

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE FILING OF A GRANT APPLICATION FOR THE BROADBAND OHIO COMMUNITY ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

WHEREAS, J. P. Ducro, Ashtabula County Commissioner, requests to apply for a grant for the Broadband Ohio Community Accelerator Grant Program; and

WHEREAS, the Broadband Ohio Community Accelerator Program is a planning and capacity-building program to help communities across Ohio leverage historic broadband infrastructure funding for community-driven internet expansion projects; and

WHEREAS, The Commissioners feel such an application would be desirable and is necessary; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, By the Board of Commissioners of Ashtabula County, Ohio that an application be made to the Broadband Ohio Community Accelerator Program, as outlined above and in accordance with a copy of said application on file in this office.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commissioner J. P. Ducro IV, on behalf of the Board of Commissioners of Ashtabula County, is authorized to execute any and all necessary documents and to file the grant application.

**ASHTABULA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
CERTIFICATION PAGE**

Resolution No. 2023-405

August 10, 2023

**RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE FILING OF A GRANT APPLICATION FOR THE
BROADBAND OHIO COMMUNITY ACCELERATOR PROGRAM**

Upon the motion of J.P. Ducro IV, seconded by Kathryn L. Whittington.

VOTE:

**Casey R. Kozlowski
Kathryn L. Whittington
J.P. Ducro IV**

**Aye
Aye
Aye**

CERTIFICATE OF CLERK

IT IS HEREBY CERTIFIED that the foregoing is a true and correct transcript of a resolution acted upon and duly passed by the Board of County Commissioners of Ashtabula County, Ohio, on the date noted above.



Lisa Hawkins, Clerk of the Board
Board of County Commissioners
Ashtabula County, Ohio



BroadbandOhio
Community Accelerator

Applications are due August 4, 2023

Applications should be submitted, in PDF format, to BroadbandOhio Project Manager Mark Schade, at Mark.Schade@development.ohio.gov.

Application

Team Manager Contact Information

Name:	J.P. Ducro
Title:	County Commissioner
Organization:	Ashtabula County
Phone Number:	440-576-3750
Email Address:	jpducro@ashtabulacounty.us

Team Members

Please list your team members and identify their area affiliations/roles. Please understand the weekly time commitment when organizing your community's cohort. Teams larger than eight individuals are appropriate, however we ask that you limit your team size to 12 people or less.

Name:	Title:	Organization:
1. J.P. Ducro	County Commissioner	Ashtabula County
2. Mandy Orahood	Director Serving Ashtabula Co.	Ohio Farm Bureau
3. Bill Callahan	Founder	National Digital Inclusion Alliance
4. Leanne Hartzell	Teacher	Buckeye Local Schools
5. Mike Candela	Superintendent	Ashtabula Co. Educational Service Center
6. Jake Brand	Director	Ash Co. Dept of Planning and Development
7. Cheryl Selby	Director	Grand Valley Public Library
8. Michael Thornton	Digital Library Branch Manager	Ashtabula Co. District Library System
9. Joan Steidl	Retired Lecturer	Kent State University
10. Stephen Kellat	Adjunct Instructor	Erie Co. Community College of PA
11. Alissa Holdson	Director of Community Development	Ashtabula Co. Community Action Agency
12.		



Application Questions (maximum of 4 pages):

1. Please briefly describe the composition of your team members and each individuals' experience with community development and broadband expansion.
2. Please describe any previous broadband planning efforts in your municipality or county. Was your team directly involved in these efforts?
3. In your community's experience, how has a lack of broadband infrastructure impacted your area? How is broadband a priority for the community?
4. If selected, what benefit do you believe this instructional program will have on your community at large?
5. How many unserved and underserved homes are represented in your community?

1. Please briefly describe the composition of your team members and each individuals' experience with community development and broadband expansion.

Our team consists of 11 members:

Ashtabula County Commissioner J.P. Ducro who formed the Ashtabula County Broadband Taskforce and has spearheaded the efforts to "Connect Ashtabula", seeking to find at least one affordable, reliable, adequate ISP for every county resident and business. He has been the point Commissioner on several Broadband federal and state grants, done extensive broadband outreach to the community, worked directly with Eastgate Regional Council of Governments and BroadbandOhio on broadband initiatives, and championed the ARPA investment in the Ohio Transparent Telecom (OhioTT) pilot project for 3 towers in Ashtabula County to connect thousands of unserved and underserved residents.

