

Lafayette County, Missouri
Request for Information (RFI) # 2022-001
Missouri Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program

Finley Engineering
on behalf of the Lafayette County Commission



Table of Contents

1.0	INTRODUCTION	3
2.0	BACKGROUND	4
3.0	INFORMATION REQUESTED	5
4.0	QUESTIONS, RESPONSE, DUE DATE	6
5.0	OTHER INFORMATION	7

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Lafayette County Commission has been engaging local stakeholder and advisory group to digital inequities and barriers to access, adoption, and utilization of broadband by residents, businesses, and institutions. The Missouri Department of Economic Development has opened a grant round for broadband expansion with applications due on Thursday, September 29, 2022. The County Commission wishes to embark upon a process to assist in broadband expansion with public private partnerships.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Broadband expansion has been determined to be a high priority by the County Commission and as such allocated within the annual budget an amount not to exceed \$1,000,000 to be funded from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in support of broadband expansion projects.

One of the strategies under consideration by County leadership is to provide matching funds to assist an ISP with their submission to the Missouri Broadband Infrastructure 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.

Lafayette seeks to catalyze the expansion of broadband in the county. In keeping with the requirements of ARPA, the County is gauging the interest of service providers who desire to expand into the county. 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 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 preference in assisting projects that include a fiber deployment for last mile and middle mile deployments exceeding the 100 Mbps symmetrical speed threshold. County also has a preference is to expand into new service areas, not just upgrade existing service areas.

Lafayette 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:

Lafayette 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 97.21% of the rural parts of the County can buy 25/3 Mbps broadband. According to the FCC, about 918 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.

Broadband Report: Lafayette County was selected as a lead participant in a Pilot Program by the University of Missouri Extension Office to expand broadband in rural, underserved areas. This report is available upon request and can provide a foundation for support of broadband expansion in the County.

3.0 INFORMATION REQUESTED

The goal of this RFI is to gather level of interest by the private sector in applying for the Missouri Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program and securing grant funding to build a robust broadband network that resolves deficiencies and service gaps for citizens in rural Lafayette 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 allocated within the annual budget not to exceed \$1,000,000.00 in support of broadband expansion projects.

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 Commission a summary of interest for discussion and determination of next steps. Of note, this RFI is for planning purposes and should not be construed as an obligation on the part of the County to make matching funds available. Should Lafayette County choose to proceed based on information obtained in this RFI, the County Commission will determine next steps.

Respondents will need to complete sections of the Missouri Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program labeled Addendum A. Respondents are also **required** to send a project boundary in .kmz or shapefile format, along with the highlighted attachments within the Addendum with their response so the County may analyze the area being considered. The County wishes to support as many projects as funds will allow, please be specific in what match support you are requesting of the County within your Missouri broadband grant exercise.

Respondents can include:

Last Mile Internet Service Providers - Finley Engineering seeks responses from Last Mile¹ Internet Service Providers on their interest in expanding broadband in rural Lafayette 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 Lafayette 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

¹ Last-mile is defined as broadband infrastructure that connects directly to the end-use (household, business or farm).

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 refers the interested parties to the footnote for definition of middle mile².

4.0 QUESTIONS, RESPONSE, DUE DATE

- 4.1 Questions regarding this RFI may be e-mailed to the following:
Sam Tennant
Assistant Director, Broadband Consulting, Finley Engineering
E-Mail: s.tennant@finleyusa.com

Questions posed by the provider community will be answered as soon as they are received and will be collected for all providers to see responses.

Responses to this RFI must be submitted to the e-mail address provided above by **5:00 p.m. (Central Time) on Tuesday, September 13, 2022.**

- 4.2 Respondents are to submit responses in a pdf format consistent with the content and instructions provided herein to the email listed above. Except for the budget template in Excel format and the project area boundary in KMZ or in shapefile format.

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 Missouri 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 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 failure to respond to this RFI will not disqualify any party**

² 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.

from being considered in future solicitations.

5.5 Experience in Lafayette County:

Please provide a brief history with connection to and/or past experience and performance in Lafayette County:

5.6 Broadband Funding Programs:

Please detail any broadband funding program applied and/or awarded within the last four years in Missouri (last-mile or middle-mile) including the funding program (State of Missouri, FCC, USDA, NTIA, or any other Federal agency), date of the request, amount applied/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, whichever is most convenient. Please be concise (please provide additional pages if needed for response):