

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

Finley Engineering
on behalf of Champaign County Executive



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

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. In addition, the report provided an overview of the significant amount of federal and state resources available for broadband expansion. The plan provided key components including the documentation of broadband gaps, market research, and projections of the total amount of resources required to fully connect the County. 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.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Broadband expansion has been determined a high priority by the County Board and as such designated a capital project(s) to be funded from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) resources allocated to Champaign County in June 2021 and authorized within the annual budget by the Champaign County Board on November 18, 2021.

One of the strategies under consideration by County leadership is to provide matching funds to assist an ISP with their submission to broadband grant programs (e.g., Connect Illinois Broadband Grant Program). Therefore, to assist with existing provider outreach the County Executive has retained Finley Engineering to lead a Request for Information (RFI) process as a means of discovery and information gathering from the provider community.

Champaign County seeks to catalyze the expansion of broadband in six different sectors outlined in the Broadband Plan Report¹ and with grant eligible areas provided in Addendum B:

1. Northwest sector (NW)
2. Northeast sector (NE)
3. East sector (E)
4. Southeast sector (SE)
5. South Central sector (SC)
6. Southwest sector (SW)

In keeping with the requirements of ARPA, the County is gauging the interest of internet providers who desire to expand into one or multiple areas listed above. The County will be utilizing RFI submissions compiled by Finley Engineering in determining the next steps in deploying County ARPA funds to support viable projects that can assist as many rural households as possible.

In addition, prospective ISPs should consider the conditions imposed by ARPA in funding such broadband infrastructure projects:

1. Projects must be completed by Dec. 31, 2026,
2. Projects should address “unserved or underserved households or businesses,” or one or more households or businesses that are not currently served by a wireline connection that reliably delivers at least 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speeds, and
3. Projects funded by ARPA funds must be designed to provide service to unserved or

¹ Champaign County Broadband Plan Report, March 9, 2022.

underserved households or businesses and that are designed to, upon completion: (i) reliably meet or exceed symmetrical 100 Mbps download speed and upload speeds; or (ii) in limited cases, reliably meet or exceed 100 Mbps download speed and between 20 Mbps and 100 Mbps upload speed and be scalable to a minimum of 100 Mbps download and upload speeds. **The County has a strong preference in assisting projects that exceed the 100 Mbps symmetrical speed threshold.**

In addition, many new funding support programs can be leveraged to construct robust internet service to residents, businesses, health care, education, and other community organizations. Among the latest developments:

1. The State of Illinois offers the Connect Illinois Broadband Grant and has funded two rounds of grants with another round opening later this year,
2. The Illinois Office of Broadband Development culminated a statewide Request for Information from interested stakeholders, particularly from middle mile providers. It is unknown if any routes are being considered through Champaign County,
3. The American Rescue Plan Act specifically allows for broadband and utility expansion, giving Champaign County the impetus to address the community's broadband needs in an expeditious manner. ARPA funding requires that monies be earmarked by December 31, 2024, and projects completed by December 30, 2026, and
4. Infrastructure Investment and Job Act (IIJA), which created the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD), was signed by President Biden on November 15, 2021, and provides \$42.45 billion to expand high-speed internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment and adoption programs in all 50 states and territories.

Given these significant developments, Champaign County is poised to take action to catalyze public private partnerships to build a broadband infrastructure that serves the needs of residents, farms, and businesses. However, the County provides the following for context:

- **Champaign County Preference:** The County is not - nor does it want to become - an internet service provider. The County is limited to providing the necessary funds for construction, and it can work with local, state, and federal partners to secure rights of way and other necessary permitting.
- **Broadband Gap:** The rural percentages are startling because the FCC data shows that 84.8% of the rural parts of the County can buy 25/3 Mbps broadband. According to the FCC, about 4,435 people or 1,848 rural households cannot buy broadband. We know from the analysis above that the FCC claimed broadband coverage is overstated significantly and that there are a lot more homes with poor broadband than are being counted by the FCC.
- **Demographic Trends in Champaign County:**
 - Population Growth: The 2020 Census reports that the County population grew 2.4% from 2010 to 2020. The population for Illinois declined by 1.1%.
 - Population Ages: The County has a slightly lower percentage of children (5.4%) than the state (5.9%) and a lower percentage of persons under 18 (18.7%) than the state (22.2%). Champaign County has a lower percentage of those over 65 (13.3%) compared to the Illinois average of 16.1%.

