

MAY 16 2022

Paula G. Reid

From: Landy Bennett <Landy@ucs.net>
Sent: Friday, March 11, 2022 11:19 AM
To: kevin.dyer@grantworks.net; County Judge (public address)
Subject: FW: ARPA Grant Funds
Attachments: ARPA Funding Request for Grant Works 2-3-2022.docx
Categories: ARPA

Denied

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Roger and Kevin...

I was just wanting to follow up on the email below.

United has surpassed a huge milestone by connecting over 10,000 members on United's internet infrastructure - just two years after hanging our first strand of fiber in January 2020.

Managing the expectations of the membership has proven to be a challenge as expected. Everyone wants to connect today...right now...or actually a year ago! It's a good problem to have...but a challenging one nevertheless.

We are hopeful that the Johnson County Commissioner's court will agree that using ARPA grant money to accelerate the fiber construction to truly "bridge the digital divide" in Johnson county meets the suggested uses of the funds as spelled out in the guidelines.

Even if Johnson County decided to just offset the cost of a few fixed wireless towers (even one)...it would be a huge economic benefit to the citizens in the more rural areas of the county.

We look forward to hearing back...and thanks again for your consideration...

Landy Bennett, CAO
United Cooperative Services

817-556-4021 – Office Direct Line
817-517-1390 – Cell

PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF EMAIL ADDRESS AND WEBSITE LISTED BELOW

landy@ucs.net

www.ucs.net



ARPA – SLFRF Grant Request

Johnson County, Texas

Project Name:

United Cooperative Services – High Speed Internet Service

Project Primary Point of Contact:

Landy Bennett, Chief Administrative Officer for United Cooperative Services.

Office Phone: 817-556-4021 Cell Phone: 817-517-1390 Email: landy@ucs.net

P.O. Box 1809, Burleson, Texas 76097

Project Description:

About United Cooperative Services (United):

Since 1938, United has provided reliable, affordable electric power to the rural homes and businesses of North Texas. Headquartered in Burleson, United is an electric distribution cooperative now serving more than 97,000 meters (approximately 68,500 members).

United plays a key role in the economic development of its communities and, unlike a private utility, the cooperative is a not-for-profit business owned by the members it serves. Although it had its beginnings in 1938, United was formed in April 2000 after Johnson County Electric Cooperative and Erath County Electric Cooperative consolidated. The consolidation resulted in a more efficient, economic operation for its members.

Maintaining more than 11,000 miles of energized line, United's service territory in north central Texas, includes Johnson, Erath, Hood, Bosque, Somervell, Palo Pinto, Coryell, Eastland, Comanche, Stephens, Young, Hamilton, Tarrant and Ellis counties.

United is one of more than 60 electric distribution cooperatives in Texas (6th largest in the state) and one of more than 900 electric cooperatives across the country. Coming years will see more growth and more changes, but United's commitment to reasonable rates, reliable power and superior service for its member-owners will never change. That's more than a promise; that's a pledge of priority. And at United, we keep our priorities straight. United's employee group repeatedly scores in the 90s and high 80s each quarter in the American Consumer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

United's Internet Construction Project:

In the summer of 2019, United's members voted overwhelmingly (91% - yes votes) for the cooperative to take on the task of building out a true high-speed fiber internet service infrastructure to provide reliable access to the internet world. In January of 2020, we began

that journey, and to date we now have over 9,500 internet connected members and over 2,700 miles of fiber optic line already installed.

The total internet project buildout for the 14-county service area will include over 4,900 miles of fiber optic construction over an estimated five-to-six-year time frame and is projected to cost \$221,490,000.00. Under the current design, construction cost for the Johnson County area alone is over \$75,000,000.00. That "current" design is the focal point of this grant request from United.

