



CONNECT new mexico

Office of Broadband Access & Expansion

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM

Governor

KELLY SCHLEGEL

Broadband Director

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Erin Kinnard Thompson
505-795-0737

Governor Lujan Grisham Announces \$17 Million in Broadband Grant Awards to Bridge the Digital Divide in Unserved, Economically Distressed Communities

Santa Fe, NM – The Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE) continues the rollout of grant awards funded by the Connect New Mexico Pilot Program. The four awarded projects reflect Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s commitment to universal broadband availability statewide.

The Pilot Program is funded by the American Rescue Plan Act’s Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Treasury. The Pilot Program directs up to \$117 million to fund broadband infrastructure expansion across unserved and underserved communities.

The four projects selected will provide high-speed connectivity to over 2,500 premises across 10 qualifying rural communities. The beneficiaries include residents, businesses, community institutions, and farms. These communities are economically distressed, with income levels and poverty rates below state and national averages.

The projects involve a total investment of \$24.5 million comprising \$17.3 million in grant funding (70.5%), and leveraged by \$7.2 million in matching contributions. Beneficiaries include Internet service providers that have a strong operational history in New Mexico – ranging from 17 to 61 years. Awardees include SWC Telesolutions (dba Ethos Broadband), Tularosa Communications, Western New Mexico Telephone Company, and Valley TeleCom Group.

“In my State of the State speech, I stressed my steadfast commitment to bring high-speed broadband networks to every unserved and underserved New Mexico community, no matter how rural. These projects showcase that commitment and our broader goal of universal broadband availability across all of New Mexico,” said Governor Lujan Grisham. “Together, we are breaking down the long-standing walls of the digital divide.”

Three of the projects involve fiber-to-the-premise (FTTP) networks. One involves a fixed wireless network that uses an emerging technology with special beam-forming signals that may provide a strong broadband connection despite the presence of an obstruction between the customer and the radio tower. These projects recognize OBAE’s commitment to prioritize fiber-based solutions while

recognizing the value of utilizing fixed wireless when economic or technical challenges make fiber infeasible.

Approximately 80% of the targeted premises are unserved, which means they are relegated to speeds below 25/3 Mbps. The other 20% are underserved, which means speeds range from 25/3 Mbps to 100/20 Mbps. A summary of the awards follow in the table below.

Service Provider	Communities	Technology	Units	Budget (Millions)		
				Grant	Match	Total
SWC Telesolutions (dba Ethos Broadband)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Gallup, Thoreau 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed Wireless 	435	\$1.04 (49.6%)	\$1.05 (50.4%)	\$2.10
Tularosa Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Alamogordo, Bent, Sun Valley 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FTTP 	1048	\$7.44 (75%)	\$2.48 (25%)	\$9.93
Western New Mexico Telephone Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gila Hot Springs, Silver City, Mimbres, Lake Roberts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FTTP with Ethernet Radio Backhaul 	221	\$5.11 (75%)	\$1.70 (25%)	\$6.81
Valley TeleCom Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Columbus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FTTP 	822	\$3.70 (65%)	\$1.99 (35%)	\$5.69

“These projects bring fiber and advanced wireless to small, isolated communities and villages. These communities are hindered by dilapidated technologies installed decades ago with minimal upgrades, resulting in a lack of access for residents and businesses to fundamental Internet applications and resources that most of us take for granted. The subsidy support and subsequent improvements to broadband infrastructure will benefit these communities for generations,” said Kelly Schlegel, OBAE Director.

Valley TeleCom Group will bring fiber to Columbus, a small border town of 1,400 residents, who have relied on DSL via copper lines installed over half a century ago.

“Since 1962, Valley’s sole mission has been to enhance the quality of life in rural communities by connecting them to the communications network. Connecting our rural communities to high-speed fiber internet is not just about access to technology, it’s about access to opportunity. By investing in infrastructure that brings reliable and affordable internet to those in poverty-stricken areas, we are opening doors to education, healthcare, and economic growth that were previously closed. This is not just a technological advancement, it’s a step towards equality and progress for all.” said Steve Metts, CEO of Valley TeleCom Group.

Sacred Wind will serve mobile home communities and surrounding areas with an advanced fixed wireless network that can deliver 100 Mbps symmetrical speeds and even higher speeds in the future. The network then ties to its fiber backhaul network.

“Sacred Wind has never been satisfied with meeting minimum requirements for our customers. We have always been driven to provide our rural areas the same or better service as is offered in Albuquerque, Denver, or New York. This project, using an affordable, very high-speed microwave technology, is specifically designed to level the playing field for neighborhoods that have always been at

the bottom of the list of other companies. This is truly an information technology equalizer.” John Badal, Board Member, Alloy, LLC, a Commnet and Sacred Wind alliance.

Western New Mexico Telephone will deploy a fiber network connecting the communities of Gila Hot Springs, Silver City, Mimbres, and Lake Roberts.

“This project involves a cost-efficient yet future-proof network design by deploying FTTP that connects to an ethernet radio network, which ties back into our existing regional fiber backbone. The combination of grant funds combined with our existing assets will enable us to serve over 220 highly rural and remote locations with gigabit fiber optic Internet, therefore allowing our residents and businesses the benefit of first-class communications services,” said Daniel Meszler, General Manager of Western New Mexico Telephone.

Tularosa will deliver a fiber network to over 1,000 primarily unserved residents and businesses in Otero and Lincoln Counties. Joshua Beug, General Manager of Tularosa Communications expressed their enthusiasm for the project:

“We are very excited and honored that the State of New Mexico’s Office of Broadband Access and Expansion has chosen Tularosa Communications to receive a Pilot Program Broadband grant. The grant funds will be used to build a 76-mile high-capacity fiber distribution network to bring gigabit speeds to approximately 1,100 homes in parts of Lincoln and Otero counties. We look forward to working with OBAE and the State of New Mexico in bringing these types of services to rural New Mexico.”

These projects involve applications filed in Wave Two. Several other applications from Wave Two remain under consideration and will be announced later in April. The deadline for Wave Three is April 3rd.

“We encourage ISPs to file applications that target unserved and underserved areas with sustainable, scalable networks and financially viable business plans that serve the comprehensive community with high-quality, reasonably priced solutions. Due to limited funds in the Pilot Program, OBAE may not be able to fund every strong application; however, they will be considered in future funding programs, such as the Connect New Mexico Fund later this year and the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD) in the future,” noted Sandeep Taxali, Program Advisor to OBAE.