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**Surf Internet Leads Charge for State Grant Funding
as Groundswell of Community Support for High-Speed Internet Grows Across Northern Indiana**

ELKHART, Ind. (February 29, 2024) – Support from local leaders has poured in from across Northern Indiana as the state’s Next Level Connections (NLC) Broadband Grant Program takes applications to subsidize broadband construction to rural areas. Surf Internet, a leader in cutting-edge, fiber-optic broadband services, is working closely with community leaders, and promising \$35 million of their own investment to apply to Round 4 of NLC funding in hopes of delivering broadband to Hoosier households.

Over 110 letters of support have come in from community leaders, local residents, and stakeholders across 16 Northern Indiana counties to partner with Surf in acquiring the state grant dollars.

The NLC program is a statewide Indiana initiative that is investing \$350 million in order to deploy broadband infrastructure to unserved end users. So far, over three rounds of NLC funding, \$251 million has been awarded across 81 counties to provide broadband access to more than 69,150 homes and commercial locations. It is currently in its fourth round of funding. Indiana’s NLC website indicates that the state expects to award the grants during the summer of 2024. Applicants will have 24 months from the award date to complete construction.

Local leaders have begun taking a more proactive approach in recent years to delivering broadband internet to their communities as the digital divide grows deeper and residents are feeling the tangible effects of being left behind. High-speed broadband is no longer a way to get ahead, it’s become a prerequisite for everything from remote learning to employment. Increasingly, schools and employers are requiring a fast, reliable internet connection in order to join classes on school days, or call in to a company zoom when working remotely. Those without broadband are discovering that certain jobs are unavailable or that children miss out on critical classwork and even extracurricular activities.

Mary Perren, Interim Executive Director of the Starke County Economic Development Foundation (SCEDF) gave enthusiastic support, saying “Broadband is to the 21st century what rural electrification was to the 20th century. Starke County officials realized this when they sought and received a Broadband Ready designation from the state, and SCEDF is thrilled to be part of the ongoing effort to bring broadband to our residents. Having access to dependable internet allows people to work remotely, is critical for e-learning days, and an essential business tool, all of which help rural communities to grow and prosper.”

“Rural Hoosiers are clamoring for real solutions to their connectivity issues,” stated Steve Carender, Surf’s Director of Special Funding, “and public-private partnerships have been, and will continue to be, the key to delivering reliable high-speed access.” Carender notes further that the communities that have already taken a proactive approach will be best positioned to close the digital divide.

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Another major opportunity to subsidize broadband projects in the future is the federal Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program. Afterwards however, there may be little opportunity for state and federal subsidies, meaning local governments will have to partner with ISPs at a higher cost to themselves to complete the work of connecting all residents to high-speed broadband.

To see if Surf Internet services are currently available for a specific address, visit <https://surfineternet.com/> and click “Check Availability.”

About Surf Internet

Surf Internet is an innovative fiber-optic internet company that serves as the essential gateway to connectivity across the Great Lakes region of Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan. The company is building a bridge to the wide-open future by delivering high-speed, reliable internet to homes and businesses in underserved, rural communities. Surf’s 200-plus person team is local, giving them an edge when it comes to customer care and advocacy for the region. Headquartered in Elkhart, Ind., Surf also has offices in La Porte, Ind., Byron Center and Fowlerville, Mich., and Coal City and Rock Falls, Ill. Learn more at [https://surfineternet.com.](https://surfineternet.com/)

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