Due to the low density of homes in the more rural areas of Johnson County, it became apparent that the feasibility of "borrowing" funds to build out true Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) to every household would have an extremely detrimental impact on the feasibility of the overall business plan. As an alternative, United's original (today's current) business plan to deliver high-speed internet service includes installing fixed wireless (line of sight) radio towers using the most advanced technology available but only in these most rural areas. Using this technology, wireless service will provide much-needed improvements in internet service speeds along with a modest upgrade in reliability compared to what many of our members have access to today. Currently, most if not all, members living in these more rural areas experience service speeds of less than 10 Mbps and poor reliability. Even with the advantage of using today's best technology, due to consistent "line of sight" requirements under the wireless tower service concept, availability to some members will still be challenging and reliability will struggle to match the service provided by true FTTH. So, while this proposed wireless tower design/concept will provide some improvements, a full fiber-to-the-home construction concept will always be the better choice to fully meet the desires along with the current and future needs of the more rural residents.

Any available funds from the SLFRF grant program that could be allocated to "investments in broadband infrastructure" would be used by United to remove the fixed wireless towers (as many as financially feasible) from the current design and replace with actual fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) infrastructure. Any advantage over what many members experience today will be welcomed but having true FTTH would not only provide access to speeds in the 1,000 Mbps range (or higher in the near future), but also provide a huge advantage with more robust reliability. This would give residents in the truly rural areas of Johnson County the same internet access advantage that all other residents and businesses in the county will know and enjoy.

The proposed changes to the current design that are mentioned above will only be feasible using available grant funds to supplement the borrowed funds currently in place today. The use of the grant funds would be to offset only the added costs associated with replacing the fixed wireless towers with the "fiber to every home" concept. In the current design there are projected to be eight (8) fixed wireless towers deployed in the southwest part of Johnson County. The added cost to build out true FTTH in this area is \$3,989,663.00. This is over and above the \$75 million already being invested by United.

It is our hope that a portion of the funds available under this ARPA grant program will be used to invest in a true fiber broadband infrastructure that will most certainly enhance and promote economic development but will forever improve the quality of life for those living in this county. While the total added cost to replace the fixed wireless towers is close to \$4,000,000.00, Johnson County could choose to replace a portion of the towers based on an average cost of \$498,707.00 per tower.

It would be our hope that all of the towers, could be replaced with this grant funding, but we also realize that any of the grant funds invested in this project will go a long way toward bringing a world class internet system to all citizens of Johnson County.

It was extremely encouraging to see that these grant programs recognize the tremendous need for reliable high-speed internet service in the more rural areas, the same areas served by United's electric infrastructure that has been in place for over 83 years. That need for a reliable source for internet service exploded exponentially with the issues we have all faced over the past two years.

Project Location:

The project location tied to this specific grant request is in the southwest portion of Johnson County in an area with the least amount of household density per square mile.

Project Budget:

The total budget for United's build out of the internet infrastructure is over \$220 million dollars and the portion of that budget that will be built in Johnson County is over \$75 million dollars. The dollar amount needed to replace all fixed wireless towers in Johnson County with true fiber to the home internet access is \$3,989,663.36.

Project Timeframe:

United's internet/fiber construction project started in January 2020, with the full build out in United's fourteen-county area to be completed in five to six years. The Johnson County portion of the build out is projected to be complete by the first quarter of 2023.

Rachel Sitler

From: Landy Bennett <Landy@ucs.net>
Sent: Monday, February 7, 2022 8:02 AM
To: kevin.dyer@grantworks.net; County Judge (public address)
Subject: ARPA Grant Funds
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Roger and Kevin...

Please find attached United's initial submission for consideration of potential grant funding available under the ARPA-SLFRF program.

As more information is needed on United's project and intended uses for the grant funds, please do not hesitate to call or email.

We would love to invite both of you to visit our office in Burleson to see, first hand, how our "build-out" is progressing and what it has already done for many of the citizens of Johnson County.

Thanks again, in advance, for your consideration of United's project.

Landy Bennett, CAO
United Cooperative Services

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