



**Talbot County, Maryland**

**Bid 17-13**

**Request for Interest**

**for**

**Partnership for Deployment of  
High-Speed Broadband in Talbot County, Maryland**

**Issued: July 14, 2017**

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## **I. Introduction**

Talbot County, Maryland (“County”) issues this Request for Interest (RFI) to convey its interest in collaborating or partnering with a motivated, high-caliber private sector partner (Partner) to make affordable and scalable Gigabit-class broadband available to County homes and businesses over privately constructed infrastructure. In return, the County will assist in seeking grant opportunities, providing access to community assets and rights-of-way (ROW), navigating the permitting process, and offering any other reasonable support we may be able to bring to the collaboration.

Home to sophisticated small towns, villages, and more than 600 miles of Chesapeake Bay waterfront, the County is the treasure of Maryland's Eastern Shore. County leadership is committed to ensuring that the County continues to prosper and evolve as the global economy shifts, and the need for ultra-high-speed broadband access becomes increasingly evident.

The County’s preferred technology is fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) deployment with Gigabit-class broadband access. The County understands, however, that its geography and population density may require creative options for ubiquitous broadband deployment. As such, the County is open to considering hybrid fiber/wireless solutions and last-mile wireless solutions. Another possibility is the extension of hybrid fiber-coaxial service from adjacent areas, so long as the resulting network provides the necessary level of service.

Responses to this RFI should state how the respondent’s approach will further the County’s goals of ensuring that residents, businesses, and visitors to our community have access to affordable, market-leading broadband services.

The County seeks input from potential partners regarding the terms and conditions under which they would participate in such a project. We are prepared to consider a variety of business models that share technological and operational responsibilities and financial risk between the partners and the County in innovative ways.

We encourage respondents to share their expertise, which may be used to shape the direction and form of this potential initiative. Respondents may work together to respond to this RFI. The County is open to creative solutions that will maximize private investment while providing reliable and high-quality services to meet its citizens’ needs.

We welcome the responses of all prospective partners, including incumbent service providers, as well as competitive providers, nonprofit organizations, public cooperatives, and entities that are not traditional internet service providers (ISPs) but are interested in acting as a partner in offering service under innovative business models. Nontraditional providers may respond as

part of a partnership with an ISP, or may provide separate responses outlining their approaches.

The County will review responses based on the respondents' experience, how well the responses address the County's objectives, how the proposed business model balances and shares risks and rewards, and other factors. The County may provide more detailed information on available assets to one or more respondents, and ask those respondents to refine their responses.

Following the evaluation of responses, the County may issue a more detailed request for proposals (RFP) relating to the County-initiated project, issue an RFP to selected RFI respondents, cancel or delay plans to deploy a network, or choose another direction that is deemed in the County's best interest.

Responding to the RFI is not a guarantee of a contract award. Further, there is no guarantee an RFP will be developed as a result of this RFI. The County reserves the right to withdraw the RFI or any subsequent RFP, or to decline to award a contract.

## **II. Background on Talbot County**

Located on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, 90 minutes by car from both Baltimore and Washington, D.C., Talbot County offers full-time and part-time residents small-town and rural living in close proximity to the nation's capital and major employment centers. With an estimated population of 38,000,<sup>1</sup> the County features picturesque towns and villages, including Easton (the County seat), St. Michaels, Tilghman Island, Trappe, and Oxford.

The County's residents enjoy the lowest property tax and the second-lowest income tax in the state, and the County's unemployment rate of 4.1 percent sits a full percentage point below the national average. The County's 2016 per-capita income of \$37,661 also exceeds that of the nation by nearly \$10,000.<sup>2</sup>

As one of the oldest centers of European settlement in North America (with settlers first arriving by boat in 1630), the County's primarily agricultural economy started in tobacco, later shifted to wheat to feed Washington's Continental Army, and today thrives on corn, soybean, and poultry production.

The agricultural sector is closely followed by healthcare, in part because the County's high quality of living has attracted many retirees. University of Maryland Shore Regional Health

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<sup>1</sup> <https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/PEP/2016/PEPANNRES/0500000US24041>, accessed April 2017

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bestplaces.net/economy/county/maryland/talbot>, accessed April 2017

employs 2,000 workers and 200 physicians,<sup>3</sup> and the 132-bed Medical Center at Easton serves as many as 40,000 patients per year.<sup>4</sup>

The County's maritime economy, which began in shipbuilding, seafood harvesting, and processing, has shifted to include water tourism and sport fishing today.

