

NineStar & Henry County REMC receive Next Level Connections Broadband Grant

INDIANAPOLIS – Governor Eric J. Holcomb recently announced \$51 million for 50 broadband infrastructure expansion projects across the state as a part of the second round of the Next Level Connections Broadband Grant Program. Central Indiana Communications, a subsidiary of NineStar Connect, and Henry County REMC partnered and received one of the grants.

The \$100 million Next Level Broadband Grant Program is the largest single state investment in broadband. In total, rounds one and two of the program have awarded more than \$79 million for 41 counties to provide broadband infrastructure to more than 21,900 homes and commercial locations.

“Lt. Governor Crouch and I have been dedicated to improving internet access for years, and now COVID has only made the need for affordable, dependable broadband more apparent,” Gov. Holcomb said. “This latest round of grants will give more Hoosiers access to more affordable, quality internet regardless of where they live, work or go to school.”

This second round of funding will provide broadband infrastructure to more than 10,590 homes and commercial locations across 32 counties. A map marking both rounds one and two is attached to this press release.

In addition to the \$51 million awarded, the 16 telecommunications providers and utility cooperatives contributed more than \$53 million in matching funds, resulting in more than \$104 million total investment for broadband.

The program allows broadband service providers and utility cooperatives to apply for up to \$5 million to expand service to unserved areas if they provide at least a 20 percent match. Unserved areas are those without at least one

telecommunication provider offering at least 10 mbps download and 1 mbps upload. Proposed projects must provide a minimum level of service at actual speeds of 25 mbps download and 3 mbps upload.

At Governor Holcomb's request, Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch, along with the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, administers and oversees the program.

"In a time where Hoosiers are having to adjust their lifestyles due to COVID-19, it's imperative that we connect as many Hoosiers as possible," said Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch. "Governor Holcomb's Next Level Connections initiative is a significant step toward bridging the digital divide and bringing greater opportunities for all Hoosiers."

The NineStar Connect and Henry County REMC project will serve 70 unserved households and 10 businesses. The requested grant amount is \$361,711, with a local match of more than \$194,767, for a total project cost of \$556,478.

Next Level Connections Broadband Grant Program is part of Governor Holcomb's \$1 billion Next Level Connections infrastructure program, which accelerates the completion of major highway projects, expands access to rural broadband services, creates more nonstop flights and pursues the expansion of rail projects in northwest Indiana.