- Homeownership: There is a lower percentage of homeownership in the County (53.0%) than the state average of 66.1%. The average home in the County costs \$162,100 compared to the state average of \$194,500.
- Education: The percentage of those with a high school diploma (95.0%) is significantly higher than the state average of 89.2%. The percentage with a bachelor's degree or higher is (45.0%) is significantly above the state average of 34.7%.
- Income: The median household income (\$52,797) is significantly below the state average of \$65,886. Per capita income (\$30,578) is lower than the statewide average of \$36,038. The percentage of homes in poverty (15.1%) is significantly above the statewide average of 11%.

3.0 INFORMATION REQUESTED

The goal of this RFI is to gather information about the level of interest by the private sector in building a robust broadband network that resolves deficiencies and service gaps for citizens in rural Champaign County. One role that the County is contemplating is providing matching funds to make it easier for an ISP to be successful in applying for state and federal broadband grant programs.

The County understands this RFI could disclose business interests in areas of the County and as such, sections of the RFI will be treated as confidential and proprietary information, but not the entire RFI. Finley Engineering will provide to the County Executive and the Broadband Task Force at their July 2022 meeting copies of the RFIs received (redacting proprietary information) and a summary of interest for discussion and determination of next steps. Of note, this RFI is for planning purposes only and should not be construed as a solicitation nor should it be construed as an obligation on the part of the County to make a purchase. Should Champaign County choose to proceed based on information obtained in this RFI, the County Executive, based upon recommendations from Broadband Task Force, will determine next steps.

Respondents will need to complete the RFI Response Form labeled Addendum A and indicate in priority order which of the unserved and underserved areas are of interest for expansion. Shapefiles of the County are available upon request.

Respondents can include:

Last Mile Internet Service Providers - Finley Engineering seeks responses from Last Mile² Internet Service Providers on their interest in expanding broadband in rural Champaign County where it currently is unavailable. Respondents need to answer and complete the accompanying form and provide additional supplemental information for County leadership to take under advisement. Respondents must meet ARPA funding requirements (see previous Section 2.0).

Middle Mile Internet Service Providers - Finley Engineering seeks responses from Middle Mile Internet Service Providers on their interest in expanding middle mile connectivity in and through rural Champaign County where it currently is unavailable. Middle Mile ISPs needs to be aware the County wants an ISP to demonstrate how the project will accelerate deployments for last-mile providers, thus connecting more households and enabling 100 Mbps symmetrical speeds or greater. Respondents need to answer and complete the accompanying form and provide additional supplemental information for County leadership to take under advisement. Respondents must meet ARPA funding requirements (see previous Section 2.0). For the purposes of this RFI, Finley

² Last-mile is defined as broadband infrastructure that connects directly to the end-use (household, business or farm).

refers the interested parties to the footnote for definition of middle mile³.

4.0 QUESTIONS, RESPONSE, DUE DATE

- 4.1 Questions regarding this RFI may be e-mailed to the following:
Tim Arbeiter
Director, Broadband Consulting
Finley Engineering
E-Mail: t.arbeiter@finleyusa.com

Questions posed by the provider community will be answered within two business days and will be compiled and sent to all providers.

Responses to this RFI must be submitted to the e-mail address provided above by **4:00 p.m. (Central Time) on Thursday, June 30, 2022.**

- 4.2 Respondents are to submit responses in pdf format consistent with the content and instructions provided herein to the email listed above.