Talbot County Public Schools (TCPS) encompasses nine schools employing 752 staff. The district's student-to-teacher ratio of 14 to 1<sup>5</sup> is below the national average.<sup>6</sup> The system was the first in Maryland to provide a laptop to each of its high school students,<sup>7</sup> demonstrating the County's commitment to embracing technology.

The County is in close proximity to Chesapeake College, with a total of 1,993 full-time-equivalent students and 453 faculty and staff,<sup>8</sup> as well as a University of Maryland Extension campus.

### **III. Current State of Broadband in Talbot County**

Verizon provides copper telephone lines to most of the County, with DSL service availability, speed, and quality varying depending on the potential customer's distance from Verizon's wire center (mostly in the towns) and cabinets. Some areas also receive service from wireless internet service providers (WISPs), including Delmarva WiFi.

Some portions of the County are served with broadband. For example, the Town of Easton and surrounding areas are served by Easton Utilities with a hybrid fiber-coaxial network. Other areas in the County are served by Atlantic Broadband, also with a hybrid fiber-coaxial network. The service areas, as reported by County residents and County data, are shown in Figure 1, below.

The County's main focus under this initiative is obtaining broadband services in areas of the County that currently are underserved by broadband providers, as illustrated in Figure 2, and improving competition and improving service quality in areas that are served.

In the underserved areas, there are approximately 2,760 homes and commercial buildings, with 358 miles of County roads. Driveway lengths vary from 50 feet to one-half mile. Many of the underserved areas have relatively high-value homes. Low population density is typically the main reason these areas have not yet been connected.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.talbotcountymd.gov/index.php?page=Health>, accessed April 2017

<sup>4</sup> <http://umshoreregional.org/about/facilities/easton>, accessed April 2017

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bestplaces.net/education/county/maryland/talbot>, accessed April 2017

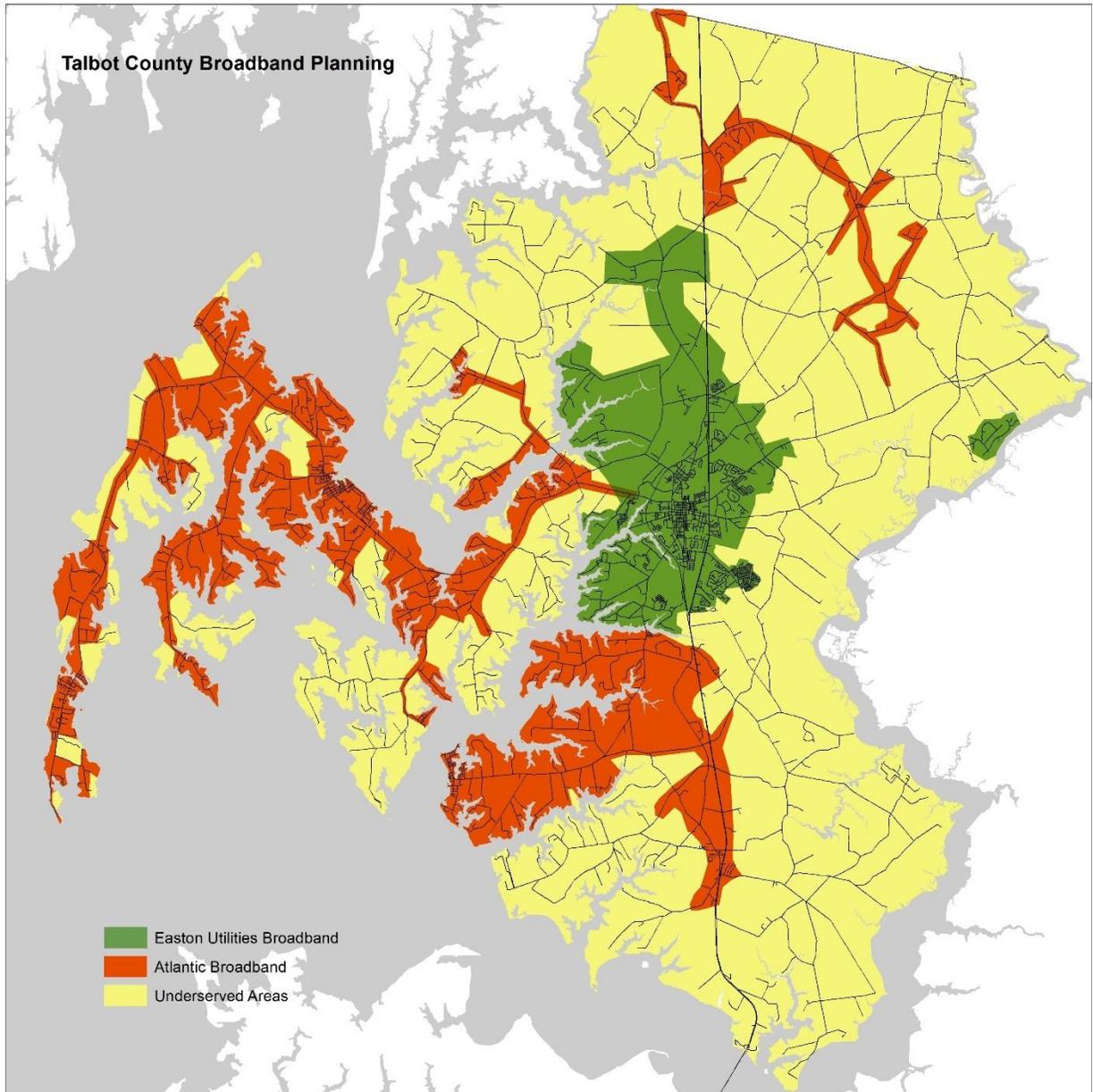
<sup>6</sup> [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15\\_208.20.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_208.20.asp?current=yes), accessed April 2017

