REQUEST FOR INTEREST (RFI)  
For High-Speed Internet/Broadband Services

Date Issued: August 25, 2021

**Submissions must be received no later than 2:00 PM on September 28, 2021**

Mail submissions to:  
Northampton County Local Government  
PO Box 663  
Jackson, NC 27846  
Attn: Carl Schumpert, Economic Development Planner

Hand-delivered submissions will not be accepted.  
Electronic and postal submissions only will be accepted.  
Direct electronic submissions to: carl.schumpert@nhcnc.net

**INQUIRIES:** All inquiries or questions must be directed to Carl Schumpert at carl.schumpert@nhcnc.net. If a clarification or change to the RFI is required, a written addendum will be posted on the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments broadband webpage [https://www.ucpcog.org/planning_and_development/broadband.php]. Respondents are responsible for keeping up with all RFI updates.
TIMELINE:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFI Issuance</td>
<td>August 25, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-proposal Meeting</td>
<td>September 8, 2021</td>
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<td>Questions Deadline</td>
<td>September 21, 2021</td>
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<td>Submissions Due</td>
<td>September 28, 2021</td>
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<td>Review of submissions completed by</td>
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Note: This is not a request for proposals.

I. Purpose

Northampton County Government and the Town of Gaston are partnering with technical assistance provided by the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments (hereafter referred to as the “partnership”) to release this Request for Interest (“RFI”) to service providers of high-speed internet/broadband services (“internet service providers” or “ISP”) to gather concepts, ideas, and interest from service providers of high-speed internet/broadband services providing affordable, reliable high-speed internet access for residential, business, and government customers throughout the focus area defined in Section II, Figure 01.

The partnership seeks ideas and interest from ISPs on providing high-speed internet/broadband service to underserved or unserved geographic locations within the focus area. High-speed internet/broadband service can include, but is not limited to, the deployment of a fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) solution, fixed wireless solution, or some other type of last-mile solution. Interested parties should provide information on how their services meet or exceed the FCC’s broadband benchmark speeds of 25 megabits per second (Mbs) download and 3 Mbs upload speeds (https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-331760A1.pdf) or provide information as to how its advertised speeds meet or exceed the broadband speed guide provided by the FCC (https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/guides/broadband-speed-guide).

The partnership was formed as a part of the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Government’s EDA-funded regional broadband initiative and is one of many steps member governments are taking to assist unserved and underserved areas gain access to high-speed internet throughout the focus area and beyond. Currently, no municipal or county funds have been or will be spent to develop, release, or administer this RFI and no member of the partnership is committing grant any funds to selected ISPs or establish a public-private partnership for internet deployment. This RFI is intended to outline the market opportunities, gauge potential interest, and invite interested providers to submit their ideas for new or expanded service throughout the focus area.
process is also intended to inform municipal and county leaders of what steps can and should be undertaken to incentivize broadband deployment across the focus area which are allowable under North Carolina law.

Note: The partnership welcomes responses to this RFI from ALL interested or potentially interested parties. Since this is only to solicit preliminary interest and ideas, this RFI should not be interpreted as an invitation for bids or request for proposals. For the purposes of this RFI, the terms “respondents,” “providers,” and “vendors” refer to entities submitting written responses to this RFI.

II. The Focus Area

Figure 01

Green shaded area is the focus area. The north border is VA/NC state line, the west border is Warren County/Northampton County line, the south border follows Roanoke Rapids Lake and Lake Gaston (also the Halifax /Northampton County line, and the east border generally follows I-95 between the Roanoke River and the VA/NC state line.

Geography and Development:

The focus area is in northwestern Northampton County and includes the Town of Gaston, the unincorporated community of Henrico, and Lake Gaston area. This area encompasses the US Census Bureau’s Gaston Township boundary, north to the NC/VA boarder, and west to Henrico, NC. The Town of Gaston is 3 miles north of Roanoke Rapids, which is the county seat of Halifax County. Gaston is also approximately 10 miles east of Lake Gaston and 4 miles south of the NC/VA border. The town of Jackson, Northampton County seat, is 17 miles southeast of Gaston. The focus area consists of residential, lake, commercial, agricultural, and industrial development. NC Highway 46 and 48 pass through the focus area including the central business district of Gaston. Interstate 95 is 4 miles east of Gaston.
Demographics and Economy:

According to Esri population forecasts, 43% of the focus area population are over age 55 and 18% are age 19 or under. 54% of the focus area population are black alone, 40% white alone, and 3% are of Hispanic origin (any race). Of the focus area population over the age of 25, 34% attained a high school diploma or alternative credential as the highest level of education, with 10% attaining an associate degree, 7% a bachelor’s degree, and 7% a graduate or professional degree. An estimated 93% of the focus area population over the age of 16 are participating in the labor force, 53% of whom are in white collar occupations, 29% in blue collar occupations, and 17% in service occupations. The most common industries include services (43%), manufacturing (13%), retail trade (10%), transportation/utilities (6%) and construction (10%). As of May 2021, the Northampton County unemployment rate was 5.5%, 1% higher than the North Carolina unemployment rate and 0.3% lower than the national unemployment rate.

