office of Broadband
Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
500 E. Monroe Street, 8th Floor
Springfield, IL 62701
Phone: 217-782-5968
Email: broadband@illinois.gov

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2. Content and Form of Application Submittal Information. Completed applications and all required supporting documentation – including one (1) electronic PDF copy submitted to broadband@illinois.gov.

The paper copies of the completed application packages with all associated documentation must fit on 8.5" x 11" paper. This size restriction includes all paper copy versions of maps and tables.

A standard application package must be submitted to and reviewed by DCEO. Each package must contain the following items:

- a. Cover Letter
- b. Application Information (found in appendix)
- c. Uniform Application in fillable PDF format (print, sign and scan signature page with submission)
- d. Conflict of Interest Disclosure
- e. Mandatory Disclosures

3. Submittal Dates and Times. The program application window will open upon publication of this NOCO.

All applications must be received on or before the application deadline of:
December 30, 2021.

Failure to meet the application deadline may result in the Department returning application without review or may preclude the Department from making the award

4. Submittal Address. Application materials must be submitted to the Department via electronic PDF copy submitted to broadband@illinois.gov by the application deadline.

Files containing Application packets and supporting documents that are too large to send via standard email may be shared using the CMS data sharing link (<https://filet.illinois.gov/filet/pimupload.asp>). This link provides a secure platform to transfer large files to Illinois employees. Applicants must confirm receipt of the application and documents by contacting the program contact listed in this NOCO.

Electronic submissions including links to documents stored in Google Docs or other cloud-based servers are not allowed.

5. Submission Confirmation. Please email the Illinois Office of Broadband at broadband@illinois.gov to confirm that each complete application package has been mailed or delivered for receipt on or before submission deadline.

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E. Merit Review, Criteria & Selection (100 points possible)

1. Merit Review. The Illinois Office of Broadband will award cohort membership to projects that help advance the Connect Illinois vision through community broadband planning and capacity building. Applications will be reviewed and evaluated by a merit-based review Committee led by the Illinois Office of Broadband and consisting of other program collaborators. This Committee will use the following criteria and associated point values (100 points possible) to assist in systematically scoring applications and awarding cohort membership. These criteria will be applied to information provided by the Applicant in response to the requirements of this NOCO. To ensure that an application receives the highest possible scoring, please be sure to provide complete and comprehensive responses for all information requested.

The team will strive to achieve geographic balance throughout the state in awarding cohort membership. As a result, applications may be considered on a regional basis per the 10 designated state economic development regions of Illinois, a map of which is available at: <https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/ConnectIllinois>.

To be considered a qualified applicant, an organization must comply with all of the specifications and respond to all items listed within the application instructions.

2. Scoring Criteria. Applications will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- The level of commitment and appropriate skills of the lead organization to manage the local program.
- The commitment of the lead organization to recruiting an inclusive project steering committee, including underserved and underrepresented populations, and following processes to ensure all voices are heard.
- The level of demonstrated support from key community organizations, including local government, chamber of commerce and/or economic development groups, school districts, health care providers, libraries and others.
- The level of demonstrated need for improved broadband access.

3. Selection Process. Applications will be graded using the merit-based review process and scored on the criteria specified herein. The Department will designate a merit-based review Committee to grade each application received for this collaboration opportunity. The final score of each Committee member will be calculated and an average of all scores will be the final score. Each applicant will then be ranked by their score.

F. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION: STATE AWARD NOTICES

Upon completion of the merit-based review process, the Illinois Office of Broadband will notify all Applicants of the merit review determination. A list of successful Applicants will be posted to: <https://www2.illinois.gov/dceo/ConnectIllinois>.

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Appendix: Application Instructions

Applications should be no longer than eight pages (excluding Applicant biographies, financial statements, other legal documents, and letters of support) and contain the following information:

1. Cover letter that introduces the applicant, defines the “community,” and makes a clear link between the community’s broadband aspirations and:
 - a. The goals of the Accelerate Illinois program
 - b. The vision articulated in statewide Connect Illinois Broadband Strategic Plan.

In addition, the cover letter should note if the Applicant expects to apply for or otherwise leverage separate Connect Illinois Broadband Grant funds or federal broadband infrastructure funding.

2. Applicant Information
 - a. Complete contact information, including Applicant name, primary contact name, title, address, email address, phone number, website address, and federal ID number.
 - b. Summary of Applicant’s history, including the date established or incorporated.
 - c. Summary of Applicant’s mission and goals.
 - d. List of the Applicant’s key project staff and leadership team, including brief bios and qualifications relevant to the Accelerate Illinois program.
 - e. List of confirmed and committed Steering Team members.
3. Community Description
 - a. Define the geographical area of your community.
 - b. Description of Applicant’s current broadband-related programs or activities, including any service statistics and strengths or accomplishments
 - c. Preview the broadband opportunities and challenges that exist in the community, and how they might be addressed through the program.
4. List and describe the local/regional organizations that have provided letters of support and participation.
5. Letters of support or other attachments.

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