Mandy Orahood, Ohio Farm Bureau Organization Director serving Ashtabula County, acknowledges broadband expansion in rural areas has been a priority issue for the Farm Bureau at the county, state, and national levels. Mandy has served on several taskforces and committees created to address broadband needs in the last several years and on behalf of the Farm Bureau membership and our community has worked closely with elected officials to ensure they understand the crucial role broadband plays to agriculture and rural areas. Additionally, she is an active leader in finding solutions to issues that face our community.

Bill Callahan is an Ashtabula County resident and member of the Ashtabula County Broadband Task Force, living at an unserved location in Pierpont Township. Bill has organized and managed community-based digital inclusion initiatives at the local, regional and national levels since 1996. He was a founder of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance and served as its Research and Policy Director from 2016 to 2020. He now directs Connect Your Community, a research and advocacy group focused on broadband access and affordability for Northeast Ohio residents.

Leanne Hartzell has been an active member of the Ashtabula County Broadband Taskforce and has attended nearly every meeting since its inception. A teacher with Buckeye Local Schools, she regularly challenges her students to work on projects to address problems in out communities and lack of broadband has been one of those issues, especially recognized during the COVID pandemic with the need for remote learning. She is also a resident of an unserved area in rural Andover township.

Mike Candela is the Superintendent of the Ashtabula County Educational Service Center. He has been an important point of contact to discuss partnerships with OARnet to improve remote learning options and seek solutions to accessing the school's network for greater public benefit, as well as connecting with all 7 of the superintendents and schools' districts in the county regarding broadband initiatives.

Jake Brand is the Director of the Ashtabula County Department of Planning and Development which hosts over 40 years of collective Community Development experience with tens of millions of dollars of grant administration. Their team was heavily involved in recent broadband planning/projects that have come out of Ashtabula County. They were also the drivers of the

recently updated Allin! Ashtabula County – Comprehensive Land Use Plan, which calls out the need for a variety of broadband needs in the County.

Cheryl H. Selby is the Director of the Grand Valley Public Library and works with a staff of 8 plus a Fiscal Officer and a Board of 7 members from various professions. The staff has a variety of skills with 2 in training to take over as co-directors upon her retirement. One staff person is working on a certificate in IT through IBM. My Board members are school teachers or former school teachers, one is a highly trained professional and has worked internationally solving connectivity issues, one is a retired history teacher. They are all familiar with the importance of connectivity with one having no access to the internet from their residence.

Michael Thornton is the Digital Library Branch Manager for the Ashtabula County District Library System and has 20 years of working for libraries in some capacity and 12 of those years at the administrative/managerial level. Increasing access to broadband has been an accelerating focus for libraries in that time, and he has been involved in expanding and improving broadband access for library patrons for the entirety of that time. He recently locally led a project to upgrade both ACDL locations to dedicated 1 GB fiber connections. In addition, he has been focused on helping library patrons understand better what to do with the access to broadband once they have it.

Joan M. Steidl is a Retired Associate Lecturer, Human Services at Kent State University. She has also worked for the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission and Solid Waste District several years ago. She has served on our local Broadband Taskforce and taken a particular interest in the needs of seniors and the importance of them gaining access to and understanding how to use the internet for their benefit and to function in today's society.

Stephen Michael Kellat is currently an adjunct instructor of computer science at Erie County Community College of Pennsylvania. He has an earned master's degree in library science from Clarion University of Pennsylvania and has previously served in a variety of formal and informal education roles at institutions including Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the American Samoa Community College, and various churches. As a patient with a rare genetic disorder, Professor Kellat has advocated for increased access to telehealth services to improve access to medical specialists not available in rural Ashtabula County. Professor Kellat also owns a small media arts consultancy which has served churches, libraries, and others in Ashtabula County to help maximize their effective use of the limited local access to the Internet in reaching their served populations.

Alissa Holdson has been with Ashtabula County Community Action Agency (ACCAA) for eight years. As Director of Community Development, she oversees grants and programs aimed at reducing poverty and increasing self-sufficiency in Ashtabula County. Her experience includes coordination of the multi-million-dollar Ohio Department of Development Home Relief Grants at ACCAA, which kept hundreds of Ashtabula County residents housed through rent, utility, and mortgage assistance during and after the pandemic. Most recently, she secured a national, competitive Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Outreach Grant for ACCAA aimed at decreasing the digital divide by promotion of the ACP.

2. Please describe any previous broadband planning efforts in your municipality or county. Was your team directly involved in these efforts?

Our efforts really began with Commissioner Ducro forming the Broadband Taskforce in an effort to rejuvenate discussions that had been started by a previous committee that had dissolved. The goal was to bring community members together to identify the problems and the assets we had and put a strategic plan together for future solutions. The taskforce consists of representatives from the community, providers, education, IT, business, and government. Critical to us getting to where we are was leveraging our county partnership and membership with Eastgate Regional Council of Governments and acknowledging we know what we need, but have no idea how to get there.