5.0 OTHER INFORMATION

- 5.1 Respondents should be aware that the information provided will be analyzed and may appear in various reports and/or requests, except for those parts of each submission, which may be denoted as Confidential.
- 5.2 Finley Engineering shall not, in any way, be liable or responsible for the disclosure of any such record, or any parts thereof, if disclosure is required or permitted under Illinois Public Records Act or otherwise by law. A blanket statement of confidentiality or the marking of each page of the submission as confidential shall not be deemed sufficient notice of exception. Respondents must specifically label only those provisions of the submission, which are "Confidential" in nature. In the event a Public Records request is submitted for a response that includes "confidential" materials, the respondent will be contacted to discuss the release of the document.
- 5.3 Finley Engineering will review the responses to this RFI, which may subsequently lead to further clarification. Finley Engineering and the County may use contents of RFI submittals to prepare other communications or solicitations (e.g. Request for Proposals) at its discretion. If subsequent solicitation(s) are released, respondents to this RFI will be notified.
- 5.4 All respondents to this RFI will be placed on a recipient list for any future solicitation(s) issued by the County. **The lack of response to respond to this RFI will not disqualify any party from being considered in future solicitations.**

³ NTIA NOFO Middle Mile Grant Program (page 6) - The term "middle mile infrastructure"— (A) means any broadband infrastructure that does not connect directly to an end-user location, including an anchor institution; and (B) includes— (i) leased dark fiber, interoffice transport, backhaul, carrier-neutral internet exchange facilities, carrier-neutral submarine cable landing stations, undersea cables, transport connectivity to data centers, special access transport, and other similar services; and (ii) wired or private wireless broadband infrastructure, including microwave capacity, radio tower access, and other services or infrastructure for a private wireless broadband network, such as towers, fiber, and microwave links.

ADDENDUM A

Request for Information Response Form – Champaign County Illinois

Provider Information

Provider Legal Name:

“Doing Business As” Name:

EIN #:

Primary Contact Name (First and Last):

Title:

Cell Number:

Email Address:

Years in Business:

Years Doing Business in Champaign County:

Years Doing Business in Illinois:

Project Type

Last Mile Infrastructure Only

Middle Mile Infrastructure Only

Both Last & Middle Mile Infrastructure

Type of Technology Deployment

Fiber

Cable

Fixed Wireless

Combination

Other (describe):

Broadband Deployment Speed:

Mbps Download /

Mbps Upload

Latency:

Priority Areas: Rank 1-6, with 1 being the highest and 6 being the lowest, leave blank if not a priority. Indicate percentage of unserved/underserved area willing to serve.

	Ranking	%’s of Sector			
Northwest sector:		100%	75%	50%	25%
Communities Included:					
Northeast sector:		100%	75%	50%	25%
Communities Included:					

	Ranking	%’s of Sector			
East sector: Communities Included:		100%	75%	50%	25%
Southeast sector: Communities Included:		100%	75%	50%	25%
South Central sector: Communities Included:		100%	75%	50%	25%
Southwest sector: Communities Included:		100%	75%	50%	25%

