



# Precision Agriculture Infrastructure Grant (PRO-AG) Program Guide Program Year 2024

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# 1 Precision Agriculture Infrastructure Grant: General Information

## 1.1 Program Overview

The Precision Agriculture Infrastructure Grant (PRO-AG) is a State-funded program created pursuant to the Precision Agriculture Infrastructure Grant Act (the Act), Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 86-1401 – 1406, to propel Nebraska agricultural producers to lead the nation in precision agriculture connectivity, sustainability, traceability, and autonomy to accelerate rural economic development, and to provide high-speed Internet service to farm site in unserved areas of the state. The Nebraska Public Service Commission (Commission) has the authority to grant awards to assist applicants with eligible costs for qualifying projects.

## 1.2 Program Components

The program is divided into two distinct subprograms: (1) Connectivity Subprogram and (2) Devices and Technology Subprogram. Each subprogram is designed to fulfill a specific purpose, and applicants can submit multiple project proposals. However, applicants must apply separately for each subprogram. It is important to note that each application will be assessed individually, and there will be no priority given to applicants who choose to apply for grants in both subprograms. Each application will be considered on its own merits within the subprogram in which it was filed.

## 1.3 Funding Availability

The Nebraska Legislature has allocated approximately \$1 million of State General Funds to be used for PRO-AG grants for each fiscal year in the current biennium. The available funding for the 2023-2024 fiscal year (2024 program year) of \$906,478 will be divided into two categories:

1. Connectivity Subprogram: The Commission shall award up to 50 percent of the available grant funds, or \$453,239 for projects within the Connectivity Subprogram.
2. Devices and Technology Subprogram: The Commission shall award up to 50 percent of available funds, or \$453,239 for projects within the Devices and Technology Subprogram.

## 1.4 Connectivity Subprogram

Grants within the Connectivity Subprogram shall be used to provide adequate precision agriculture connectivity to on-farm structures and devices, including, but not limited to, tractors, combines, irrigation systems, livestock facilities, and farm offices.

NOTE: Adequate precision agriculture connectivity means a download speed of at least one hundred megabits per second and an upload speed of at least twenty megabits per second (100/20 Mbps), or greater.

## 1.5 Devices and Technology Subprogram

Grants within the Devices and Technology Subprogram shall be used to provide:

1. On-farm traceability solutions that satisfy food supply stakeholder demand, including blockchain.
2. Products that improve soil health, water management tools and sensors that facilitate judicious use of water resources, and products that promote the use of water efficiency seed technologies that lower agriculture's water, carbon, and nitrate footprint.
3. Products that use autonomous solutions in agricultural machinery, including but not limited to, grain carts, spreaders, precision drone scouting, and scouting robots.

## 1.6 Definitions

For the purpose of this program:

1. Adequate precision agriculture connectivity means high-speed Internet service to farm sites supporting various on-farm precision agriculture applications, with a download speed of at least one hundred megabits per second and an upload speed of at least twenty megabits per second (100/20 Mbps).
2. Farm site means the portion of land contiguous to land actively devoted to agriculture which includes improvements that are agricultural or horticultural in nature, including any uninhabitable or unimproved farm home site.
3. Farm home site means land contiguous to a farm site which includes an inhabitable residence and improvements used for residential purposes and which is located outside of urban areas or outside a platted and zoned subdivision.
4. Unserved area means a geographical area of the state which lacks broadband Internet service providing access to the Internet at speeds of at least twenty-five megabits per second for downloading and three megabits per second for uploading (25/3 Mbps).
5. Commission means the Nebraska Public Service Commission.
6. Program means the Precision Agriculture Infrastructure Grant Program created in Neb. Rev. Stat. § 86-1401 to 86-1406 and Commission order C-5529.
7. Provider means a wireless network provider that provides adequate precision agriculture connectivity.
8. Agricultural Cooperatives means a business entity that is cooperatively owned and controlled by agricultural producers, in which members' resources are pooled, and which operates for its members' benefit rather than the benefit of outside investors.
9. Agronomist means a scientist who specialized in the science of farming, including but not limited to crop production, soil control, or soil management.
10. Agricultural Producer means an individual or entity directly engaged in the production of agricultural products, including the cultivating, growing, and harvesting of plants and crops, including farming; breeding, raising, feeding, or housing of livestock, including ranching; forestry products; hydroponics; nursery stock; or aquaculture, and whereby 50 percent or greater of their gross income is derived from these products.
11. Eligible Land means cropland, grassland, rangeland, pastureland, farm sites, and other agricultural land used for active production in the state of Nebraska.