We quickly learned that Trumbull County was about to initiate their own Broadband Feasibility Study and, though Eastgate, were able to convince them to consider a broader collaborative study that would encompass all of Eastgate's member counties: Trumbull, Ashtabula, and Mahoning. This Regional Broadband Feasibility Study yielded valuable information as well as short, medium, and long-range goals to address the digital divide within all our communities. The content of the study has been instrumental in the grant applications that followed in which Ashtabula County was individually or collaboratively involved with, including the NTIA grant, Ohio Residential Broadband Grants with numerous providers where we collaborated and offered matching funds, ARC Power Grant, and the Ohio Middle Mile Project focusing on the Lake to River Fiber Backbone.

Additionally, Ashtabula County has contracted with GreatWave Communications who are in the process of completing a fiber loop in the county to provide options for additional customers as well as redundancy for those already somewhere on the existing infrastructure. After completing an RFP for broadband solutions to our rural unserved and underserved areas, we have also engaged with OhioTT in a pilot project for 3 towers to serve approximately 8000 residents in the Cherry Valley, New Lyme/Lenox, and Richmond/Pierpont Township areas. This project should be completed by the fall. We are also an Appalachian Digital Accelerator Grantee through the Connect Humanity Fund.

Members of this team directly involved in one or all of these projects include Jake Brand, Mandy Orahood, and Bill Callahan and all have written letters of support or publicly provided support for our efforts.

3. In your community's experience, how has a lack of broadband infrastructure impacted your area? How is broadband a priority for the community?

Lack of broadband infrastructure impacts us in all aspects of life. Our county is the largest by area in the state at over 700 square miles with limited public transportation options. Inability to use telemedicine for many creates health emergencies as our only hospitals are in the far northern section of the county. In education, children and families seeking home schooling options or needing to learn from home during the school day or with homework often have unreliable or no options to keep up with their studies. Adult education for higher learning also becomes limited for those looking to expand their skill set or become more employable and higher wage earners. Small business and agricultural businesses struggle to perform the basic functions of business such as filing permits and forms, processing payroll, paying bills, and sending invoices and farmers struggle to access the benefits of modern technology to make yields of milk or crops higher, track data better, and improve profitability and efficiency.

With large areas of affordable land ripe for development, a relatively low tax rate and cost of living, access to many parks, natural resources, fresh water lakes, recreation, highways, rail, and a local airport, we have all the resources to attract and appeal to developers as well as families looking to locate away from the larger cities with high expenses and traffic, but without adequate internet to meet the needs of today's consumer, we are overlooked and struggle to compete.

The Ashtabula County Commissioners have made making reliable, affordable, and adequate broadband service available to every resident and business in Ashtabula County a top priority and are now implementing dig once policies with any new construction they are involved with in their various departments to install conduit to make future investment and expansion of fiber as affordable and practical as possible.

4. If selected, what benefit do you believe this instructional program will have on your community at large?

If we are selected, this program can only help us. First, I expect it will get more thought leaders and stake holders actively involved in the process of expanding broadband internet in Ashtabula County.

Second, it will reinforce that we are going down the right path with our planning or help us shift directions if we should be moving on a different tract based on what we have accomplished so far. New, updated information and planning based on steps already taken or projects in motion will help us be more competitive for future grants and assure we are being good stewards of tax dollars and leveraging the previous resources we must get the biggest bang for our buck to assure the best outcomes for our county residents and businesses.

Finally, with the extensive funds committed to the BEAD Program, we plan to expand our network and attract more last mile providers by strengthening our middle-mile infrastructure.

5. How many unserved and underserved homes are represented in your community?

According to the Ashtabula County Broadband Profile from Broadband Ohio/Department of Development, 65% of the populated area & 32% of households do not have access to minimum 25/3 Mbps. Of 51,751 households in the county, 16,436 are below 25/3 and 55% or 9,106 are below 10/1 Mbps

An additional report from Broadband Ohio shows the unserved and underserved locations in Ashtabula County (i.e. location codes starting with 13117 and 13118) from the lists on the Broadband Ohio website shows 3,851 unserved and 2,169 underserved. These are raw numbers from the current FCC Map data, using a definition of "served" that includes all reported wireline connections, as well as fixed wireless connections using licensed spectrum (e.g. T-Mobile). We believe these are low-end numbers which will significantly increase through the state's challenge process. We know from personal experience, research, and resident feedback that areas shown on the map to have providers offering acceptable internet service are not truly available to the consumer.