

Attachment J

Grantor Request

A digital inclusion plan must be attached for consideration. The plan should specify: the applicant's process to consult with community and consider affordability; a description of how the project will meet the objective of providing broadband infrastructure deployment within the project area to directly enable work, education, and healthcare monitoring; a description of how the project will address a critical need that resulted from or was made apparent or exacerbated by the COVID-19 public health emergency; identify any critical needs of the community intended to be served by the project, and how the project will be tailored to meet those needs, including the carrier's efforts to ensure members of the community to be served will be able to afford the services offered and must describe any discounts and/or support programs to be offered for low-income individuals; specify how the project will impact access to and use of information and communication technologies within the communities it serves, including individuals and communities that are the most disadvantaged; include the pricing structure of the 100/100 Mbps plan being offered to low-income subscribers in addition to the availability of Lifeline or Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) discounts and any additional terms and conditions of service; include evidence of outreach efforts to relevant stakeholders (community leaders, community members, civic organizations, etc.) in the areas they are wishing to serve. (Attachment Letter: J)

Applicant Response

Nextlink has actively partnered with the Microsoft Airband Initiative since 2019. Benefits from our relationship with Airband include access to technical expertise, preferential pricing on innovative technological solutions, as well as digital skills training and a free technical hotline for its customers through PCs for People, another Airband partner. We also collaborate with National 4-H, another Airband partner, to deliver a digital skills education program entitled Tech Changemakers, which empowers youth to train other community members on digital literacy.

Additionally, Microsoft is providing a one-time \$25,000 grant to assist Nextlink in the establishment of digital navigator cohorts in strategic locations to help increase broadband adoption. Nextlink Internet will partner with community stakeholders and anchor institutions to secure Digital Navigators to address the entire digital inclusion process — home connectivity, devices, and digital skills — with members of its communities through repeated interactions. Microsoft Airband partners, like Rural LISC, will work with Nextlink to identify community organizations in the designated project areas to train, organize, and deploy volunteers to serve as digital navigators.

Nextlink will leverage newly established relationships with community colleges and public libraries that are trusted anchor institutions whose position at the intersection of media, information, and technology makes them dependable guides for the people they work with. Digital Navigators often come from the community they serve, which makes them well positioned to understand and address the technology-related concerns of their fellow community members. A public library embodies the innate trust that is critical to the role of a Digital Navigator.

These navigators will be volunteers or cross-trained staff who currently work in social service agencies, libraries, health, and more who offer remote and in-person guidance. Digital Navigators will be familiar

with resources that relate to digital equity and will help residents learn to use critical online services that provide guidance with food support, rent, education, employment, childcare, government benefits and more. Furthermore, they will recommend resources, monitor progress, and check back with the client.

1. Community and Affordability

Nextlink is always considering the community it is serving. We have been in touch with multiple post-secondary institutions in Nebraska. We are participants in the annual NACO Conference. We serve as a Bronze Sponsor for the annual NACO Conference several years in a row, and repeatedly attend legislative meetings within the state. These opportunities have not only enabled Nextlink to establish relationships with various counties but have also given us the opportunity to relay information on our network expansion on a face-to-face basis with local officials. We have been critically involved in promoting the public comment period for the State's BEAD proposals, event updates, program announcements and much more. We are very supportive of our people in Nebraska. We are regularly reaching out to members of the various counties we are proposing to serve and offering numerous ways in which we can partner with these communities to further their broadband connectivity objectives.

2. Enabling Work, Education, and Healthcare

The goals of the project are to provide high-quality, high-speed broadband internet and phone service to underserved areas in Nebraska. In addition to targeting unserved and underserved areas across the project area, Nextlink also is focusing on economically distressed areas. In fact, all proposed locations to be served are experiencing obstacles to reliable work environments, challenges in offering educational resources, and difficulties in providing readily available healthcare connections. Nextlink will remedy many, if not all, of these challenges through our proposed service solution.