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A565962005Feb26.html?nav=rss\\_metro/columns/offthebeat/md](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A565962005Feb26.html?nav=rss_metro/columns/offthebeat/md), accessed April 2017

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.chesapeake.edu/about/at-glance>, accessed April 2017

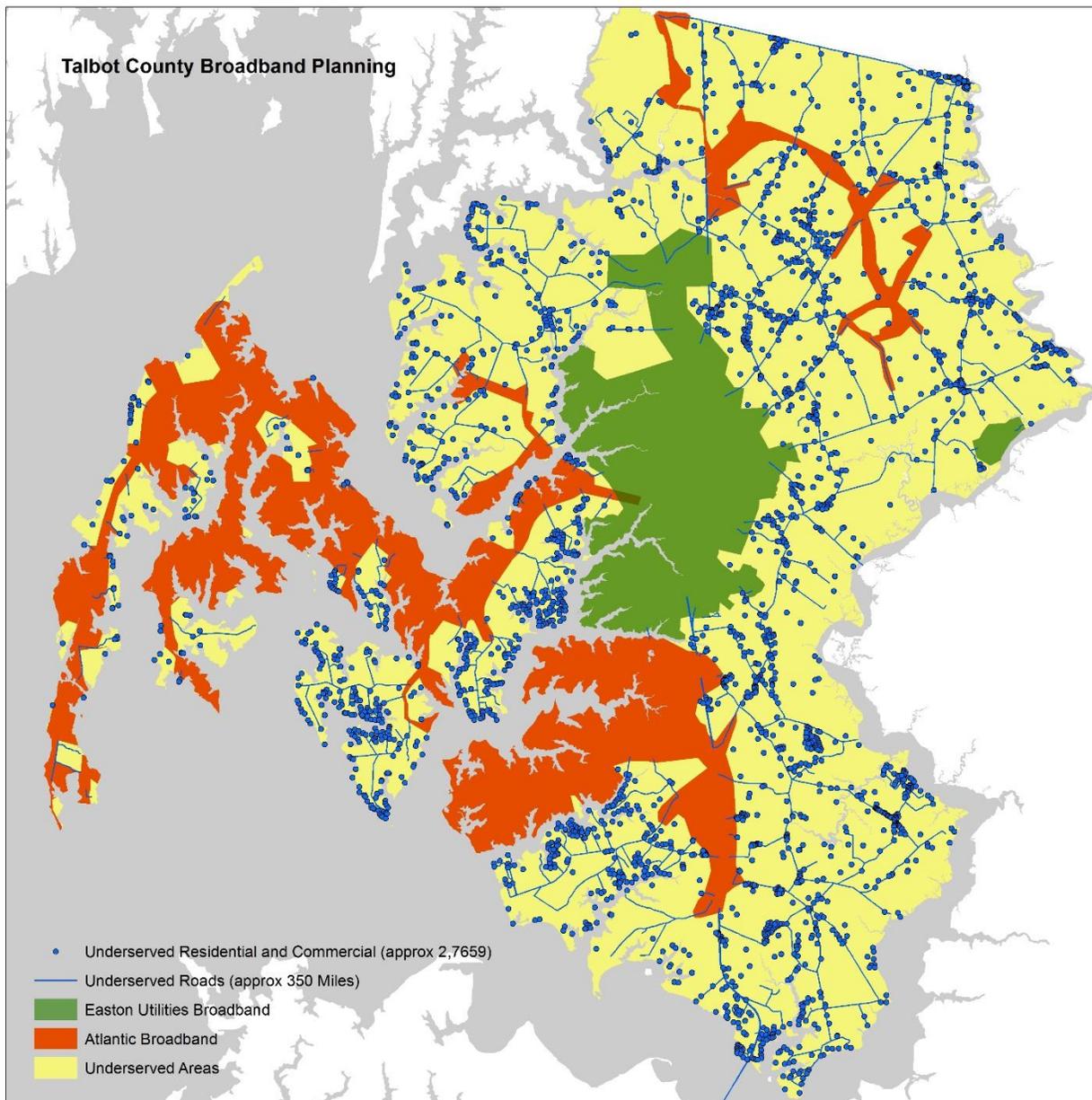
Talbot County Public School (TCPS) facilities are currently all fiber-connected, either by Atlantic Broadband or by Easton Utilities, under a five-year contract ending in 2020. Internet connectivity is provided through the SAILOR statewide network<sup>9</sup> and Comcast.

