

# Community Broadband Capital

## Economic Development Tools



In 2012, Story County established its Economic Development Process and Policies, to clearly define the prioritization of potential tax increment financing (TIF) revenues. Within this, five types of economic development projects may be considered through the County's Urban Renewal Area Program, one encapsulating broadband projects - "Communication and Utility Infrastructure Expansion. Furthermore, the Board of Supervisors identified the need to commit staff and resources to the broadband discussion with the following language in the adopted Strategic Plan: "Update and expand broadband connectivity needs assessment throughout Story County and explore options for expansion of services." Staff members from Planning and Development, Story County Assessor's Office, Board of Supervisors office, and others have all been assigned responsibilities to help move broadband forward within Story County.



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## Cash



Story County received \$18.9 million in total funding from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Knowing that funds must be obligated by the end of 2024 and spent by the end of 2026, in the spring of 2021, the Board of Supervisors designed an approach to solicit input on the best use of the funding, accepted applications and approved projects. Throughout the summer of 2021, Story County reflected on specific community needs and lessons learned to date in pandemic response and recovery, asking the community for input on the funds. One of the three priorities for the highest and best strategic uses of the funding to serve the citizens of Story County based on the input that was received included investments in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure.

The Story County Board of Supervisors committed up to \$500/location (cap of \$30,000) as a local match to providers in Story County for the application to OCIO's NOFA #006. Through this, Colo Telephone, Huxley Communications, and Stratford Regional Telephone will receive \$65,500 total from Story County.



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## Rights of Way



The permitting process in Story County has been created with the intention of creating the least amount of unnecessary hassle for the broadband providers. The permit is only a one-page form, with attached maps and/or their installation plans. The focus of review by Story County is mainly concerned with the effect on bridges, culverts, and underground tiles. If we have concerns about an application, we do not deny it, we enter into a conversation with the applicant in order to find a solution that works not just for the County, but the applicant as well.

Another way we have streamlined the process is not taking more than one week on a single permit, the application is then put on the County Board of Supervisors agenda for final approval. We keep the Board of Supervisors in the loop throughout the process. That way once it officially comes before them there are not any surprises. This keeps business going throughout the County. Once the permit is signed, the utility does agree to move their line at their cost if the line needs to be moved for future road improvements. That way we won't have to relocate again and costs for all the parties involved are minimized.



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**PROPOSAL TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO STORY COUNTY SERVICE PROVIDERS  
FOR APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING FROM THE  
EMPOWER RURAL IOWA BROADBAND GRANT PROGRAM**

On July 1, 2021 the Office of the Chief Information Officer issued Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) #006, for the Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant Program, making available up to \$97,500,000 for broadband expansion in Iowa. The Application Acceptance Window is from July 1 – July 26, 2021, during which time communication service providers may submit applications for grant funding under the program. This grant round is based on renewed Targeted Service Area determinations published in an updated version of the Statewide Broadband Availability Map V4 as of 7/1/21.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Story County was aware of ongoing needs for greater broadband connectivity through the county. Dating back to 2014, when Story County became a Connect Iowa community, we recognized the pivotal role technology plays in how businesses operate, how services are provided, and the degree to which our citizens need reliable internet access. Our Strategic Plan built on that work, stating that we will “Update and expand broadband connectivity needs assessment throughout Story County and explore options for expansion of services.” COVID-19 cemented our commitment and dedication to addressing these needs.

Story County staff have been working with the Greater Des Moines Partnership (GDMP) to assess broadband needs in Story County and through the Central Iowa Region. The OCIO’s map update identifies several significant areas of Story County where broadband falls within the tiers (categorized by download/upload speeds) identified by the Legislature and the OCIO as not being adequate. The results of the GDMP survey also show several underserved areas in Story County.

Four local telephone companies provide internet service through fiber in Story County. All plan to apply to the funding through the Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant Program. Details about their plans, and staff’s recommendation for Story County providing matching funds, are shown in the chart below.

<b>Service Provider</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Approximate # of New Locations</b>	<b>Funding to be requested</b>	<b>Proposed Match: \$500/location, cap of \$30,000</b>
Colo Telephone	Between Nevada and Colo	11	\$100,000	\$5,500
Huxley Communications	Rural Maxwell and Iowa Center	1091	\$5,250,000	\$30,000
Minerva Valley Telephone	Rural McCallsburg	8	\$271,000	\$4,000
Stratford Regional Telephone	Rural Roland, west to Hwy 69, south to 170th	120	\$2,400,000	\$30,000