## 1.7 Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for this program include:

1. Providers
2. Agricultural Cooperatives
3. Agronomist
4. Agricultural Producer

Please note that applications under the Connectivity Subprogram are permissible from Agricultural Cooperatives, Agronomists, or Agricultural Producers only if submitted in partnership with a Provider as defined in section [1.6](#).

## 1.8 Eligible Project Areas

The Act stipulates that funding should support connectivity sufficient for precision agriculture activities to farm sites in unserved areas of the state. For the purpose of the grant program, farm sites mean the portion of land contiguous to land actively devoted to agriculture which includes improvements that are agricultural or horticultural in nature, including any uninhabitable or unimproved farm home site (Nebraska Rev. Statute §77-1359). Unserved area means a geographical area of the state which lacks broadband Internet service providing access to the Internet at speeds of at least twenty-five megabits per second for downloading and three megabits per second for uploading (25/3 Mbps).

Grant funding must contribute to the advancement of precision agriculture initiatives within the state of Nebraska.

## 1.9 Eligible Program Costs

Examples of allowed and disallowed costs can be found on our website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/precision-agriculture>. These examples may be periodically updated by Commission staff.

Please note that direct costs associated with providing internet service to the customer premises to support on-farm connectivity as part of a Connectivity Subprogram grant application, will be considered but should not exceed 25% of the total project costs.

The PRO-AG grant funding period begins after the grant application is received, reviewed, and officially approved with an award notification. Eligible program costs are those that are incurred after the program year grant award notice and end at the conclusion of deployment, or at the established deadline for deployment for the PRO-AG grant project, based on whichever is earlier. In-kind contributions will not be allowable expenses in this program.

## 1.10 Matching Fund Requirement

There is no matching funds requirement for PRO-AG grants. However, applications which provide at least a 25% percent match will receive additional scoring, with higher scores available to applicants providing a higher match percentage.

Applications that demonstrate a minimum 25% match will be eligible for additional scoring points based on their match percentage commitment. Refer to [Section 3](#) Selection Criteria for details.

# 2 Application Process

## 2.1 Program Schedule

The PRO-AG grant cycles will run on an annual basis, with awards to be made on or before June 30 of each year.

## 2.2 Filing Window

The grant application window for program year 2024 will open on January 23, 2024, and close at 5:00 p.m. Central Time on February 23, 2024. While the Commission will consider any applications received before the end of the filing window, applicants are strongly encouraged to submit their applications as soon as they are ready.

***Applicants must submit their applications to the Nebraska Public Service Commission on or before the application deadline of February 23, 2024, no later than 5:00 p.m. Central Time. Late filed applications will not be considered.***

## 2.3 Preparing an Application

To be considered for funding, the application and all required information and attachments must be submitted as part of a complete application package.

The application form is located on the Commission website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/precision-agriculture>. For the best experience, we recommend that you download the file and complete the application in Acrobat Reader or Professional, rather than through the browser. You may submit additional pages to expand on application form fields if additional room is needed. The completed application and supporting documentation should be emailed to [psc.broadband@nebraska.gov](mailto:psc.broadband@nebraska.gov) no later than February 23, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. Central Time.

The application form is a fillable PDF and applications must be received in PDF format. Printed applications will not be accepted. Upon request, the Commission can return a date-stamped, printed PDF of the application to the applicant as confirmation of the data submitted.

Ensure that your application and all attachments are clear, concise, and address all the specific requirements. Tailor the information to demonstrate how your project aligns with the goals of the grant program and how it will contribute to the advancement of precision agriculture.