Figure 1: Current Broadband Coverage in Talbot County



<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sailor.lib.md.us/default.aspx>, accessed April 2017

Figure 2: Underserved Areas in Talbot County



The County government’s internal broadband needs are currently provided through a mixture of County-owned point-to-point wireless links and connectivity to the SAILOR statewide network. County government is not currently seeking connectivity through this network, but expanded fiber may be a useful resource to the County in the future. For example, the County reports slow service between its EMS facilities and the University of Maryland Shore Medical Center at Easton, and may examine new alternatives to the current service.

The majority of the underserved areas have utility poles. The amount of space and loading of the poles varies. The power companies in the underserved areas are Choptank Electric

Cooperative and Delmarva Power. While Delmarva owns some of its own poles, in certain areas it rents space on Verizon-owned poles. In some areas, there are separate power and telephone poles.

The County is mostly a tidewater area with soft soil. In between driveways, the soil is well suited to plowing of cable, with minimal cost or complexity of restoration. The right-of-way width varies depending on the area.

#### **IV. The County's Vision**

We believe broadband is a critical infrastructure—similar to roads, water, sewer, and electricity. Providing equal and affordable access to communications infrastructure and service is essential to promoting equal opportunity in business, education, employment, healthcare, and all other aspects of day-to-day life. We desire to expand the availability of broadband services, including to businesses and residents in the less densely populated sections of the County. We also desire improved service quality and competition in areas that are already served.

Currently, access to reliable broadband connectivity in some parts of the County is sporadic, and many residents and business owners must settle for inadequate speeds. While TCPS reports general satisfaction with the quality of its current service, it is concerned about costs, and expects its bandwidth needs to grow in the coming years. As education increasingly requires connectivity for video, cloud resources, electronic textbooks, and other resources, TCPS is also concerned about the students who live in the underserved areas and about students who are in served areas but cannot afford service. Local businesses that provide free internet access, such as Panera Bread and McDonald's, reportedly are crowded with these students. Families who home-school also require high quality connectivity, both for their regular instruction and to interconnect with resources who support home schooling.

Many tourists and part-time residents travel from regions with superior bandwidth and expect that type of connectivity to continue without interruption when they come to Talbot County. The County is known as a desirable vacation and second-home location for highly skilled individuals who require robust broadband connections to do their work. These visitors and potential residents are willing to pay for high-quality broadband—and they will not stay long in an area with poor service.

Real estate professionals report that properties in the underserved areas are suffering losses in value, and that it is sometimes difficult to sell homes without high-quality broadband. Part-time residents in the underserved areas are limited to costly, low-performance satellite services or inadequate DSL services. The County wants part-time residents to continue to visit—and to increase the amount of time they can spend in the County.