Households:

There are approximately 4,036 housing units within the focus area. 70% are households with 2 or more people and 30% are households with 1 person. 25% are households with children and 4% are multigenerational households. The average household size is 2.28. 45% of housing units are owner occupied, 21% are renter occupied, and 33% are vacant.

Lake Gaston lies at the northwest corner of Northampton County. It is a popular recreational and fishing area. Many restaurants and marinas are located along the coast of Lake Gaston. Upscale communities can be found in this area with full-time and vacation residencies.
Existing Broadband Connectivity:

Current broadband internet providers within the focus area include but are not limited to CenturyLink Communications, Hughes Network Systems, Mediacomm Communications, Roanoke Connect, and Viasat, Inc. According to 24 responses collected from the focus area to the NC Broadband Infrastructure Office’s [NC Broadband Survey](https://www.ncbroadband.gov/north-carolina-broadband-survey), which was released in mid-2020, 13 respondents were considered unserved (less than 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload), 4 were inconclusive (had an internet connection but did not record speed test data), and 7 were served (had an internet connection with greater than 25/3 speeds).

Figure 03 - Gaston Area NC Broadband Survey Responses

Figure 04 – Lake Gaston Area NC Broadband Survey Responses
Based on 227 NC Broadband Survey responses collected from Northampton County households, business, and farms, 89 had no wireline internet and 14 reported having no internet at all. Additionally, 90 of those with internet are paying over $81 per month for internet service only. The median download speed for Northampton County respondents was 10Mbps (below the 25Mbps threshold) and the median upload speed was 2Mbps (below the 3Mbps threshold).

**Anchor Institutions**

In order to represent a potential customer base with the focus area, the Partnership has developed an online map, hosted by the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments that labels the locations of private businesses, public institutions, churches, and schools. The map can be viewed at [this link](#). Most of the assets represented on the map are located within the municipal boundaries of Gaston, however, there are many operating farms and occupied residences throughout the focus area and along Lake Gaston. Notable potential anchor institutions within the focus area, in addition to the high concentration of farms, include Northampton County High School, Gaston Elementary School, Gaston Middle School, KIPP Gaston College Preparatory, Gaston Fire & Rescue, local government offices, Gaston Market, Family Dollar, North Carolina Center for Auto Research (NCCAR), Hardees, Northampton Marine, and various marinas located on Lake Gaston. Many small churches can be found in this area of Northampton County as well. Due to COVID-19 and unreliable Internet, many churches in the area are having issues live-streaming their services. Finally the future site of the Northampton County Convention & Health Center, located on Edwards Beach Road/Lake Gaston, could serve as an anchor institution.

**Potentially Available Assets**

The partnership may provide an ISP with access to assets, services, and infrastructure to the extent available and needed by the ISP for the purpose of providing high-speed internet connectivity within the focus area. Use of any public asset by an ISP will be reviewed by local government attorneys prior to development of agreements. Available infrastructure may include use of water, sewer, storm water, or street rights-of-ways, available land or easements, space on or within public buildings, space on water towers or other vertical assets, and more. The partnership will work together and with other organizations as necessary to facilitate utilization of existing resources needed in order to connect the focus area to high-speed broadband by an ISP.

*Pictured: Northampton County High School is located in Gaston, NC. It is the only public high school within Northampton County. Gaston Middle School and Gaston Elementary are also located within the Gaston Township. KIPP Gaston College Preparatory, a charter school, is also located in the vicinity.*
III. Requested Information

(a) Cover Sheet
- Provide the full legal name of the organization or Provider, and the type of entity.
- Provide a website link and physical address.
- Provide the names of all principals of the organization or Provider must be disclosed on the cover sheet, specifically, all persons who have an equity interest in the Provider organization and/or hold a senior leadership position in the Provider organization.
- The cover sheet must be signed by an owner, corporate officer, or agent authorized by the Provider.