The items that make up an application are further outlined below:

### 2.3.1 Application Section I - Applicant Details

- Field 1. Subprogram type: This field should include the Subprogram for which the application pertains. Options include:
- a. Connectivity Subprogram
  - b. Devices and Technology Subprogram
- Field 2. Applicant name: This field should include the legal name of the entity applying for the grant.
- Field 3. Applicant type: This field should identify the applicant type. Options include:
- Provider
  - Agricultural Cooperative
  - Agronomist
  - Agricultural Producer
- Field 4. Applicant street address: This field should include the street address of the applicant.
- Field 4a. Applicant city: This field should include the city for the address of the applicant.
- Field 4b. Applicant state: This field should include the state for the address of the applicant.
- Field 4c. Applicant zip code: This field should include the zip code of the applicant.
- Field 5. Applicant contact (first and last name): This field should include the name of the contact person for questions related to the application and the overall project.
- Field 6. Applicant e-mail: This field should include the e-mail address of contact person identified in field 4.
- Field 7. Applicant phone number: This field should include the phone number of contact person identified in field 4.
- Field 8. Connectivity only: Applicant's Nebraska ETC status: This field should include the applicant's Nebraska ETC status. Options include:
1. Not applicable;
  2. Currently certified as Nebraska Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (NETC), in good standing;
  3. Application for Nebraska Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (NETC) certification has been filed with the Commission;
  4. Applicant attests they will submit application to the Commission for NETC certification at least six months prior to project completion.
- Field 9. Connectivity only: Does the applicant currently report through FCC Broadband Data Collection (BDC) system speeds of at least 100/20Mbps provided to customers within the State of Nebraska? This field should indicate whether the applicant/service provider partner currently reports through FCC BDC speeds of at least 100/20Mbps service is being provided to customers in Nebraska located outside of the project area. Response options include: Yes; No; Not applicable.

### 2.3.2 Application Section II – Project Details

- Field 1. Project name: Provide a concise and descriptive name for the project in this field.
- Field 2. Precision agriculture production type: This field should include the type of agriculture production benefiting from the project. Options include: Animal Production, Crop Production, or Both Animal and Crop Production.
- Field 3. Project location description: This field should include a brief description of the project location(s) where the project will take place. Please specify the geographical details, such as address, city/town/village, county, etc. that would be impacted by the project. Connectivity applications must include a contiguous project area to be considered for funding and must provide on-farm connectivity.
- Field 4. Estimated number of locations that will be directly served by the project. For connectivity projects involving a farm site, this input should be “1”.
- Field 5. Technology type(s) used in proposed project: The input in this field should describe the technology type(s) to be used in the proposed project.
- Field 6. Start Date: Enter the proposed start date of the project in mm/dd/yyyy format.
- Field 7. Expected project completion date in mm/dd/yyyy format.
- Field 8. Total project cost: This field should indicate the total estimated cost of the project based on costs deemed eligible within the PRO-AG grant program. See our website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/precision-agriculture> for a list of examples of allowed and disallowed costs.
- Field 9. Total match amount: This field should include the sum of all matching funds committed, including those committed by outside sources and those committed by the applicant.
- Field 10. PRO-AG grant amount requested: This field should indicate how much grant money is being requested for this application.
- Field 11. Connectivity only: Farm Site(s) Size (acres): Enter the total acreage of the farm site (or sites) where the proposed connectivity project will be implemented.
- Field 12. Connectivity only: Number of Key Operational Locations: This should include the total number of key operational locations at the on-farm infrastructure site, such as the farm office, livestock facility, a combine, equipment shed, field operation center, center pivot system, and remote monitoring points. This should match what is included in the project diagram provided as Attachment J.
- Field 13. Connectivity only: Number of Connected On-Farm Entities: The total estimated number of on-farm structures and devices to be connected by project at completion. This represents the overall count of structures and devices on the farm that will be integrated into the proposed connectivity project. It encompasses all on-farm entities, including but not limited to tractors, combines, irrigation systems, livestock facilities, and farm offices.
- Field 14. Connectivity only: Current maximum connection speed bandwidth in project area in Mbps: This field should include the current maximum download and upload speeds available within the project area. To be eligible for funding, the current speeds must be less than 25/3 Mbps.
- Field 15. Connectivity only: Speeds upon completion: The speeds the connectivity project will provide upon completion. To qualify, the project must provide adequate precision agriculture connectivity with speeds of 100Mbps/20Mbps, or greater.
- Field 16. Connectivity only: Monthly customer rate for proposed 100Mbps/20Mbps service: This field should include the monthly customer rate to be billed for 100Mbps/20Mbps service provided within the project area. This should not include promotional rates such as new customer discounts, upgraded service discounts, or customer retention discounts.

### 2.3.3 Preparing Application Attachments

Preparing Grant Application Attachments: All attachments to your grant application must comply with the formatting requirements in this section and must be in .pdf (portable document format), to preserve the layout and appearance of submitted documents, unless otherwise noted.