The County is also concerned about the needs of farms in the underserved areas, which have increasing needs to be connected—both to support and monitor their operations and to connect to markets and suppliers.

Other businesses have increasing needs for broadband and will find it difficult to continue to operate without reliable, high quality service. Telecommuters, work-at-home individuals, and remote office workers need to connect for a wide range of reasons—to link to cloud-based databases and services, to participate in video conferencing or presentations, to reliably do electronic payment transactions, to back up their work and data, and to learn and perform research. Businesses that traditionally do not require information technology cannot operate without it—construction contracting, auto service, retail, and home crafts.

For all of the County’s economic sectors, broadband is critical to lowering business costs, attracting and retaining highly skilled residents, and creating sustainable new jobs in an entrepreneurial economy based on innovation and creativity.

The County intends to empower its citizens and local businesses to be network economy producers—not just consumers of network information and data services. Further, we intend to provide our stakeholders with the broadband capacity they need to compete successfully in the global marketplace.

The County will consider a range of construction, operation, and ownership models for broadband. The County and selected Partner(s) will collaboratively determine the most mutually beneficial partnership structure, which may include cost-sharing, infrastructure leasing, and profit-sharing arrangements.

## **V. Project Goals**

The County seeks a creative partnership that will meet its current connectivity needs, and that will anticipate potential future needs. The Partner should plan for a long-term relationship with the County, and should base its response on the County’s vision and project goals.

The County seeks a Partner to offer fast, affordable broadband internet and data services. The County has prioritized a partnership that:

1. Provides the broadband infrastructure to Talbot County homes and businesses to enable residents, workers, and visitors the opportunity to access affordable, reliable high-speed broadband connections to the internet and other networks; the infrastructure will ideally be capable of 1 Gbps, but the ability to provide hundreds of Mbps will still be a substantial improvement, especially if there is a technological roadmap to higher speeds in the future

2. Delivers an unfettered data offering that does not impose caps or usage limits on one use of data over another (i.e., does not limit streaming); all application providers (data, voice, video, cloud services) will be equally able to provide their services, and the consumer's access to applications will open the marketplace
3. Considers innovative models, including, but not limited to:
  - a. Homes and businesses (including farms) building their own fiber to the right-of-way, either individually or as part of cost-sharing groups
  - b. New or existing providers offering potential fiber/wireless solutions
  - c. Existing providers extending their service areas
4. Considers ways for the County and prospective partners to share financial and operational risks
5. Ensures improved access to all County residents, provide cost-effective services for price-sensitive customers, and provide flexible pricing plans to help narrow the digital divide
6. Substantially improves service to underserved areas within three years.

The County considers both cost and availability of service to be important. We encourage responses that address both to maximize adoption of service and to deliver the intended economic and quality-of-life impacts.

One of the County's key priorities is to provide all members of the community the opportunity to access robust, affordable broadband service. The network should be built throughout the underserved areas and avoid "cherry picking," or building only to the most affluent areas of the County where there is a higher likelihood of obtaining subscribers willing to pay for service (and thus seeing a quicker return on capital investment). If possible, the network should also address problems with service and cost in areas that are currently served.

Further, the County is acutely aware that providers advertise as being "served" some areas in which residents and businesses in fact cannot obtain internet service, or are told that service is only available if they individually finance a large-scale fiber build. The County wishes to address this problem by requesting that the Partner clearly identify its proposed services area, and that it extend service to a large number of passings at once, with an equitable approach to sharing costs among the potential customers.

Low-income residents are particularly vulnerable, and broadband is important to help level the playing field. As the world becomes increasingly connected, broadband access is key to

education, job training, and even access to one's own medical records. We expect respondents to this RFI to be sensitive to this reality, and to be willing to work with the County to develop creative solutions for supporting all members of the community.

The County may also consider models which could include, but are not limited to, the following scenarios:

- Private construction, operation, and maintenance of privately-owned fiber optic infrastructure;
- Publicly or privately constructed open-access infrastructure that allows other qualified providers to offer service over the network; or
- Private provisioning of services over infrastructure that is constructed, owned, operated, and maintained by the Partner.

The County will also consider any combination of these models as well as alternative suggestions proposed by respondents.

