

NEWS

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NORTH FLORIDA SCORES \$30 MILLION FEDERAL GRANT

Newly-formed North Florida Broadband Authority (22 Local Governments) Partners with North Florida Economic Development Partnership for Enhanced Broadband Infrastructure and High-Speed Connectivity for Region.

Today, The Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce announced that the North Florida Broadband Authority (NFBA) has been awarded more than \$30 million to enable and enhance real access to Broadband and high-speed connectivity for a 14-county region designated as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) in North Florida. The NFBA's grant application was selected from among 2200 proposals submitted nationally to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"This is an extraordinary accomplishment," said Jeff Hendry, North Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP). "This is truly a public/private partnership involving our regional local governments, our education, health care, public safety service providers, aligned private businesses and economic development interests. This initiative has the potential to be a cornerstone of the region's future."

"Getting the grant is a reward for real commitment and focus," said Robert Sheets, CEO of Government Services Group, which developed the grant on behalf of the Authority with the support of the NFEDP. "These local governments— all 22 of them—voted to form the Authority in less than three weeks," Sheets noted. "That is, from the time the idea was considered to the first gavel at a meeting, 22 local governments considered, supported, and acted on an agreement to work together. These small, largely rural communities formed a single-purpose entity focused on a specific goal, and in the process demonstrated that governments can get the job done."

“This is more than a regional business/government effort,” said Hendry. “It truly is a comprehensive community effort that included support and commitment from political leaders and businesses, community colleges and universities, libraries, rural hospitals and numerous community groups. In all, nearly 70 letters of support were submitted representing every sector of the region.”

In the initial grant preparation, the Authority asked for a waiver for the required 20 percent matching funds. However, after taking an internal inventory of all the local government assets, the Authority was able to collectively offer \$9 million dollars of in-kind match (including land and existing towers.) In doing so, they actually exceeded the required match by more than \$3 million—something none could have done alone.

It’s important to note that this initiative takes nothing away from commercial providers. Rather, it will allow this entire region to develop new and enhance existing access to high-speed connectivity and in doing so will give a substantial economic development boost to the entire region. Business requires access to 21st century technology. For example, businesses as diverse as manufacturing, logistics and distribution, agriculture, technology, medical and health care research, development, and public safety all require reliable access. This initiative provides this region with an opportunity to connect to the future.

Part of the Economic Stimulus Package, this money is dedicated to creating infrastructure projects that serve communities and jumpstart economic opportunity. The communities served by this Authority include: Baker County, Bradford County, Cedar Key, Columbia County, Cross City, Dixie County, Gilchrist County, Hamilton County, Jefferson County, Lafayette County, Lake City, Levy County, Live Oak, Madison County, Monticello, Perry, Putnam County, Suwannee County, Taylor County, Union County, Town of White Springs, Wakulla County, and Worthington Springs.

For more information visit: <http://www.nfba-fl.org/>