Naming Convention: Please label attachments as follows: “Applicant\_Name\_Project\_Name\_Attachment\_Letter” (Example: FarmTech\_NEWaterConservation\_AttachmentA). If it is necessary to submit multiple attachments under one attachment letter category, label the attachments to identify the separate attachments, such as the following: “ApplicantName\_ProjectName\_AttachmentLetter\_1”, “ApplicantName\_ProjectName\_AttachmentLetter\_2”, etc. (Example: FarmTech\_NEWaterConservation\_AttachmentA\_1, FarmTech\_NEWaterConservation\_AttachmentA\_2, etc.).

#### File Name Restrictions

- File names of .pdf attachments should be limited to 50 characters whenever possible.
- Names may not include special characters (e.g., &, -, \*, %, /, #), periods (.), blank spaces or accent marks.
- An underscore (example: Attached\_File.pdf) may be used to separate a filename.
- File names must be unique. No other attachment in the application package may have the same file name.

### 2.3.4 Attachment Requirements

#### Attachment A. Business Plan

All applicants should provide a business plan for the proposed network including the following:

1. **Executive Summary:** Briefly describe the farm/business, including its history, mission, and goals. Include specific objectives related to precision agriculture connectivity or technology adoption. Legal name of the farm/business applying for the grant.
2. **Project Proposal:**
  - a. Description of the precision agriculture project you plan to implement.
  - b. Explanation of how the on-farm connectivity -OR- devices and technology will be utilized to enhance productivity, efficiency, and sustainability.
  - c. *Connectivity applicants:* Include a statement certifying that the farm site(s) to be served are currently unserved or lacking broadband Internet service at speeds of at least 25 Mbps for downloading and 3 Mbps for uploading. Further, that upon completion of the project, that the farm site(s) will have access to minimum speeds of 100/20 Mbps for precision agriculture connectivity to on-farm structures and devices, as required by Neb. Rev. Stat. § 86-1404(2)(a). NOTE: Please note that if the [FCC National Broadband Map](#) indicates that the location is already receiving speeds of 25/3Mbps or higher, applicants are required to submit evidence refuting the data on the broadband map.
3. **Timeline for project implementation:** Provide a timeline for deployment of connectivity OR devices and technology with milestones. Include any indication of readiness as evidence that the applicant is prepared to move forward immediately upon award of grant.
4. **Sustainability:** Provide evidence of project sustainability for a minimum of five years.
5. **Eligible Entity Documentation:** Applicants may include supporting documentation, such as business registration certificates, cooperative bylaws, professional certifications, to further validate their eligibility status.
6. **Project Budget:** A project budget must be attached reflecting a clear and detailed breakdown of cost elements based on total allowable project costs. Any disallowed expenses must be adjusted from the total project costs to determine total allowable costs for calculating the grant amount requested and required match percentage. This should include the total costs, the total grant amount requested, and detail any matching funds committed by source.

7. **Financial Projections:** Include the financial projections for the projected, including a cost-benefit analysis that quantifies the expected return on investment (ROI). This should include both short-term and long-term projections.
8. **Financial Statements:** *Connectivity Subprogram* - Non-ETC applicants must include their most recent year's financial statements. Additionally, if an ETC applicant has not submitted financial statements to the Commission since January 2023, they are required to provide financial statements along with their application.
9. **Rate Comparability:** *Connectivity Subprogram* - Applicants must demonstrate that the rates they offer in the project area will be comparable to those offered elsewhere for the same type of service. The rates offered are not required to be static over the five-year period described in the business plan. However, applicants must commit to the rates listed in the business plan for the five-year reporting period.

## **Attachment B. Legal**

### **1. Connectivity Subprogram:**

- a. Include contact information for the applicant's legal representation. Legal representative must be licensed and in good standing to practice law in Nebraska, or an attorney admitted to practice pro hac vice in Nebraska. Omission of this information will disqualify the applicant from grant consideration.
- b. Applicants must submit a letter of support or approval from the owner of each farm site included in the grant application. This letter should clearly express the owner's consent for the connectivity project and their understanding of the proposed on-farm connectivity services and rates charged for service.
- c. A description of any risk factors or legal challenges that must be addressed prior to or during the project in question, and how the applicant intends to mitigate these risk factors or legal challenges.

