

# Request for Information

Internet Service  
Provider's Network  
Potential in Jefferson  
County

Released March 4, 2024

**THIS IS A REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI) ONLY.** This RFI is issued solely for information and planning purposes- it does not constitute a Request for Proposals (RFP) or a promise to issue an RFP in the future. Jefferson County may or may not award a contract based on this RFI, nor does this RFI commit the County to contract for any supply or service whatsoever. Failure to respond to this RFI does not preclude participation in any future RFP, if any issued.

Jefferson County will treat your response as the preliminary proposal for the purposes of selecting a Respondent to further define a potential project. The county is advising that all interested vendors will not pay for any information or administrative costs incurred in response to this RFI. All costs associated with responding to this RFI will be solely at the interested party’s expense.

## **1. OPPORTUNITY SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose**

Jefferson County (“County”) is issuing this Request for Information (“RFI”) to receive information from qualified respondents as to the installation of broadband network in un/underserved areas of Jefferson County – see potential project areas Exhibit A – and any other parts of the County that Respondents can serve. It is the County’s intent to use the information gathered from this request to strategize the development of a broadband network that provides opportunity to connect every household and business in the potential areas. The County will also use this information to make a 2024 Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) POWER grant application. It is the County's intent to seek up to \$2.5 million dollars from the ARC’s "Broadband as a Service" grant to contract with a selected partner to provide their high-speed Internet services to the residents and businesses in the Priority Areas, identified in the map as part of this document.

### **Background**

For many years, a growing digital divide caused by a broadband network that has failed to deliver has plagued Jefferson County and the broader region. For too many residents, broadband internet is simply not available. For many others the services offered are unreliable and expensive. Amid the global pandemic that highlighted the issue of the growing digital divide, numerous conversations, at multiple levels of the community, have taken place to find ways to address these problems without yet providing a comprehensive path forward to achieving the goal of better broadband.

To fulfill its role of furthering the development of a coherent broadband strategy for the county, it is crucial that we have a clear understanding of the plans and intentions of the various Internet Service Providers (“ISPs”) that operate in the county. The County therefore issues this Request for Information (RFI) to determine the interest of

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private entities to collaborate with the County to address the lack of broadband infrastructure in several parts of the County. The County seeks ideas and interest from private entities regarding bringing higher speed broadband to currently- un/underserved County homes and businesses in the less dense parts of the County over privately constructed and owned communications infrastructure. To support the collaboration, the County can assist in seeking federal and state grant funding, providing access to community assets and rights-of-way (ROW), navigating the permitting process, and offering any other reasonable support the County can bring to the collaboration.

The County understands that the geography and population density of the rural parts of the County may require creative options for ubiquitous broadband deployment. As such, the County is open to considering all types of last-mile wireless solutions.

In responses to this RFI, the County seeks to learn how the respondent’s approach will further the County’s goals of ensuring that residents, businesses, and visitors to our community have access to market-leading broadband services.

The County also seeks input from potential partners regarding the terms and conditions under which they would participate in such a project. We are prepared to consider a variety of business models that may share technological and operational responsibilities and financial risk between the partners and the County in innovative ways.

The County encourages all respondents to share their expertise to shape the direction and form of this potential initiative. Respondents may work together to reply to this RFI. The County is open to creative solutions that will maximize private investment, as well as state and federal broadband funding, while providing reliable and high-quality services to meet its citizens’ needs.

The County welcomes responses from all prospective partners, including incumbent service providers, competitive providers, nonprofit organizations, public cooperatives, and entities that are not traditional internet service providers (ISPs) but are interested in acting as a partner in offering service under innovative business models. Nontraditional providers may respond as part of a partnership with an ISP or may provide separate responses outlining their approaches.

The County will review responses based on the respondents’ experience, how well the responses address the County’s objectives, how the proposed business model balances and shares risks and rewards, and other factors. The County may provide more detailed information on available assets to one or more respondents and ask those respondents to refine their responses.

Following the evaluation of responses, the County may issue a request for more detail relating to the County-initiated project, cancel or delay plans to deploy a network, or choose another

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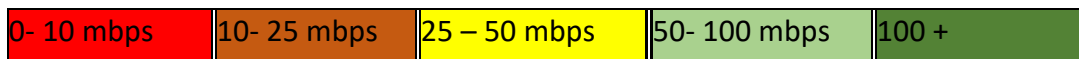
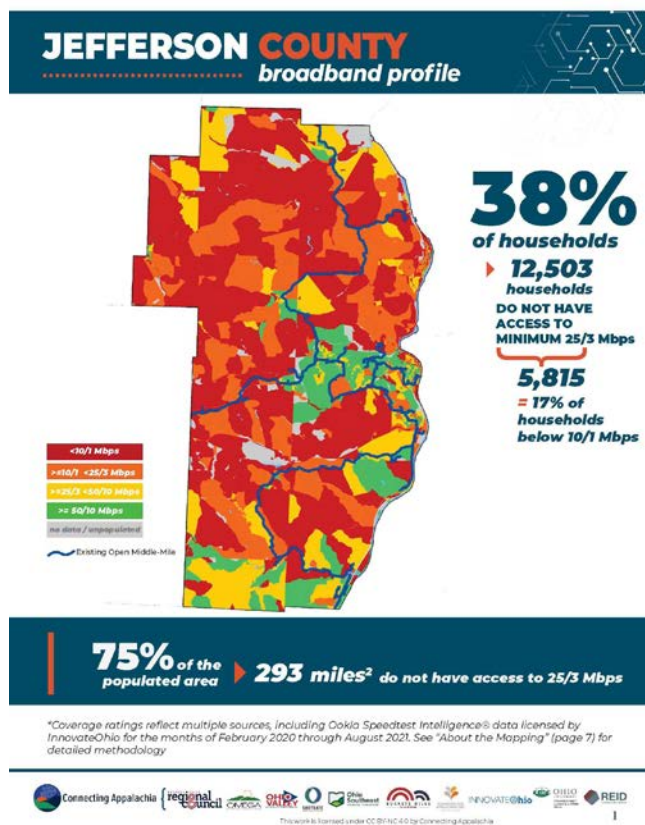
direction that the County may deem to be in its best interest.