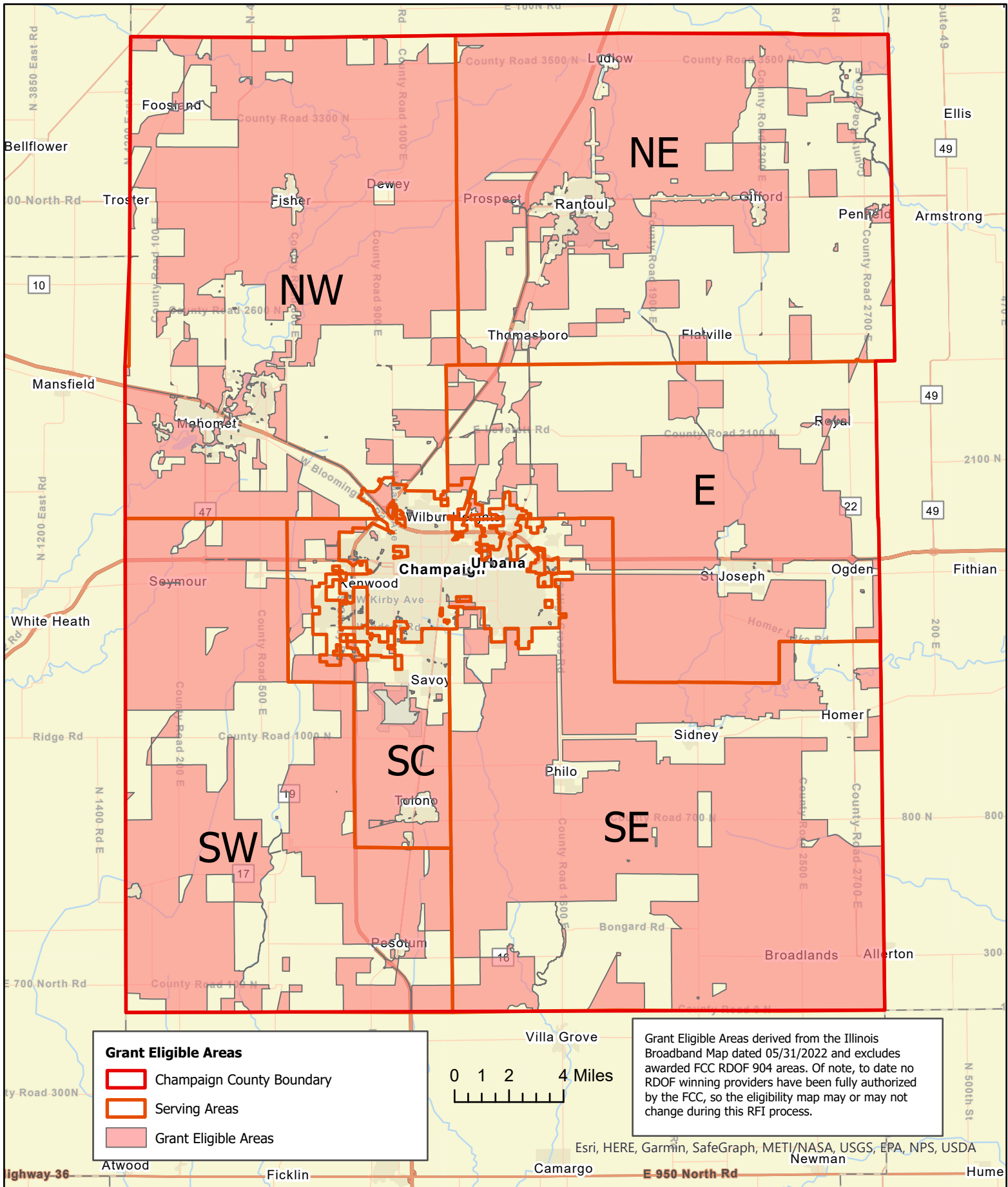
Deployment Overview:

Please provide a high-level introductory overview in constructing and providing high speed internet in each of the sectors denoted above. For areas selected under 100%, please describe the general proximity of the area(s) under consideration. If portions of your response are proprietary, please denote as *Confidential* to assist Finley in redacting for public consumption (please provide additional pages if needed):

Broadband Funding Programs:

Please detail any broadband funding awards made within the last seven years in Illinois including the funding program (State of Illinois, FCC, USDA, NTIA, or any other Federal agency), date of the request, amount awarded, status of the proposed project(s), and a community reference for follow-up. Respondents are to provide their responses in narrative or table format, please be concise (please provide additional pages if needed):

Will the respondent be seeking state and/or federal funding to address the expansion plans proposed in this RFI? If so, please describe which program(s):



Addendum B: Champaign County IL Grant Eligible Areas (Page 2 of 2)

