Virginia Growth and Opportunity Fund (GO Virginia)

Regional Broadband Infrastructure Project Guidance

Section I: GO Virginia Program Intent

GO Virginia's goal is to facilitate regional collaboration to grow and diversify the economy through supporting projects leading to the creation of more, higher paying jobs through revenue derived from out-of-state sources. Programs and projects recommended by the Regional Councils and approved by the GO Virginia state board shall be consistent with the strategies and targeted industry clusters outlined in the regional growth and diversification plans.

Section II: REGIONAL BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

The 2018-2020 State Budget (Item 106.M4 and Item 106.M5) directed the Broadband Taskforce to develop a framework that provides guidance to the types of broadband initiatives the GO Virginia Board may approve. The group prioritized the use of broadband to effectively link economic clusters and help Virginia companies and residents enjoy a competitive edge while growing the economy in each region.

GO Virginia funds may be used to support regional planning efforts that inform and encourage private sector broadband infrastructure build out. GO Virginia funds may be used to fund middle-mile broadband infrastructure projects, including, but not limited to, fiber and conduit, that extend telecommunications networks in partnership with the private sector and focus on meeting the business needs of a community.

GO Virginia funds may not be used to support broadband projects focused on providing residential broadband service to customers (also known as "last mile"). Applicants interested in support for last-mile broadband grants should refer to the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI).

The Virginia Growth and Opportunity Board authorizes DHCD to accept per capita and competitive grant applications consistent with GO Virginia Board Policy #8 – Use of GO Virginia Funds for Investments in Broadband.

Regions may request funds for two types of activities:
1. PLANNING
   a) Regional Planning and Broadband Strategic Design Support

2. IMPLEMENTATION
   a) Middle-mile broadband infrastructure projects, including but not limited to fiber and conduit, which extend telecommunications networks, in partnership with the private sector and focus on meeting the business needs of a community, and/or
   b) Related digital literacy and internet relevance programming connected to business growth and expansion opportunities.

Section III: Application Process

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING GRANTS

Match Requirement: $2:1 (no Local Match required)

These regional broadband plans should present middle-mile broadband infrastructure opportunities that fill identified gaps, identify potential sources of matching funds for future implementation projects, and include a proposed timeline for implementation. The plans should include an inventory of assets (infrastructure such as cell/electric towers, employment centers, etc.), engineering designs, and cost estimates for implementation. Funds may also be used to integrate existing local plans and/or update regional plans.

Applicants must demonstrate a commitment to a planning process that engages a variety of stakeholders. Applicants should describe the outreach and engagement strategy for relevant stakeholders such as business and industry, current middle mile providers, private and public Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and/or Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs), private utility companies, public utility cooperatives, localities, regional planning organizations, and regional economic development organizations.

Applicants are encouraged to use Commonwealth Connect's Broadband Toolkit as a resource to guide their planning activities. The toolkit and other resources guides and technical assistance can be found here.

Regional councils will submit an enhanced capacity building (ECB) application electronically to DHCD by the established quarterly deadlines. Planning grant requests of less than $100,000 will count toward a region's $250,000 annual fund allotment for ECB activities.

Applications will be reviewed by DHCD's GO Virginia staff and reported to the Virginia Growth and Opportunity Board for consideration at the next board meeting.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS

Match Requirement: $1:1 (20% or $50,000 (whichever is greater) local match required)

Regional Councils pursuing grants for construction of middle-mile broadband infrastructure are encouraged to have a recently completed regional broadband plan and be applying for funds to implement one or more elements of that plan. (This does not have to be a GO Virginia-funded plan.)

Projects must have the participation of two or more localities and be developed in partnership with one or more private sector providers. Middle mile projects must develop open-access networks, allow access to the middle mile network at a competitive rate, and be available for any interested internet service provider (ISP). Applications that involve not-for-profit or cooperative model providers as well as applications that represent an exceptional economic opportunity are encouraged.

Projects must respond to the Region's need for middle mile infrastructure, especially as it relates to enhanced service levels for businesses in the Region's targeted sectors, and the demand for the increased middle mile capacity among the region's ISPs. Applicants are strongly encouraged to engage early and often with potential ISP customers of the middle mile project. Priority will be given to projects with committed ISP customers.

Applicants may include a project element to educate affected businesses about the impact online tools can have on their business. Applicants are encouraged to work in conjunction with local community institutions already engaging in digital literacy education, such as library systems or cooperative extension offices.

Regional councils will submit a per capita or statewide competitive grant application and submit through the Centralized Application and Management System (CAMS). Applications shall be submitted in CAMS by the established quarterly deadlines for per capita and competitive funds.

Applications will be reviewed by DHCD's GO Virginia staff and reported to the Virginia Growth and Opportunity Board for consideration at the next board meeting.

ISSUE DATE: January 27, 2020

REFERENCES:
GO Virginia Board Policy #8 – Use of GO Virginia Funds for Investments in Broadband
Memo: Areas of Opportunity for Future Broadband Investments. Recommendations of Go Virginia Broadband Taskforce (9-10-19)

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