## **VI. Network Design and Construction Parameters**

The County is willing to consider all proposals for partnerships, and welcomes respondents' unique approaches to network design and construction. The County prefers the following baseline technical attributes:

- Fully fiber-based connectivity (i.e., FTTP) to residential and business customers
- Fiber strand capacity capable of providing direct homerun connections to businesses and residential "power" users
- Fiber strand capacity and physical architecture (e.g., handhole placement, backbone routes) anticipating full deployment to all homes and businesses
- Low latency
- Backbone topology capable of supporting connections over diverse paths from one or more central hub locations to fiber distribution cabinets located throughout the County to facilitate high-availability service offerings
- Aerial fiber distribution plant constructed on utility poles where cost-effective
- Underground communications conduit pathways that can be utilized by the County for future scalability, where feasible

- Fiber routes that are aligned with existing County conduit and coincide with planned County utility, roadway, and related capital improvement projects to reduce cost and minimize disruption where possible

We understand that a community-wide FTTP network may not seem cost-effective for some providers. Respondents that believe this goal to be a barrier to their ability to successfully partner with the County should clearly articulate their reasoning, and describe how they may provide a “good-enough” technological alternative to FTTP.

For example, the County will consider hybrid fiber/wireless approaches that may reduce fiber construction costs while still providing high-speed broadband access to remote areas of the County.

## **VII. County Contributions and Assets**

We are in the early stages of determining exactly what the County’s role will be in promoting enhanced broadband access, and we are willing to consider various levels of public involvement.

One known opportunity is the County’s planned sewer and water improvements, including excavation from St. Michaels to Tilghman Island and villages along the path. The County is interested in working with a Partner on joint-build or joint-trenching opportunities that arise along these routes.

In the event that respondents propose to perform network construction and installation, the County will dedicate resources to support its Partner(s) through plan review, coordination, and inspection services to expedite and potentially reduce the cost of construction in the public rights-of-way.

The County is open to suggestions for other roles it can play in supporting this project, including a model in which County-funded fiber is deployed on main roads, and the Partner(s) is responsible for drop cables and laterals into subscribers’ homes and businesses. We encourage partners to suggest creative and innovative ways the County can leverage its strengths to accomplish its goals.

At a minimum, the County anticipates that it will assign a point of contact (POC) who will be the liaison to the Partner and its subcontractor(s), and we commit to providing services to help prevent or lessen conflicts in the Partner’s construction schedule. County staff will be prepared to assist the Partner(s) in navigating necessary permitting to streamline planning and construction efforts. For example, the County may assist in publicizing the effort to the public in the underserved areas.

Once we have selected our Partner(s), the County is prepared to move forward. The County will work with its Partner(s) to facilitate the smoothest possible access for construction of the network.

For the selected Partner(s), the County will provide access to non-public records that identify County infrastructure. Such information includes, but is not limited to, the location of traffic, sewer, water, and storm-drainage facilities.

Respondents should also identify any existing assets they may have in the area and how they intend to leverage those for this project. Partners may be asked to pay franchise fees to the County and pole attachment fees to the appropriate utility. Respondents should consider whether they propose to offset the fees with in-kind contributions, including conduit and dark fiber. The County will work with its selected Partner(s) to facilitate conversations and collaboration between the partnership and jurisdictions that may govern the Partner's access to necessary infrastructure, rights-of-way, and other components necessary to successfully deploy a robust network.

## VIII. RFI Response Requirements

Talbot County requests the following information—in as much detail as is practicable—from respondents. Please follow the exact order below and use the appropriate response headers. Start a new page for each response header. Your willingness to follow these instructions will facilitate our review.

Page requirements are based on Times New Roman or Calibri 12-point font with 1" margins on all sides. Please start a new page for each response header. Responses that do not follow this format may be excluded from further consideration.

1. **Cover Letter:** Please include company name, address of corporate headquarters, address of nearest local office, contact name for response, and that person's contact information (address, phone, cell, email). Keep response to one (1) page.
2. **Business Model Summary:** Please summarize the business model you intend to use for the partnership. This should be a concise explanation of the key components of your business model, including but not limited to the division of network and operations responsibility and ownership. Keep response to two (2) pages.
3. **Affirmation:** Please affirm that you are interested in this partnership and address the core project goals and network design parameters listed above (Sections V and VI). List each goal and requirement with a brief statement of how you will comply. If you cannot meet any of those requirements, indicate the requirements to which you take

exception, and provide an explanation of the exceptions. Keep response to three (3) pages.

