



OFFICE OF THE CHAMPAIGN COUNTY EXECUTIVE

1776 East Washington Street, Urbana, Illinois 61802-4581

Darlene A. Kloepfel, County Executive

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: October 27, 2022
Re: Champaign County Broadband Infrastructure Expansion Project
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Champaign County has launched a broadband infrastructure expansion project aimed at connecting thousands of homes, businesses, and anchor institutions (such as libraries and community centers) with faster, more reliable, and more affordable internet access.

Federal funds available to communities through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act are making it possible to connect rural communities and other underserved residents with high-speed, reliable, and affordable fiber broadband. The County Board has reserved nearly one quarter of its \$40 million ARPA allocation to match the service providers' investment in the project and leverage the additional Federal and state grants needed to connect miles and miles of fiber optic cable in underserved rural areas of the county.

“We already knew there was a significant disparity between the urban and rural parts of Champaign County in terms of internet access, reliability and affordability. A countywide survey conducted this summer on behalf of the County by the University of Illinois Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning provided evidence of that disparity,” stated County Executive Darlene Kloepfel. Finley Engineering assisted the County's Broadband Task Force with developing a county-coverage plan and provided guidance to the County through a lengthy selection process whereby NextLink Internet and Volo Internet + Tech were chosen as the providers to carry out the multi-year rural build-out process.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, broadband became a necessity for many households in ways it had never been before for remote work, schooling and health care, and the disparity in access for low-income residents also became apparent. As part of this initiative, Volo will also bring broadband access and training on Internet use to all 17 of the housing communities operated by the Champaign County Housing Authority.

Understanding the importance of broadband to the agricultural community, the Champaign County Farm Bureau has been a partner in the County project since the beginning. The Farm Bureau will handle outreach and plans a series of meetings with stakeholders and residents in the coming months. More details about the plan to build out Champaign County can be found on the county's website at <https://www.co.champaign.il.us/CountyBoard/Broadband.php> and reports about the County's ARPA funded projects are included in the monthly County Board meetings.

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