

Northern Arizona Council of Governments Economic and Workforce Development

Build Back Better Regional Challenge Grant Opportunity

The Economic Development Administration's Build Back Better Regional Challenge "is designed as a two-phase competition to (1) help regions develop transformational economic development strategies, and (2) fund the implementation of those strategies that will create and grow regional growth clusters."

Phase 1 of the grant opportunity provides a technical assistance grant of up to \$500,000, which will be used to further develop the regional strategy for a Phase 2 project implementation grant to be awarded in mid 2022. Deadline for the Phase 1 Application is **October 19, 2021**.

Magellan Advisors is developing a Broadband Strategic Plan for Northern Arizona Council of Government (NACOG) that calls for the development of a regional broadband network that connects Apache, Coconino, Navajo, and Yavapai Counties by filling in gaps in broadband infrastructure. The availability of reliable broadband would allow the NACOG region to attract and retain broadband-reliant businesses across the region, with particular benefits to growth of a medical industry growth cluster, fitting the application criteria for a Build Back Better Regional Challenge grant.

The medical growth cluster in NACOG includes a number of stakeholders with a need for not only broadband, but overall enhanced infrastructure and workforce development to support communities in the NACOG region. Stakeholders involved in the development of this growth cluster include:

- Major hospital and healthcare systems including Summit Healthcare, Northern Arizona Healthcare, Dignity Health, Little Colorado Medical Center, and White Mountain
- Physicians' clinics and offshoots of major hospitals
- Biomedical companies throughout the region including laboratories, medical device manufacturers, and pharmaceuticals
- Colleges and Universities including NAU and Northland Pioneer College, for support in workforce development of medical professionals
- Communities served by these healthcare centers including coal affected communities in Apache and Navajo Counties, for support of telemedicine services
- Timber and forestry product pipelines for the construction of new and expanded healthcare facilities
- Industrial and commercial real estate developers to support the need for new facilities

The regional broadband network is just one component in a larger Build Back Better regional strategy with a focus on developing the growth cluster. Additional infrastructure projects such as water, sewer, or electrical, or other workforce development, property development, and various other initiatives should also be included to create layered projects throughout NACOG's region. NACOG is currently coordinating with industry leaders, infrastructure owner/operators, workforce development groups, and other key stakeholders to further develop a regional strategy.

NACOG will be the lead institution for the grant, with private partners from the chosen industry cluster, each of NACOG's counties and member cities, and other regional entities as partners. Other partners that could be engaged include:

- Economic Development groups
- Educational institutions including universities and colleges
- Biomedical laboratories
- Salt River Project
- Arizona Public Service
- Property developers and site selectors

Next steps for NACOG include:

1. Identification of additional projects and stakeholders to be included in the Build Back Better Challenge. EDA requires identification of 3-8 regional projects to be included.
2. Procurement of a grant writer for assistance with compiling the application (to be completed by September 24, 2021).
3. Engagement with and commitment from potential coalition members including documentation that each coalition member has read the application and is committed to executing its component(s) of the regional growth cluster. This may take the form of letters of support with appropriate language regarding the member's understanding of its commitments.
4. Collecting letters of support from across the region, with emphasis on the industries supported in the regional growth cluster.
5. Identification of total project budget and project narrative for the technical assistance grant.