

## **Champaign County, Illinois - Request for Information (RFI) #2022-006 Broadband Infrastructure Expansion – RFI Process**

In March 2022, the Champaign County Broadband Task Force received the [Broadband Plan Report](#), commissioned by the Champaign County Board, which created a sustainable broadband master plan for the entire County to address existing digital inequities and barriers to access, adoption, and utilization of broadband by residents, businesses, and institutions. As a part of the plan, a leading recommendation was to engage existing internet service providers (ISPs) on their interest in expanding services in the broadband gaps in rural Champaign County. The County Executive retained Finley Engineering to facilitate the RFI process and the Broadband Task Force with the task of recommending the following:

1. Additional amount of ARPA resources needed to incentive broadband expansion in the upcoming fiscal year from the County Board, and
2. County Executive update on utilization of the \$2.8 million in County ARPA resources already allocated within the current County budget as match dollars for upcoming state and federal broadband programs to the County Executive for further negotiations.

### **Highlights of the RFI Process:**

- RFI released on June 10, 2022, by Finley Engineering on behalf of the Champaign County Executive to the public, existing broadband providers within the County, and other providers expanding broadband infrastructure,
- Deadline for submission was Thursday, June 30, 2022, at 4:00 p.m. Thus, providing approximately three weeks for submissions,
- Nine responses were received and presented the Champaign County Broadband Task Force at their public meeting held on Monday, July 11, 2022, at 4:30 p.m. Meeting attachments posted on the County's Broadband Task Force webpage,
- The Broadband Task Force recommended that five of the nine be interviewed for further exploration on ways to expand broadband to all citizens within the County. The five providers shared common characteristics and interest in expanding in all six sectors within the County and proposed fiber buildouts. The Task Force appointed two members to serve on the interview team, one staff person from the Office of the County Executive, and a representative from Finley Engineering as facilitator,
- The five providers included Frontier Communications, Comcast, NextLink, Volo.net, and CCG Fiber,
- The providers were invited to participate in a one-hour interview consisting of the following:
  1. 15-minute presentation,
  2. 30 minutes of interview questions (providers received questions in advance), and
  3. 10 minutes of questions from the provider to the interview team
- Prior to the interview, providers were expected to complete an exercise which entailed completing a condensed, yet high-level version, of the Connect Illinois Broadband Grant Program. Providing the interview team the core information needed for discussion, and
- The interview team met four times several times following the interviews to deliberate and decide on a draft recommendation, the recommendation is as follows:
  1. To request additional ARPA resources in the amount of \$7 million dollars from the Board, and
  2. Request the County Executive to begin negotiations with Volo.net and NextLink to receive a part of the \$3 million ARPA allocation dedicated to broadband, to pursue a Connect Illinois grant for fiber-related projects.

The Champaign County Broadband Task Force will deliberate and submit their recommendation to the County Executive. The County Executive and Broadband Task Force Chair will then in turn provide the recommendation and an update to the County Board at their Thursday, August 18, 2022 meeting.