### **2. Devices and Technology Subprogram:**

- a. Provide a detailed outline of the pertinent qualifications and certifications essential for the proposed devices/technology.
- b. Provide a statement specifying whether the applicant currently holds the necessary qualifications and certifications, including any expiration dates. If not currently secured, define the planned steps and timelines for acquiring any essential qualifications and certifications.
- c. Detail the applicant's strategies and commitments for sustaining the qualifications and certifications over the five-year post-deployment period.

## **Attachment C. Technical Summary:**

### **1. Connectivity Subprogram:**

- a. A description of the applicant's experience providing precision agriculture on-farm connectivity solutions including their technical capability to meet the requirement to provide a minimum 100/20 Mbps. Include details of past successful projects or initiatives related to precision agriculture connectivity or similar technologies. Specifically, whether they currently provide broadband at the minimum 100Mbps/20Mbps speeds.
- b. A detailed description of the proposed network architecture including the specific technologies and strategies to provide service, a list of the on-farm structures and devices to be connected by project, placement of access points, data collection devices, and other key elements. Include the expected latency of the network (in ms) upon completion.
- c. Explain how the solution ensures reliable and scalable connectivity. This could include a plan for network expansion along with a description of strategies for preserving performance with increased device density.
- d. The expected useful life of the facilities to be built including a statement as to the technological components used, and, if applicable, which components may require more frequent repair or replacement.
- e. Applicants should explain how the project will be resilient and sustainable in the long-term. Specifically, how the project area will be maintained throughout the useful life of the facilities along with the applicants plans



to meet the minimum speed requirements in place for the PRO-AG grant for a minimum of five years following completion.

- f. Applicants may include an attestation from a qualified engineer describing whether the speed requirements can be fulfilled using the proposed technology and design.

**2. Devices and Technology Subprogram**

- a. Overview of the applicant's experience and expertise in precision agriculture devices and technology solutions, specifically as related to the devices/technology included in the application. In cases where the applicant lacks direct experience, an explanation is required on how they plan to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to operate the equipment effectively. Provide details of past successful projects or initiatives related to precision agriculture or similar technologies.
- b. Details about the proposed program involving precision agriculture devices and technology, including specifications and technical requirements. Include an explanation of how the chosen technologies align with the goals of the project.
- c. The expected useful life of devices/technology included in the request for funding including a statement related to which components may require more frequent repair or replacement.
- d. Applicants should explain how the devices/technology funded with PRO-AG grant funds will be maintained throughout the useful life or for a minimum of five years following project completion.

**Attachment D. Cybersecurity:** Applicants must attach a cybersecurity plan, including an attestation that the applicant does not use any equipment prohibited for use by the Federal Communications Commission pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 1601. NOTE: Remember to avoid sharing sensitive details that could compromise your security posture.

**Attachment E. Match documentation:**

- 1. Provide a table detailing the confirmed matching fund commitments by source. The table should include the total amount committed for matching funds, a detailed description of the dollar amount of each match as well as the source of the match. The table should first list the amount committed by the applicant, and then list each funding partner. Below is an example:

Match Source:	Funding Commitment:	Percentage of Total Matching Funds
<i>Applicant</i>	<i>\$80,000</i>	<i>80%</i>
<i>Funding source A</i>	<i>\$10,000</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Funding source B</i>	<i>\$10,000</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>(continue as needed)</i>		
<b>Total Matching Funds:</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

- 2. Documentation of the match source(s) should also be provided. This could include but is not limited to a signed contribution certification for community partner match.

**Attachment F. Monitoring and Evaluation:**

- 1. Plan for monitoring and evaluating the success of the precision agriculture project.
- 2. Clearly define milestones and key performance indicators (KPIs) that will be used to measure the outcomes.

**Attachment G. Project Impact**

**Impact statement:** Summarize the project’s significance and potential impact.

- 1. Connectivity applicants should explain:

- i. Specify the direct benefits to the farm site, outlining how the proposed project will positively impact its operations and overall functionality.
  - ii. Is there a potential for expansion? Include any details as to how the proposed project allows for scalability and growth beyond its initial scope, indicating the potential for broader application or increased capacity in the future.
  - iii. Engagement measures with proposed project location.
2. Devices and technology applicants should explain:
    - i. The type of farm operation/business to benefit from project (e.g., crop farming, livestock, mixed farming).
    - ii. What are economic or technological benefits, and how broad are the benefits?
    - iii. Demonstration of more efficient use of Water resources, if applicable
    - iv. Delineate project area and locations to be served.

