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Deadline Extended for Broadband Expansion Pilot Project in SE Ohio

Project spurs public-private partnerships to bring broadband to unserved households

(COLUMBUS, Ohio) — BroadbandOhio, a division of the Development Services Agency, has extended the grant application period for the MARCS Tower Pilot Program. ***The deadline to submit an application is now April 2, 2021.*** The project is aimed at expanding broadband using existing technology through MARCS towers located in Scioto and Jackson Counties, in Southeastern Ohio.

This innovative approach builds upon the goal of BroadbandOhio by enhancing and expanding high-speed internet access to unserved and underserved Ohioans, particularly those in the Appalachia region of the state, by creatively leveraging state assets.

Multi-Agency Radio Communications System towers, also known as MARCS towers, are part of a statewide, wireless, digital communication network that allows emergency and law enforcement personnel to communicate instantly during emergencies. This project gives Internet Service Providers an opportunity to apply for a grant through the state to attach to **six towers** in Scioto and Jackson Counties, ultimately providing low-cost internet to unserved households in the area.

The project is made possible through collaboration between InnovateOhio, the Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS), and the Development Services Agency (DSA). MARCS towers, which today help our emergency responders communicate in a crisis, were purchased with tax-exempt bonds, limiting the ability for private companies to co-locate equipment on the tower. However, DAS was able to convert these into taxable bonds, thereby eliminating this restriction. DAS will hold the master license agreement with the company looking to co-locate on the tower.

The grant allows for telecommunications providers to locate on one of these towers, at no cost to the provider. DSA will evaluate companies based upon the speeds that they will provide, the equipment used to provide the service, the range of the signal, as well as the cost of the service to the end user. The goal is to find a solution that will both bring internet to places that currently lack service and do so at an affordable price.

Eligible applicants include any telecommunications provider who is interested in using the towers to broadcast an internet signal to the surrounding community. Providers will need to meet or exceed the federal definition of high-speed internet, which is 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload.

The grant application is currently open and will close at **5 p.m. on Friday, April 2, 2021**. Visit development.ohio.gov to apply and learn more.

In addition, a pre-submission grantee conference will be held March 10, 2021 at 11 a.m. via WebEx.

Representatives from BroadbandOhio and the Ohio Department of Administrative Services will be available to answer questions about the program and the grant application.

Register for the grantee conference here:

<https://ohio.webex.com/ohio/onstage/g.php?MTID=efef7efa0adb578fba7e7378a264f9ce0>

This project is another broadband initiative that builds upon the DeWine-Husted Administration's efforts to expand and enhance broadband connectivity for businesses and families throughout Ohio.

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