

Attachment J – Digital Inclusion
Windstream Services, LLC
2023 Nebraska Capital Project Fund

Introduction

Today, access to reliable high-speed broadband over a dependable infrastructure is essential for commerce, remote work, education, and telehealth. The Internet is firmly woven into civic life, entertainment, and social connectivity. Windstream understands these communication needs and is committed to helping our customers and the communities we serve reach their objectives.

Still many residents and businesses struggle to keep pace in today's digital world because they lack adequate broadband access. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically highlighted the critical need for this problem to be addressed with quality high-speed broadband.

As COVID-19 spread, the very patterns of daily life were disrupted. Many businesses shut their doors and others directed employees to work from home. Teachers, students, and parents scrambled to cope with unexpected demands of remote learning. Medical facilities were heavily impacted and the need for telemedical services rose. Families without adequate broadband service struggled to cope with the lockdown of community life.

To earn a needed paycheck or to allow children to keep up with school studies, many families found themselves driving long distances to sit in parking lots where public Wi-Fi was available. With the threat of virus variants continuing to emerge, the specter of renewed difficulties still hangs over residents and businesses where high-speed broadband access is not available.

To help address these needs, Windstream is seeking grant dollars to assist in deployment of symmetrical gig-speed fiber broadband to homes and businesses identified in this application as lacking in access. The vision of this proposal is to extend symmetric gigabit-speed broadband access to lessen the impact of COVID-19 on the unserved in the project eligibility areas and to allow those impacted to take advantage of remote work opportunities, keep pace with classroom and remote learning challenges, and access real-time telemedicine care.

The 2023 Nebraska Capital Projects Fund (NE CPF 23) grant program is a much-needed opportunity to address these needs and provide greater broadband access to local homes and businesses in this community.

Kinetic by Windstream, the consumer brand under which the company is known to many customers, has been recognized by cNET as 2022's Best Rural Fiber Internet Service Provider and as Best for Fast DSL Internet Speeds.

Windstream brings the expertise and the willingness to deploy a fast, reliable next generation fiber network to address broadband needs of in the project county. Help us move the local communities forward toward a brighter future.

Together, we can deliver fiber fast internet to the local community.

Community Outreach and Engagement

Windstream representatives met with the Seward County Broadband Task Force February 13. Attendees included Seward County Commissioners Misty Ahmic and Darrell Zabrocki; Seward County Chamber President Jonathan Jank and Oliver Borchert-Williams of SENDD. As a result of the information the task force members shared during the meeting, Windstream revised its proposed Project Area to include additional areas, which members of the task force through their own diligence consider to be unserved or underserved. (See attachment M for documentation provided to local officials)

The information reviewed covered the following exchanges in Seward County: Beaver Crossing, Bee, Garland, Pleasant Dale, Seward, and Utica.

Additionally, at the time of this filing, Windstream representatives are tentatively scheduled to meet with the Village of Bee Board of Trustees, Wednesday, March 8th, to review Windstream's application for the Village of Bee.

Low-Income Assistance/ACP

Windstream is proud of its participation two programs that help provide a fast, reliable home internet connection for qualified low-income customers - the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and the Lifeline Assistance Program.

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) supports eligible low- income households struggling to afford monthly internet service. This critical program ensures that households have the connections they need for work, school, healthcare, and more. Starting in January 2022, ACP replaced the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBBP) which was initiated in 2021 to help families and households struggling to afford internet service during the COVID-19 pandemic. ACP provides relief where eligible households can receive a monthly credit of up to \$30, and up to \$75 per month for qualifying households on qualifying Tribal lands. The ACP benefit also provides a discount toward a one-time purchase of a computer, laptop, or tablet and through the program a qualified Windstream customer can purchase a tablet for as low as \$20.

Windstream has seen significant growth in the number of Kinetic by Windstream customers that are taking advantage of this program to receive critical broadband services at home. In the first month of the EBBP, Kinetic had 2,631 subscribers participating. By the end of 2022 those numbers have risen to more than 74,700 subscribers participating in ACP.

To ensure that ACP runs smoothly and meets all federal requirements, Windstream set up an internal ACP team to help provide oversight. The team discusses any new regulations or requirements issued by the FCC, any issues or problems that have arisen, ways to make ACP more efficient, opportunities to improve the growth of the program, and to discuss option to ensure customers are informed about the program.

To be eligible for ACP, customers must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Have an income that is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines;
- Participates in certain assistance programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC, or Lifeline;
- Participates in Tribal specific programs, such as Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations;
- Is approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school breakfast program in the current or immediately preceding school year;
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year; or
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income program.

Kinetic makes efforts to let our current and potential customers know of the program and provides a link to our website for more information. Existing or new customers may apply for ACP through the Windstream website at <https://www.windstream.com/affordable-connectivity-program>. The Windstream website links the customer to the National Verifier to validate support for approval.

Windstream drives awareness of ACP across the footprint through digital initiatives, channel tactics and household level communications. Select segments within the customer base receive incremental communication touchpoints. Positioning of the Affordable Connectivity Program helps keep households/families connected while providing the comfort, confidence and peace of mind knowing they can maintain affordable internet long-term when qualified.

Windstream also participates in a government benefit program called Lifeline, a program aimed at helping make residential telephone or broadband service more affordable to eligible low-income individuals and families. Lifeline discounts are limited to one per household and vary based on customer location and qualifying service.

The program offers a monthly discount limited to one discount per household and can either be applied to wireline or wireless. If applied to wireline the discount can be applied to either voice or broadband service. For the broadband Lifeline discount to apply, a customer must subscribe to service that meets the minimum standard requirements as defined by the FCC. Proof of participation in a qualifying program or proof of income must be provided.

