

## DOCUMENT 1.1

In 2019, Osage Municipal Utilities applied for a USDA ReConnect Grant. In early winter of 2019, we were notified that we were successful in our grant application. The focus of the grant was on the community of Mitchell, Iowa. The community of Mitchell is directly north of Osage and has a population of 131 residents. Mitchell is a little renaissance community as they have the state of Iowa's largest fireworks company, a restaurant, a hydroelectric dam, campground, bike trail, two vineyards, construction companies, microgreens business and a variety of other entrepreneur spirited businesses.

More importantly this community is home to many students who call the Osage Community Schools home. These students are part of the "have not's" within our school district. The students who live in Mitchell are extremely limited in their ability to learn online. The Osage Schools is a one-to-one district and expect students to do online learning.

As a former educator, legislator, and current member of the Iowa State Board of Education, I understand the importance of connectivity for online learning equity. That was one of my main drivers in writing the USDA grant in the spring of 2019 was to get these kids connected and become part of the "haves" of our school.

Move forward to the spring of 2020 and we get hit with the COVID pandemic. Unfortunately, the students who resided in Mitchell were sent home to do online learning. That was a disaster as I had parents calling me crying that they needed to figure out a solution for their children and asked me about the USDA grant money. Unfortunately, we were not able to begin moving on the grant as it had to go through a lot of hoops prior to bidding the project. Many of the students who had no connectivity before could at least go to a local library in Osage to get connectivity to do online schooling, with COVID, that option was taken away.

In addition to the local students from our k-12 system, we have college students that had to return home in the spring of 2020 due to COVID. Many of those students faced challenges doing their online learning due to limited connectivity. There is no guarantee that it will be any different this fall or next spring. We also must factor in that adult learner who has now lost their job to COVID and may be using funding to go back to school and being upskilled or retrained. How will they be able to complete that education if they do not have the connectivity. This is truly a barrier that affects all levels of education.

We were finally given the green light to bid out our project in June of 2020 and the bids all came in very high. The contractors are very busy with projects and we do not have a lot of contractors to choose from in our area. These factors have made our project costs increase significantly. As of today, we have gone back to the drawing board to try and figure out how to make this project viable financially given the current bids. The contractors are providing very high bids as they do not need the work. There is a lot of money going towards connectivity right now and COVID has only made the situation more critical.

I am applying for this grant in hopes that we can make this a local, state, and federal project. With these funds we will be able to get this project back on track and completed. I am so close to bringing connectivity to these residents and most importantly these students. I am not going to quit trying to find a way to make this project work financially and this grant would get us to the point where the project overcomes the financial hurdle that put the project on hold.

These are emergency federal funds to help us through the COVID pandemic and I truly believe that my project came in over budget due to the COVID epidemic due to the pressure it put on connectivity needs.

## DOCUMENT 1.2

My wife is a nurse practitioner in family practice and emergency room care at the Mitchell County Regional Health Center in Osage. I understand the impact that COVID has had on the healthcare community and the patients they serve.

During the height of the crisis in our county, my wife had patients who were afraid to come to the clinic and be seen for fear they might contract COVID. Telemedicine and telehealth became a critical tool in seeing patients with chronic health conditions. Not only did we have to worry about the patients directly impacted with COVID, but we also needed to worry about the patients who were being indirectly impacted.

The region I have outlined for this grant do not have the connectivity needed to take care of their health needs online. Once again, we have the "have" and "have not's" when talking connectivity. To think that our insurance providers would loosen the restrictions on telehealth visits via the internet was unheard of. Now it will probably become common practice.

To think we have residents, who are afraid to go the hospital for fear of COVID and are sitting at home taking risks with medications and pre-existing conditions, when all they need is connectivity to see a physician, is saddening.

Think of all the new advances that come because of COVID. Remote heart monitoring equipment, oxygen sensors, thermometers, insulin monitoring, etc.... These residents in my grant are unable to take advantage of those advances due to lack of connectivity. These emergency funds will be put to great use and will ultimately save a life.



### DOCUMENT 1.3

To complete the USDA, ReConnect Grant I had to go out and get letters of support for the grant. I literally went back to my campaign days of door knocking. I knocked on every door and talked to every resident of Mitchell and the surrounding area. I learned a lot about Mitchell.

The think I learned the most is that Mitchell is a community of entrepreneurs. I was amazed at all the business diversity in a community of 131 residents.

Mitchell has the following:

- 2 vineyards
- 2 contractors who build machine sheds
- Stihl Dealership
- Bar/Restaurant
- National Recognized Fireworks Company (shoot the fireworks for the Iowa State Fair)
- A microgreens farmer
- HVAC Business
- Art of Education (most recently approved college in the state of Iowa)
- Numerous telecommuters
- Diesel repair shop
- Campground
- Hydroelectric dam
- Seed dealers
- Bee farmers

The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Mitchell. They could do so much more if they only had connectivity. It blew my mind that these people have not given up due to lack of connectivity and I am also excited about the potential expansion when they do get connectivity.

I have two stories to share with you. The first story is about Flashing Thunder Fireworks which a family run business responsible for the fireworks show each night at the Iowa State Fair. As you can imagine, COVID has destroyed their fireworks business this year as most of their shows have been cancelled. They must purchase their fireworks a year in advance as they are shipped over from China. This company tries to use a wireless internet signal to operate a national business. When COVID hit they reached out to me in despair and said that they realized our USDA grant was a work in progress, but if there was any chance we could get them connected it would help them move product online. They were worried if they could not do online sales, they would have to close their doors. Osage Municipal Utilities went to Mitchell and tapped into our fiber trunk line, that runs through Mitchell, and hooked up this business at our own expense. It was the right thing to do and we not going to let COVID take down a great family run business. Online sales were a game changer for them, and their doors are still open.

The second business in Mitchell is an online university, The Art of Education. The Art of Education was started by a husband and wife and went from a blog for art teachers to an online master's degree program for art teachers across the nation. Their business has flourished during COVID as their model is COVID proof. They currently have over 60 faculty and staff all over the United States as part of their

university. The headquarters for their business started out at their home in Mitchell, but due to connectivity issues they rented an office space in Osage to get the connectivity needed. They have three little children and when COVID hit they were forced to do more work from home to be with the kids and they have faced challenges due to lack of connectivity. They would love to build out their headquarters in Mitchell, but connectivity is a limiting factor.

I also know of multiple people in Mitchell who were asked to work from home but were unable to because of connectivity issues. They had to find space in friends and family homes to continue to work, which was contradictory to staying in isolation.

The list of stories is long, and I feel that you get a picture of the challenges experienced by residents in Mitchell. These emergency funds applied to this situation are exactly what the funding was meant for. They are going to meet the needs of education, health, and business.