Governor Cooper Announces More Than $12 million to Expand Internet Access

Projects in 11 rural counties awarded GREAT grants and COVID-19 Recovery Act funding

Raleigh

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People living and working in 11 rural counties will get expanded high-speed internet service thanks to more than $12 million in grants awarded by Governor Roy Cooper's administration. Governor Cooper, along with the NC Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) and its Broadband Infrastructure Office (BIO), announced today the award of the 2019-2020 Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) grant and COVID-19 Recovery Act funding.

The winning projects are expected to connect 8,017 families and 254 businesses, farms and community institutions to high-speed internet.

"With this pandemic, high-speed internet access is even more important for remote education, telemedicine and small businesses," Gov. Cooper said. "These projects will help bridge the digital divide in 11 rural counties, so these communities can access important services and participate in our increasingly digital society and economy."

The announcement comes during Rural Broadband Week, which Gov. Cooper declared to encourage efforts to get more rural North Carolina communities connected to high-speed internet.

Building on the success of its inaugural round of grants last year, the GREAT grant program provides matching grants to internet service providers and electric membership cooperatives that compete for funding to expand high-speed internet service in Tier 1 counties.

Additionally, the COVID-19 Recovery Act, recognizing the increased importance of broadband expansion in light of the pandemic, allocated funding for eligible projects.

“Too many North Carolinians lack access to the lifeline that high-speed internet connectivity offers. This divide is especially stark, currently, when residents are being asked to work, learn, access services and interact online more than ever,” acting NCDIT Secretary and State Chief Information Officer Thomas Parrish said. “Because of the GREAT grants, thousands of households and hundreds of businesses in our state will finally have more options to connect, compete and thrive.”

Eleven providers and cooperatives were awarded $10,244,195 for projects in the following 11 counties, connecting 6,860 households and 243 businesses, agricultural operations and community anchor institutions to broadband. GREAT grant recipients include:

County — Applicant/Provider

- Bertie — Roanoke Connect Holdings
- Columbus — Atlantic Telephone Membership Corporation
- Duplin — CenturyLink
- Edgecombe — CloudWyze, Inc.
- Graham — Zito Media
- Greene — Nfinity Link Communications Inc.
- Martin — CloudWyze, Inc.
- Nash — CloudWyze, Inc.
- Robeson — Atlantic Telephone Membership Corporation
- Rockingham — Spectrum Southeast, LLC
- Swain — Sky Wave, Inc.

An additional award of $2 million from COVID-19 Recovery Act funding will enable broadband deployments in a second area of Robeson County, connecting 1,157 households and 11 businesses, agricultural operations and community anchor institutions to broadband.

County — Applicant/Provider

- Robeson — Spectrum Southeast, LLC

Six more last-mile broadband projects, located in Columbus, Duplin, Graham and Swain Counties, are under consideration for COVID-19 Recovery Act funding.

An announcement regarding those projects will be made in the coming weeks.

Applicants are scored based on the number of households, businesses and agricultural operations they propose to serve, the average cost to serve those households and the speeds offered. Applicants receive higher awards for agreeing to provide higher speed service, defined as a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. All awards are contingent on final executed grant agreements with these broadband provider partners.

Launched in 2018, the GREAT grant program previously awarded nearly $10 million for 20 projects in 18 Tier 1 counties to connect more than 10,000 households, businesses and agricultural operations. The program will expand to include Tier 2 counties in the upcoming grant cycle.

About the Broadband Infrastructure Office

NCDIT's Broadband Infrastructure Office leads the statewide initiatives to expand high-speed internet access, adoption and use for all North Carolinians. In 2019, Gov. Roy Cooper issued Executive Order 91 (EO91), which lays out clear directives to expand broadband across the state through a task force comprised of cabinet agencies, which the office facilitates and supports.

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