4. **Experience:** Please provide a statement of experience discussing past performance, capabilities, and qualifications. Identify other networks your firm has designed, built, maintained, or operated; include the levels of broadband speed, availability, and adoption among different categories of end users and unique capabilities or attributes. Discuss partnerships with other service providers, governments, or nonprofit entities you have undertaken, particularly any involving dark fiber leasing. Describe the nature of the projects and your firm's role. For entities currently providing communications services in or near Talbot County, describe your current service footprint in the County and the region, including a description of the type of infrastructure and services you currently offer and the technology platform(s) used. Explain how your firm is a suitable partner for this project. Keep response to two (2) pages.
5. **Technical and Operational Approach:** At a high level, summarize the technological and operational approach you would use for this project. Keep response to three (3) pages.
6. **Business Structure:** Summarize the business approach you would use for the project. How would your business plan help to meet the County's goals? What are the key assumptions? What are your main areas of risk, and how can the County help reduce the risks? What are the County's main areas of risk, and how will you attempt to reduce the risk to the County? Keep response to three (3) pages. In addition, please complete Appendix A to clarify areas of responsibility. Please submit Appendix A electronically in its native Excel format.
7. **Open Access:** If you currently operate communications facilities, indicate whether they are operated on an open-access basis. Describe whether and, if so, how you would support open access to infrastructure in the County. Keep response to one (1) page.
8. **Schedule:** Describe your proposed schedule for implementing service. Offer a timeline with key milestones. Would you be able to begin service before the entire network is constructed? Are there areas of the County you would recommend be constructed first? What will be accomplished in 3, 5 and 7 years? Keep response to two (2) pages (one for response, one for schedule).
9. **Privacy:** Describe your ability to provide secure network service or infrastructure that complies with public safety and other security and privacy regulations and requirements. Keep response to one (1) page.

- 10. Financing and Funding:** List any requirements the County must meet for you to partner with the County on this project by completing Appendix B.

Please also provide a one-page flowchart that shows the flow of funds between all parties in your response. Include all sources and uses of funds.

If you do not address this question, it will be assumed that you are interested in the partnership but have no financial requirements whatsoever of the County. Please submit Appendix B electronically in its native Microsoft Word format. Please limit your response to the separately attached Microsoft Word document, plus the one-page flowchart.

- 11. Services:** Describe the service options you plan to offer over this network (for example, data only; voice and data; a triple-play of voice, data, and video). What download/upload or symmetrical speeds would you offer and guarantee to end users? How will your residential and business offerings differ? What types of service level agreements (for lit services: availability and packet delivery; for dark fiber: repair time) would you be prepared to offer? Keep response to two (2) pages.
- 12. Pricing:** Provide your approach to pricing the proposed services. For managed services, please describe factors impacting non-recurring costs (e.g., estimated fiber path distances, equipment redundancy); recurring costs for varying capacity levels; and any key technical assumptions upon which prices are based. For dark fiber offerings, please describe desired pricing models. Keep response to two (2) pages.
- 13. Local Participation and Economic Development:** Provide a statement of how your proposed participation would help the County's economic development goals. Describe your interests and plans to hire local contractors in the County, and how your participation would help local job creation. Describe your relationships with local businesses in the County, if any, as well as your interest and plans to engage them in this project. Keep response to three (3) pages.
- 14. References:** Provide a minimum of three (3) references, including contact information, from previous contracts or partnerships. Keep response to two (2) pages.

In addition to the response above, please submit your completed Appendices A and B. Keep Appendix A in its native Microsoft Excel format. Keep Appendix B in its native Microsoft Word format. Appendix C shows the required structure for responses and should be used as a guide.

## IX. Response Process

We ask that all respondents provide all requested material and that all respondents complete the attached responsibility matrix (Appendix A) and financial responsibilities questions (Appendix B), and submit each in the format (structure and page limitations) specified in the RFI instructions in VIII. We have included Appendix C as a guide.

**Respondents must submit one (1) electronic copy to [mcohoon@talbotcountymd.gov](mailto:mcohoon@talbotcountymd.gov). Please also deliver or mail the final RFI response (including the required Appendices) in a sealed envelope to the following address:**

**R. Andrew Hollis  
Talbot County Manager's Office  
Courthouse – South Wing  
11 North Washington Street  
Easton, MD 21601**

**Any bids received after 4:00 p.m. EST will not be accepted and will be returned unopened.**

The County cannot guarantee that correspondence directed to other County staff or departments will be received or considered.