**Attachment H. Other supporting documentation (if applicable):**

1. Other supporting documentation could also include documentation such as supplemental speed test data, letters of support from members of the community, supplemental financial information such as the most recent year's federal tax return, etc.

[2.3.4.1 Additional Required Attachments for Connectivity Subprogram](#)

**Attachment I. Shapefiles:**

1. Polygon shapefiles reflecting the project area must be included. Any supporting files necessary to open the shapefile must also be attached.
2. Point shapefiles identifying serviceable locations in the project area must be included. Any supporting files necessary to open the shapefile must also be attached. (Attachment Letter: B). The points in the shapefile should match the number of locations reported to be served on the application in Field 3c.
3. Applicants must include tower location shapefiles for existing and planned towers. They must also provide a shapefile polygon demonstrating coverage for the planned and/or existing networks, including where the upload and download speeds will meet or exceed the required speeds (100/20 Mbps), and showing that coverage encompasses the locations included in the application.

**Attachment J. Project Diagram:**

1. Provide a detailed diagram of the project design, as well as a list of key operational locations:
  - Diagram: The diagram should include the entire project layout, including key infrastructure components and connectivity pathways. Highlight the central hub, distribution points, and connectivity routes. Differentiate between wired and wireless components. Clearly depict the connection of on-farm structures, devices, and key operational locations. The diagram should provide a description of the size of the project location and should be appropriately scaled.
  - List of Key Operational Locations: Applicants must submit a list of key operational locations for proposed post-completion speed testing. Examples include the farm office, livestock facilities, equipment sheds, field operation centers, irrigation control points, critical pathways, and remote monitoring points. Each location should be briefly explained, highlighting its significance, and specifying how speed testing will confirm compliance with required performance standards.

## 2.4 Submitting an Application:

Completed applications and all required supporting documentation must be received electronically via e-mail to the Commission at [psc.broadband@nebraska.gov](mailto:psc.broadband@nebraska.gov) by 5:00 p.m. Central Time on February 23, 2024. The application form should be submitted in .pdf format using the provided application form, all required attachments should be submitted. If all documents CANNOT be attached within a single e-mail due to size limitations, the submission may be sent in more than one e-mail. If it is necessary to submit in separate transmissions, the subject of the e-mails should clearly indicate the applicant and project name, and how many e-mails are being sent (e.g., Email 1 of 4, etc.). Files should be attached to the e-mails; links to websites are not acceptable. Alternatively, you may utilize programs such as zip files, Dropbox, Sharefile, etc., if they contain individual files. Each attachment should be clearly labeled to indicate the contents (Refer to [2.2.3 Attachments](#) for details). Late filed applications will not be considered.

## 2.5 Protecting Confidential Information in an Application:

A Protective Order governing the 2024 grant application cycle will include specific information that can be submitted confidentially. A copy of the Protective Order will be available on the Commission website once entered. Applicants are required to closely follow the terms of the Protective Order. All confidential materials must be clearly marked as such both in the filename and as a stamp or watermark on each page of the document itself. Commission Staff will contact applicants who submit information incorrectly marked as Confidential to provide an opportunity to remove the marking. The Commission does not guarantee that information submitted that is not marked in accordance with the terms of the Protective Order will be protected.

## 2.6 Administrative Review

The Commission seeks to avoid unnecessary delay in PRO-AG. Therefore, the Commission will use an administrative review process for PRO-AG connectivity applications. The Commission will verify that the project exclusively serves unserved locations, as required by the Act. Applications will either qualify for scoring based on whether it serves exclusively unserved locations based on review of all applicable data sources, or it will be removed from further consideration.

# 3 Selection Criteria

The Act specifies certain purposes and conditions for use of grant funding. The Commission intends to evaluate applications to ensure statutory requirements are met and to award grants to the projects that provide the highest return in public benefit for the public costs incurred. The PRO-AG applications will be reviewed by a team composed of Commission staff who will use the following criteria to prioritize, score, and award grants:

## 3.1 Priority for Grant Distribution

Projects will be prioritized if they meet the following criteria:

1. **Demonstrated Substantial Economic Benefit:** Projects that showcase a significant economic impact on rural Nebraska. The evaluation will consider the tangible and quantifiable benefits the project brings to the local economy, emphasizing job creation, income generation, and overall economic development.
2. **Continuing or Increasing Economic and Technological Impacts:** Projects that would provide continuing or increasing economic and technological benefits over time will be prioritized. This approach aims to support initiatives that not only yield immediate benefits but also contribute to sustained growth and progress over time, fostering long-term economic and technological advantages in the state.