(b) Previous Experience
- Identify previous experience in providing internet services and broadband content in other markets.
- Provide a map of your current coverage area in relation to the focus area.
- Describe services and content offered to existing customers, including pricing and contract terms.
- Provider customer service capabilities and technical support practices, including service standards.
- Identify three references (names, email, and phone number) who are familiar with your previous experience as a service provider.

(c) Preliminary proposal for internet service and broadband content you would offer in the focus area
- Provide a preliminary description of internet service and broadband content you may consider offering in this focus area (include existing and/or proposed download and upload speeds)
  - What customer segments would you serve?
  - What services and content would you offer to various customer segments, including critical or key pricing and contract terms?
  - What customer service and technical support would you offer?
    - How and where would you staff this?
    - What service standards would you provide?
  - What specific area of the region are you considering serving?

d) Other information, advice, or counsel you would offer to the partnership with respect to high-speed internet/broadband expansion.
IV. Areas of cooperation

To the extent not covered in previous responses, this section highlights ways that the Partnership could cooperate with respondents to improve the business case for proposed solutions. We encourage respondents to be creative and suggest other types of partnerships or business opportunities of interest.

Specifically, this section could include:

Resource and facilities:
Explanation of need for access to community assets and resources. Respondents should also address the relative importance and impact of variation in terms of more flexibility with respect to accessing the following type of community assets, facilities and policies:

- Pole attachments
- Utility conduits
- Dark fiber
- Backhaul or ISP partnerships involving local, statewide, or regional fiber assets
- Public rights of way
- Undergrounding policies
- Other community assets, facilities or policies not specifically mentioned above

Regulatory environment:
Description of any rules or regulations at the federal, state or local level that could impact the feasibility or underlying economics associated with the proposed solutions. Responses should also include an explanation of any forms of proposed regulatory relief, including streamlined permitting, which could improve the economic case for the business models or network solutions proposed or for other network solutions that respondents considered but dismissed due to existing regulations and their effect on economic viability of such proposal.

Other partnership or revenue opportunities:
Discussion of any other types of partnerships or working relationships between respondents and supporters which could improve the business case for respondents to partner with one or more supporters. For example, a company may work with community colleges and the surrounding communities to develop partnerships that allow the company to deliver voice, video and data services, and/or to pilot cutting-edge new products, recruit new employees, or enter branding and marketing agreements.
V. Review Process

Responses received by the stated deadline will be shared with all members of the partnership including Northampton County Government and the Town of Gaston. A member of the partnership or a combination of partnership members may seek further information from a responding ISP upon reviewing submissions. All partnerships members reserve the right to reject, or otherwise not respond to, any or all submissions.

Confidentiality

All submissions are subject to North Carolina Public Records Law. To the extent that respondents desire to submit proprietary information, all local governments and the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments represent that they will use all reasonable efforts to claim available exemptions under the NC Public Records Law (NCPL), and will notify the affected respondent if an NCPL request is received in connection with that proprietary information. The respondent will be given an opportunity to seek court action to prevent release of information. All materials that the respondent believes are proprietary MUST be labeled “CONFIDENTIAL” or “TRADE SECRET.” Members of the Partnership cannot guarantee that their efforts to claim available exemptions will be successful and any of them may be required to disclose the respondent’s information, even that which is labeled proprietary, privileged and/or confidential.

Incurred Costs

No member of the Partnership, including the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments, will be liable in any way for any costs incurred by respondents in replying to this RFI, including, but not limited to, costs associated with preparing the response or participating in any site visits, demonstrations, conferences or oral presentations.

Links:

Webpage where information about this RFI will be published and up to date:


https://www.ucpcog.org/planning_and_development/broadband.php

Map of NC Broadband Survey responses with focus area, with the focus area highlighted:

https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1BsYIrUL-O-spPOfH8kjCmntYBjv-qxeS&usp=sharing

Map of the focus area’s anchor institutions and vertical assets:

https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=18iiVIFU-ErAGwSbm3ZqFItv-0jYcdrRI&usp=sharing
## ATTACHMENT A: COVER SHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Person, Business or Organization:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Entity: (e.g. Sole-Proprietorship, Partnership, Corp., Non-Profit, Public Agency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Tax ID Number:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Person – Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Person – Address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Person – Phone Number(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact Person – e-mail address</td>
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By signing this **Cover Sheet** I hereby attest: that I have read and understood all the terms listed in the RFI and I have read and understood all terms listed in this request.

_______________________________________  _______________
Signature of Authorized Representative    Date

Printed Name of Authorized Representative  Printed Title of Authorized Representative