An eligible customer may choose to apply their Lifeline discounts to a qualifying service or carrier. Lifeline credits can only be used with one service and one provider such as Windstream. Customers must renew/recertify each year to continue in the program.

For the purposes of the Lifeline program a household is defined as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address and share income and expenses. Lifeline service is not transferable, and only eligible consumers may enroll in the program.

Current pricing for FttP Broadband in similar Windstream exchanges in Nebraska, along with a statement concerning affordable pricing.

Current Windstream Broadband Pricing

| Speed | Price |
|------------------|----------|
| 500 Mbps | \$ 64.99 |
| 1Gbps | \$ 94.99 |
| Modem Rental (A) | \$ 9.99 |

Additional Information:

- A. Modem charge of \$9.99/month; Customer may provide modem to waive charge
- B. Windstream provides a promotional credit for first 12 months of service

Windstream is committed to digital inclusion and breaking down the digital divide that exists in the unserved and underserved areas. To reflect this commitment, Windstream is prepared to offer a low-income service offering for 100/100 Mbps at a monthly cost of \$49.99. In addition, Windstream has and will continue to participate in federal broadband internet access subsidy programs such as Lifeline or the Affordable Connectivity Program. Any low-income service plan will be eligible to receive additional Lifeline and ACP discounts.

***Under current Windstream consumer offers no annual contract is required for residential customers and Windstream does not charge a termination fee in the event a customer decides to cancel their service. Nor do the offers contain broadband data caps or overage charges.**

Adoption, Digital Literacy, and Digital Inclusion

Windstream is submitting the following examples of Community outreach, in order to improve Digital Literacy and Inclusion, as well as Adoption rates. While Windstream is not submitting a specific plan at this time, our State and Government Affairs team will work with local Windstream retail and network operations team, to formulate an approach that not only reaches the communities being affected by this project, but also as an outreach to our service area in general, in Seward County, Nebraska. Windstream plans to work with local officials to identify and pursue programs particularly helpful for Nebraska residents.

Kinetic Digital Inclusion and Literacy in 2022

Throughout the 18-state Kinetic footprint, both in person and online, Kinetic by Windstream is committed to digital inclusion and literacy for our customers and the communities we serve. We are investing in our network to bring individual and community level access to robust broadband connections, internet-enabled devices that meet customers' needs and building the skills to explore, create and collaborate in the digital world.

Education

- Kinetic Scholars – Kinetic awarded scholarships for continuing education, including STEM, in communities across our footprint. In 2022, the company awarded approximately \$20,000 to students in six states.
- Kinetic has worked with local partners to teach Digital Literacy classes and Broadband 101 Senior center classes in Kentucky.
- Kinetic has funded technology grants for educational organizations in Ohio and Pennsylvania.
 - Kinetic provides support resources directly to customers through welcome emails and face-to-face interactions with retail employees and technicians who install their service. The company also provides an online customer portal and YouTube videos to troubleshoot common issues that arise. ○ [Welcome Center](#)
 - Email 101
 - Getting The Most out of Your Wi-Fi Speed
 - How to Use the Go Kinetic App
 - Gateway Troubleshooting

Business and Workforce Development

- The Black Business Support Fund awards small business owners with monetary grants, free internet service and business consultations. Since 2020, the program has awarded \$300,000 in grants to businesses across the footprint.
- Kinetic hosted seminars for Chamber of Commerce Economic Development in Kentucky.
- Kinetic participated in Georgia Municipal Association rural broadband summit panel.
- Kinetic participates in Job Fair & Career Day at high schools and technical colleges, including on-site technician vehicles & fiber splicing equipment to demonstrate the technology. The company also uses videos to educate potential employees about job opportunities with the company and in the industry, along with skills necessary to be successful.

Community Participation

- Computer training/internet accessibility community partnerships in Ohio.
- Town Hall meetings to share the coming fiber investment through Georgia State Fiscal Recovery Funds

- Community Grants for various organizations in communities we serve (United Way, humane societies, domestic violence shelters, economic development and veteran support groups) to ensure technological resources are up to date.
- Connected device giveaways at events across the footprint.

Customer Support –

At Windstream, our customers are at the center of everything that we do, and we know that their need for flexibility and convenience has never been greater. As a result, we offer many methods of customer support. We strive to make it easy for customers to communicate with us and to obtain information about their products and services.

To help customers get the most out of their broadband service, Windstream technicians provide basic product information and assistance in connecting to broadband upon installation, and support is available via 800 numbers, online chat, and email enabling customers to address specific issues. The company has robust customer support at windstream.com and how-to videos are available on YouTube.

Windstream also offers consumers a helpful Go KinetiC app to assist them in getting the most out of their broadband. The Go KinetiC app gives a customer access to all the critical account information about their KinetiC services. By setting up a Go KinetiC account, customers will be able to personalize their KinetiC services, manage Wi-Fi devices, get support via live chat, or view and pay their bill online. It is a fast and easy way to manage their Wi-Fi experience.

Go KinetiC puts account information, answers, and convenience at our customers' fingertips 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Go KinetiC is accessible via a web browser on a desktop, laptop or mobile device. Customers can also download the Go KinetiC App.

Go KinetiC is accessible anytime and anywhere, and it's filled with service-related features. Customers can:

- Access account and service information
- View and pay their bill online
- Set up AutoPay and Paperless Billing
- Easily manage Wi-Fi password, access and more
- Live chat
- Track orders and support requests
- Conduct speed tests
- Track the location of their technician when they have an appointment
- Securely register devices
- Review customized special offers
- Refer friends and family to receive a reward

Customers can create an account by visiting <https://my.gokinetic.com> or via the Go KinetiC app on their mobile device.