3. **Water Conservation Focus:** Priority will be provided to projects dedicated to water conservation. Proposals that explicitly address and implement innovative strategies, technologies, or practices aimed at conserving water resources will be prioritized. The assessment will focus on the project's potential to mitigate water usage, promote sustainable water management, and contribute to environmental conservation efforts.

## 3.2 Grant Program Areas

Grant applications will first be sorted into two different subprograms: Connectivity OR Devices and Technology

Once applications are sorted into the two sub-program areas, applications will be further reviewed and scored. The following criteria and associated point values will be used to score and award grants within each respective subprogram.

### 3.2.1 Connectivity Subprogram Scoring:

Applications are eligible for a maximum 100 scoring points. The scoring will assess grant applications, evaluating both gating criteria for eligibility and scoring criteria for project merit and impact. The scoring rubric can be found on our website at: <https://psc.nebraska.gov/precision-agriculture>

### 3.2.2 Devices and Technology Subprogram Scoring:

Applications are eligible for a maximum 95 scoring points. The scoring will assess grant applications, evaluating both gating criteria for eligibility and scoring criteria for project merit and impact. The scoring rubric can be found on our website at: <https://psc.nebraska.gov/precision-agriculture>

### 3.2.3 Scoring and Tiebreaker

Applications will be prioritized based on overall scores, with higher scores indicating a higher priority project.

If applications receive the same score requiring a tiebreaker, the application with the lower amount of PRO-AG grant dollars requested, would be given preference.

## 4 Grant Award Notification

For program year 2024, grant awards will be released on or before April 30, 2024. ACH documentation requirement: Successful applicants will need to submit required documentation for receipt of ACH payments from the State of Nebraska immediately upon the award of a grant to ensure that the first payment is not delayed. Additional instructions will be provided when grant awards are released.

## 5 Distribution of Support Details

Successful applicant must submit a State of Nebraska W-9 and ACH enrollment form one week following grant awards. The PRO-AG grant funds awarded will be distributed to individual grant recipients as follows:

- 90% of the funds awarded will be distributed upon award of the grant, receipt of Acknowledgement and Attestation Form, and the W9/ACH form.
- 10% of the funds awarded will be distributed upon successful completion of the project, submission of the Certification of Project Completion, successful speed testing results if applicable, and receipt of invoice submittals to justify allowable expenses.

Upon project completion, grant recipients must submit the Certification of Project Completion Form certifying that the project described in the application has been completed. Within 90 days of project completion, Connectivity Grant Recipients must submit speed test results verifying that the connectivity can provide the required speeds (100 Mbps download/20 Mbps upload). The required forms are available on the PRO-AG website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/precision-agriculture>.

## 6 Post-Award Requirements

Quarterly progress reports regarding the construction of service in the project area must be submitted to the Commission by the fifteenth day of the first month following each quarter. A PRO-AG Awardee Progress Report form can be found on the PRO-AG website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/precision-agriculture>.

### 6.1 Completion Deadlines

#### 1. Connectivity Subprogram

- a. **Deadline:** Grants awarded in this subprogram are subject to a twelve-month completion deadline after the date on which the grant is awarded.
- b. **Extensions:** The Commission may permit one extension of up to six months upon request and for good cause shown.
- c. **Completion:** Project completion signifies the fulfillment of all defined objectives and activities related to establishing or enhancing on-farm connectivity. This includes the successful construction of planned connectivity infrastructure, adequate connectivity of 100/20 Mbps is met, and connections have been made to on-farm structures and devices such as tractors, combines, irrigation systems, livestock facilities, and farm offices.

#### 2. Devices and Technology Subprogram

- a. **Deadline:** Grants awarded in this subprogram are subject to a twelve-month completion deadline after the date on which the grant is awarded.
- b. **Extensions:** The Commission may consider allowing one six-month extension upon a showing of good cause.
- c. **Completion:** The project would be considered complete when the project can fulfill the primary operations that it was designed to perform.