**Please identify any proprietary and/or confidential information as such.**

### Letter of Intent

**All interested respondents are asked to submit a letter of intent via email by **July 28, 2017** to [mcohoon@talbotcountymd.gov](mailto:mcohoon@talbotcountymd.gov).**

The letter of intent should include the **company name and the name, title, phone number, and email address** of the respondent's primary point of contact, and should indicate that the respondent intends to submit a formal response to the RFI. The letter of intent can be contained in the body of an email, and does not have to be a formal, standalone letter.

### Questions

Questions related to this RFI must be submitted in writing and should be emailed to [mcohoon@talbotcountymd.gov](mailto:mcohoon@talbotcountymd.gov) **no later than August 4, 2017**. Responses shall be provided by e-mail to vendors who have submitted a letter of intent to respond **no later than August 18, 2017**.

### Response Deadline

**Final RFI submissions must be received via both U.S. mail and email no later than September 1, 2017 at 4:00 PM EST. Please send to [mcohoon@talbotcountymd.gov](mailto:mcohoon@talbotcountymd.gov).**

Please deliver or mail the final RFI response (including the required Appendices) in a sealed envelope to the following address:

**R. Andrew Hollis  
Talbot County Manager's Office  
Courthouse – South Wing  
11 North Washington Street  
Easton, MD 21601**

**Any bids received after 4:00 p.m. EST will not be accepted and will be returned unopened.**

The County cannot guarantee that correspondence directed to other County staff or departments will be received or considered.

**Please identify any proprietary and/or confidential information as such.**

### **Summary of RFI Process Deadlines**

The following is the schedule for responding to this RFI. The schedule is subject to change:

**July 14, 2017** – RFI issued

**July 28, 2017** – Deadline for submitting letter of intent to respond to RFI

**August 4, 2017** – Deadline for submitting questions about RFI

**August 18, 2017** – Responses to questions issued

**September 1, 2017** – RFI responses due

Talbot County thanks you in advance for your thoughtful response.

## **X. Personal Presentations**

At its discretion, the County may request that vendors and other parties that provide a timely response to this RFI make an individual and personal presentation to better explain information or solutions identified in the response. These presentations, if requested by the County, shall be held at a time and place of mutual convenience.

## **XI. County Rights Reserved**

1. The County reserves the right to accept or reject all or portions of any response(s) to the RFI, to waive any formalities of the RFI process, to re-advertise the RFI, to amend the terms of the RFI, to extend the dates provided herein, to suspend the procurement if the desired outcomes are not achieved, to award the contract to the most responsive and responsible respondent(s) as deemed in the best interest of the County, and/or to

proceed to provide the services otherwise, as the County may determine in its sole discretion is in the best interest of the County.

2. No reimbursement will be made by the County for any costs incurred in responding to this RFI, developing or submitting responses to the RFI, or attendance at a site inspection, pre-bid conference, or interviews.
3. The County reserves the absolute right to conduct such investigations as it deems necessary to assist in the evaluation of any response to the RFI and to establish the experience, responsibility, reliability, references, reputation, business ethics, history, qualifications and financial ability of the respondent(s), proposed subconsultants, independent Consultants and suppliers. The purpose of such investigation is to satisfy the County that the respondent has the experience, resources and commercial reputation necessary to perform the work and support any warranties in the prescribed manner and time.
4. In the event the RFI responses are considered for an award, the County reserves the right to award the Project to the firm that demonstrates the best ability to fulfill the requirements for the performing the subject services. The successful firm will be chosen based on the qualifications, evaluation of submittals and a possible interview. The County reserves the right to conduct such discussions or negotiations with Proposers or other entities as it deems necessary to assist in the evaluation of any proposal, to secure maximum clarification and completeness of any proposal, and select the proposal that best meets the requirements of the County and the public interest.

## **Appendix A: Responsibility Matrix**

Appendix A is included as a separate file.

Note that Appendix A must be submitted in its native Microsoft Excel format. Failure to follow submission instructions may result in rejection of the response.

## **Appendix B: Financial Responsibilities Questions**

Appendix B is included as a separate file.

Note that Appendix B must be submitted in its native Microsoft Word format. Failure to follow submission instructions may result in rejection of the response.

## **Appendix C: Response Form Outline**

Appendix C is included as a separate file.

All responses should follow the instructions and outline in Section VIII and Appendix C. If any discrepancy exists, instructions in Section VIII should supersede all other directions.