NCDIT
NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY
EXPANDING MOBILE BROADBAND (FIRSTNET)

Overview

To help increase coverage of the Public Safety Broadband Network, the N.C. Department of Information Technology's (NCDIT) First Responder Emerging Technologies (NCDIT FirstTech) program invites state government entities (State Entity/Entities) to apply for assistance in funding a project to serve a specific state campus.

Background

NC Session Law 2022-74 allocated $2 million to NCDIT to provide matching funds for mobile broadband providers to deploy infrastructure to extend coverage or enhance the capacity of the Public Safety Broadband Network to unserved and underserved State agency campuses. The Department shall determine the match rate for each campus based on the ability of each campus to provide funding based on the Department's criteria. Mobile broadband infrastructure funded under this subdivision shall be capable of utilizing the Band 14 spectrum.

Project Guidelines

NCDIT seeks to fund projects that will have the largest impact for public safety. State Entities can select state campuses that they consider to be unserved or underserved for evaluation. The State Entity will be required to submit the amount of match funding that they are providing as part of the Project Plan as detailed below.

Eligible Uses
"Public Safety Broadband Network" and "Band 14" are specific terms used to refer to the project established under the 2012 Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act, also known as FirstNet (https://firstnet.gov/about). FirstNet is a private-public partnership with AT&T and the federal government's First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority). All project plans must be developed by FirstNet in consultation with the State Entity and NCDIT FirstTech. Project plans must include the deployment of radio equipment capable of utilizing Band 14 (i.e., only funding fiber to a campus would not be eligible). The use of term "FirstNet" in this document refers to either FirstNet Authority employees or AT&T employees.

Examples of projects include but aren't limited to:
- Construction of a new macro cellular tower site,
- In-building femto or small cell deployments,
- Temporary deployable assets to achieve needed coverage.

Applicant Eligibility
Applicants must be an entity of North Carolina state government, which includes:
1. All State Government Organizations
2. University of North Carolina System or individual schools, universities, or centers within the system; and
3. N.C. Community College System or individual schools, colleges or centers within the system.

Only one application per campus will be accepted. However, the Project Plan can involve the deployment of several solutions or infrastructure to achieve coverage enhancement on that campus.

Funding Criteria
Funding will be based on the Project Plan that is developed by FirstNet in consultation with the State Entity. NCDIT FirstTech (firsttech@nc.gov) can provide contact information with the appropriate FirstNet people based on the location of the campus. Matching funds are required from the State Entity, which will submit the amount it can afford as part of the Project Plan. See below for the acceptance of in-kind matching funds. NCDIT FirstTech will use the match rate as part of the grading scale for determining which Project Plans to award.

Application Process

Applicants must:

1. **Submit an online interest form** (https://forms.office.com/g/udtS5ThxDe)**.** Upon receipt of an interest form, NCDIT FirstTech and applicant will schedule a site visit to determine eligibility.

2. Schedule a site visit with NCDIT FirstTech by emailing firsttech@nc.gov to determine unserved or underserved eligibility. NCDIT FirstTech staff will utilize a FirstNet device and perform at least 3 speed tests from areas around the campus, either indoor or outdoor, determined by the requesting State Entity. All the speed tests will be averaged, and anything less than 100Mbps download or 20Mbps upload will be considered underserved and less than 25Mbps download or 3Mbps upload will be considered unserved.

3. Applicant can work with FirstNet to design a Project Plan at any time. The State Entity will work with FirstNet to determine the amount of funding needed for an appropriate solution to increase coverage or capacity at the campus. A completed Project Plan will only be evaluated after a NCDIT FirstTech site visit has been completed. NCDIT FirstTech shall determine whether the proposed project should receive funding under this program based on the criteria set forth in this document.

Applicants and FirstNet will be notified via email if their project has been awarded.

Applications will be accepted starting November 15, 2023. Evaluations of the initial submissions will be conducted in March of 2024 with projects announced in April of 2024. Applications may continue to be submitted on a rolling basis with projects that meet the selection criteria awarded as funding is available.

Project Plan Requirements

All project descriptions should include the following sections:
1. Cover Page
2. Project Narrative
3. Project Timeline
4. Project Budget

Cover Page
The cover page should include the following information:
- State Entity
- Contact Name
- Contact Email
- Mailing Address
- City, State Zip
- Telephone
- Website
- State Campus Name
- State Campus Address
- State City, State Zip

Project Narrative

Project narratives should include the following sections. Please fully answer and address each bulleted sub question.

- Scope of the Project
    - Provide dates and results of the NCDIT FirstTech site visit and speed tests that determine eligibility.
    - Will this project seek to improve coverage outdoors only, target in-building coverage, or both?

- Match funding rate
    - How much match funding will the State Entity contribute?
    - If the State Entity is making other contributions outside of direct funding (referred to as in-kind match), such as land-use, internet access, tower space, etc., provide details and testament that all such agreements or contracts are already in place or can be executed between the State Entity and the Provider, which could also require approval or lease agreement with the State Property Office at the Department of Administration.
    - Does the State Entity already have the procurement process to disburse the match funding to NCDIT?

- Potential Obstacles
    - Discuss any barriers or obstacles you might encounter and any strategies to overcome these.

Project Timeline

Please include a timeline that was discussed with FirstNet for accomplishing the activities outlined in the project narrative.

Project Budget

NCDIT will disburse funds to the FirstNet Authority or pursuant to State Term Contract 915a according to the following schedule:
- Project award – 50 percent of the Project Plan budget from NCDIT.
- Project completion as verified by NCDIT FirstTech – balance of the NCDIT funding, according to the Project Plan.
- State Entity Match funding will be disbursed by the State Entity according to their process and schedule.

Selection Criteria

NCDIT FirstTech will evaluate the applications based on several criteria. Applications will be awarded based on funding availability from NCDIT for projects that meet the below criteria:

- Matching funds available from State Entity.
- In-kind match available from State Entity.
- County Distress Rankings (Tiers) for economic well-being as determined by the North Carolina Department of Commerce found here https://www.commerce.nc.gov/grants-incentives/county-distress-rankings-tiers. NCDIT FirstTech will prioritize campuses mainly located in Tier 1 counties.
- Average number of first responders at state campus weekly.

All questions can be emailed to NCDIT FirstTech at firsttech@nc.gov.