## 7 Post-Deployment Requirements

### 7.1 Speed and Latency Testing – *Connectivity Subprogram only*

Connectivity Subprogram grants are required to submit speed test information to the Commission following deployment of the completed network as outlined in the application.

To confirm required speeds and latency are being met by the grant-funded on-farm connectivity network, performance testing will focus on key operational locations that would represent typical usage scenarios. Examples of locations for testing could include farm office, livestock facilities, equipment sheds, field operation centers, critical pathways, remote monitoring points, etc.

Upon project completion, the wireless network provider must test those locations and demonstrate that adequate connectivity is being provided. Specific requirements for speed testing for each project will be issued on a case-by-case basis.

The PRO-AG Speed Test Certification form should be used when reporting speed test information to the Commission. The form can be accessed on the PRO-AG website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/precision-agriculture> and includes additional detail pertaining to this requirement. Performance testing must be performed for the on-farm network.

General principles for speed testing:

- All key operational locations identified in the application must be tested.
- Speed testing must be conducted for one week (7 days) for each project.
- Speed testing must be performed during daylight hours, for at least a four-hour window each day.
- A minimum of one download test and one upload test per location, per hour should be conducted during the test window.

- Each speed test must measure a connection between a specific farm site and selected test location for at least 10 seconds.

General principles for latency testing:

- All key operational locations identified in the application must be tested.
- Speed testing must be conducted for one week (7 days) for each project.
- Speed testing must be performed during daylight hours, for at least a four-hour window each day.
- A carrier must conduct one latency test per minute at each selected test location for the duration of the testing period.

Testing Deficiencies:

- Should an applicant's testing fail to reflect that the entire project area is capable of being served at the required speeds as approved in the grant application, the applicant will be allowed a reasonable time to correct the deficiencies.
- The applicant must submit the speed test results along with a written proposal to remedy the deficiencies within the next sixty (60) days, including the date upon which speed testing will be conducted a second time.
- If the deficiencies are not corrected and the provider fails to provide adequate precision agriculture connectivity after the second set of speed tests, the applicant shall be subject to penalties as outlined within the C-5529 order.

NOTE: In some instances, the Commission may also accept speed test data or reports submitted by the customer being served to determine whether adequate connectivity has been provided.

## 7.2 Annual Report Requirement

The awardee will be required to submit an annual report on the usage and maintenance of the on-farm connectivity network or the grant-funded devices and technology. The report should include a description of the benefits to Nebraska obtained by the project. Connectivity Subprogram participants must also provide speed testing to demonstrate the continued ability of the network to provide the required speeds. The annual reports would be required for a period of five years after project completion. Reports should be submitted to the Commission via e-mail to [psc.broadband@nebraska.gov](mailto:psc.broadband@nebraska.gov) by 5:00 p.m. Central Time on July 1 of each year, or the first business day thereafter.

## 8 Other Conditions and Requirements

In accordance with Nebraska Revised Statute § 86-1401 et seq. and Commission Order C-5529, the applicant and its successors and affiliates are obligated to adhere to the following terms if receiving a grant:

### 1. Connectivity Subprogram:

- a. Grant recipients must offer broadband Internet service in the project area for at least five years post deployment; and
- b. Grant recipients must maintain minimum speed capability of 100Mbps for downloading and 20Mbps for uploading in the project area for five years post deployment.
- c. Prohibition: Grant recipients are prohibited from transferring deployment costs, initially supported by grant funds, to their customers through any form of charges. This includes direct charges, fees, or any other means of passing on costs associated with the deployment phase covered by grant funds. While end-users benefiting from the improved connectivity may provide matching funds, they shall not be required to bear the portion funded by the grant.

### 2. Devices and Technology Subprogram:

- a. Awardees must keep all equipment funded with PRO-AG grants in service for a minimum of five years after project completion.

- b. All necessary maintenance and repairs for the funded equipment must be performed at the cost of the awardee.

Any applicant that declines to accept these conditions shall not be eligible to receive a grant.

## 9 Failure to Complete an Awarded Project

### 9.1 Post-Award Repayment

Any grant recipient which fails to complete an awarded project must repay ten percent (10%) of the grant for each month that the project is not complete after the project deadline, including any extended deadlines.

## 10 Contact Information

For more information including the application and template forms, consult our website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/precision-agriculture>. The Commission staff can be contacted via e-mail at [psc.broadband@nebraska.gov](mailto:psc.broadband@nebraska.gov).