Responding to the RFI is not a guarantee of a contract award. Further, there is no guarantee the County will develop an RFP because of this RFI. The County reserves the right to withdraw the RFI or any subsequent RFP, or to decline to award a contract.

### Current Broadband Status in Jefferson County

The digital divide in the County is stark and in need of urgent attention. Based on findings from Ookla Speedtest Intelligence data analysis carried out by the Ohio Mideastern Government’s Association through Reid Consulting Group, it is County’s position that approximately 75% of the geographic area of the county lacks access to the 100/20 speed that is available in the well-served areas of the county (see Fig. 1 below)

**Fig. 1 Speedtest Data showing 75% of the geographic area of the county as underserved.**



To remedy this problem, and considering the results of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund

(“RDOF”) auction results in the county, the County has identified potential project investment areas that we are seeking to gain potential interests ISPs to expand their planned RDOF and HB 2 investments into the areas identified in Exhibit A.

## **2. INQUIRIES AND SCHEDULE OF EVENTS**

### **Inquiries**

Following the RFI Issue Date, Respondents may make inquiries regarding this RFI at any time prior to the Response Due Date to Michael Paprocki at [mikepap@bhjmpc.org](mailto:mikepap@bhjmpc.org)

### **Schedule of Events**

#### **Response Deadline**

Final RFI submissions must in PDF format and be received via email no later than April 1, 2024, by 4:00 PM EST. Please send to Michael Paprocki at [mikepap@bhjmpc.org](mailto:mikepap@bhjmpc.org).

#### **Summary of RFI Process Deadlines**

The following is the schedule for responding to this RFI. The schedule is subject to change:

March 4, 2024 – RFI issued

March 15, 2024 —Deadline for submitting questions about RFI

March 22, 2024– Responses to questions issued

April 1, 2024 – RFI responses due

Jefferson County thanks you in advance for your thoughtful response. We look forward to the opportunity to work with the private sector to meet our community’s broadband goals.

## **3. RESPONSE FORMAT**

Please submit a PDF document of no more than 15 pages that contains the following information:

### **A. Respondent Contact Information**

Please submit a Cover letter that includes company name, address of corporate headquarters, address of nearest local office, contact name for response, and that person’s contact

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information (address, phone, cell, email).

**B. Collaboration Proposal**

Please summarize the business model you intend to use for the collaboration with the County. This should be a concise explanation of the key components of your business model, including but not limited to the division of network and operations responsibility and ownership, as well as a discussion of what you would expect from the County as part of this collaboration. How would your business plan help to meet the County’s goals? What are your main areas of risk, and how can the County help reduce the risks? What are the County’s main areas of risk, and how will you attempt to reduce the risk to the County? How much cash/donation value would your company be willing to put into the project?

**C. Respondent Experience**

Please provide a statement of experience discussing past performance, capabilities, and qualifications. Please share such information as other networks you operate and other partnerships with governments or nonprofit entities. Describe the nature of the projects and your firm’s role. For entities currently providing communications services in or near Jefferson County, please describe your current service footprint in the County and the region, including a description of the type of infrastructure and services you currently offer, and the technology platform(s) used.

**D. Technical and Operational Approach**

At a high level, please share the technological and operational approach you would use for this project.

**E. Schedule**

Please describe your proposed schedule for implementing service. Offer a timeline with key milestones.

**F. Financing and Funding**

Please clearly describe any financial requirements the County must meet for you to collaborate with the County on this project

**G. Services**

Please describe the service options you plan to offer over this network.

**4. DISCLAIMER**

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The intent of this RFI is to obtain proposals. There may or may not be an award. There is no contractual relationship established by submission of a proposal to this RFI. If the County uses public funding to secure any products or services based on information submitted in response to this RFI, the County will use appropriate procurement and application procedures. The County is not in any position to guarantee that any public funding will result from this RFI. County reserves the right to cancel this RFI, modify the RFI, modify the process, or the scope of the project. This RFI does not commit the County, or any of its members, to enter any contractual relationship with any respondent.

Expenses incurred by the Respondents in developing, preparing, or submitting any information, documentation or other materials in response to this RFI and/or by attending meetings directly or indirectly related to this RFI are entirely the responsibility of the Respondents and at their own risk and expense. The County will neither pay nor reimburse Respondents or its members for development, preparation and/or submission of any information, documentation or other materials in response to this RFI.

## **5. PROPOSAL EVALUATION**

The County will evaluate all proposals using the following criteria to conduct a best-value evaluation:

1. Experience and qualifications of the provider. (20 points)
2. A clear understanding of this project. (15 points)
3. Speed of services provided. (15 points)
4. Offering Affordable Connectivity Program service. (15 points)
5. Amount of the ISP investment i.e.: Cash, In-Kind Value (15 points)
6. Providing broadband service outside the proposed investment areas. (10 points)
7. Timeline to build out from notice to proceed. (10 points)

After evaluating all proposals, the local project partner team, comprised of County representatives, and a third-party consultant may choose to interview the top candidates.

Jefferson County reserves the right to accept or reject any, and all proposals or to waive any irregularities and reserves the right to award one ISP per investment area or any combination thereof.



EXHIBIT A:  
Potential Project Areas