3. Addressing Critical Needs

Nextlink builds a network with scalability in mind in all elements including last mile and middle mile such that unanticipated subscriber demands or subscriber counts can be quickly addressed. During the unprecedented material surge in traffic in Spring 2020 resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, a substantially higher demand from the Nextlink subscriber base for work at home- and home-schooling applications was experienced. Nextlink was easily able to identify hot spots in the overall network at both the last mile and middle mile and was able to upgrade those areas almost immediately to provide increased capacity.

Nextlink continues to address novel and unprecedented times by being flexible, nimble, and adaptable to new economic requirements as they arise. One of the benefits of being a nimble service provider, is being able to flex and adjust as situations change. Nextlink is a large service provider, but has the ability to bolster that expansive service with a team that is ready to provide agile, read-to-flex, operational capacity.

4. Meeting Critical Needs in an Affordable Way

Nextlink will offer a variety of plan speeds and pricing tiers to meet the needs of any and all customer types and requirements. These plan offerings will include an entry-level, highly affordable option with a minimum speed of 100Mbps down and 100Mbps up for \$49.95. Nextlink is also a participant in the EBBP, ACP and Lifeline programs. The EBBP program offered \$50 monthly discounts (\$75 for tribal customers) and has recently been replaced by the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The ACP offers a \$30 monthly discount (\$75 for tribal customers) to eligible households. By utilizing the ACP \$30 discount, households will be able to afford a functional speed plan for less than \$20 per month.

5. Accessible Solutions for All

Nextlink will offer a variety of plan speeds and pricing tiers to meet the needs of any and all customer types and requirements. These plan offerings will include an entry-level, highly-affordable option with a minimum speed of 100Mbps down and 100Mbps up for \$49.95. Our proposal for project counties includes more than internet connections; it also includes an affordable home price-plan plus access to Nextlink's participation in the FCC Affordable Connectivity Program which provides monthly subscription discounts and computing devices for qualifying households. Moreover, Nextlink Internet strives for a holistic customer experience through its digital skills learning program, provisioning of internet devices, and uniquely favorable subscriber care services. Nextlink has actively partnered with the Microsoft Airband Initiative since 2019. Benefits from our relationship with Airband include access to technical expertise, preferential pricing on innovative technological solutions, as well as digital skills training and a free technical hotline for its customers through PCs for People, another Airband partner. We also collaborate with National 4-H, an additional Airband partner, to deliver a digital skills education program entitled "Tech Changemakers," which empowers youth to train other community members on digital literacy.

6. Affordable Pricing Structure

Nextlink will offer a variety of plan speeds and pricing tiers to meet the needs of any, and all, customer types and requirements. These plan offerings will include an entry-level, highly-affordable option with a minimum speed of 100Mbps down and 100Mbps up for \$49.95. Nextlink is also a participant in the EBBP, ACP and Lifeline programs. The EBBP program offers \$50 monthly discounts (\$75 for tribal customers) and has recently been replaced by the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The ACP offers a \$30 monthly discount (\$75 for tribal customers) to eligible households. By utilizing the ACP \$30 discount, households will be able to afford a functional speed plan for less than \$20 per month. With renewed federal interest in the viability of the ACP program, Nextlink remains committed to offering affordable broadband access to populations who are economically disadvantaged.

7. Outreach Efforts to Relevant Stakeholders

Nextlink has reached out to many community stakeholders throughout this application period. We have been in touch with multiple college and university-level stakeholders. Western Nebraska Community College has provided substantial support through their letters of support (please see Attachment G_7g). Commissioner Knapper has indicated thankfulness for Nextlink's on-going relationship, which has been building over the last 18 months for the area. The Commissioner is grateful that Nextlink is not like other parties who come into an area without first communicating with the community with the sole goal of accomplishing their ends while not considering the means to get there. Nextlink prides itself on being community-first, while not allowing financial interests to dictate its activities.

Please see Attachment G_7g for documentation of our Community Support