



## **APACHE COUNTY RECEIVES \$9.7 MILLION FOR HIGH SPEED BROADBAND AND INTERNET INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT**

**APACHE COUNTY, AZ** — Joy Whiting, the Apache County School Superintendent, is extremely pleased to announce Apache County has been awarded \$9.7 million from the Arizona Commerce Authority (ACA) Broadband Development Grant. The funding will be used to install fiber optic infrastructure to connect homes and businesses in eight communities in Apache County. Although the grant application process was spearheaded by Apache County Superintendent of Schools, Joy Whiting, “the process of applying for this broadband infrastructure grant was a huge undertaking with many individuals and entities helping along the way,” said Superintendent Whiting, “First and foremost, I would like to thank Governor Ducey and the Arizona Commerce Authority for their investment in rural Arizona. I also want to thank each of the individuals and entities because this award would not have been possible without their help:

- Apache County Board of Supervisors; Dr. Joe Shirley, Jr., Chairman Nelson Davis, and Alton Shepherd;
- State Representatives Myron Tsosie and Jasmine Blackwater-Nygren as well as Senator Theresa Hatathlie, all united in their support for this grant application;
- Jeff Sabotka, Senior Vice President and State Broadband Director of the ACA, for his patience and consistent perseverance in helping the state of Arizona in so many ways, but especially for understanding rural Arizonans needs;
- Keith Watkins, Senior Vice President of Legislative Affairs and Rural Development of the ACA, who has personally visited Apache County multiple times to understand and address the economic issues facing our community;
- Milan Eaton, the State E-Rate Director, a one-man band and champion for all schools, especially rural schools;

- The Salt River Project and Tucson Electric Power Coal Communities Transition Team formed by subject matter experts who put countless hours behind the project. Both SRP and TEP went above and beyond not only in their professionalism and commitment to the Apache County, but each committed \$300,000 in matching funds in support of the project; while funding an economic study from Rounds Consulting which looked at how high-speed broadband will help improve the region with new jobs, tax revenue, and other economic growth;
- Karen Ziegler, John Lucas, and those from CBA, for seeing Apache County’s huge need for high speed internet and tackling this infrastructure problem with an all-hands-on-deck approach;
- Apache County’s partner in the project, Commnet, for having the foresight to invest, plan ahead and take risks; even though there was the possibility of no return on investment;
- The three municipalities and their councils, led by Eagar Mayor Bryce Hamblin, Mayor-Elect Shelly Reidhead, and St. Johns Mayor Spence Udall, who came together to support this region-wide broadband effort; and,
- The school districts, as their support for this project will now bring high speed internet to the families of students who attend their very small and very rural schools.”

Work on Apache County’s ABDG application began in early 2021 when Superintendent Whiting took office and prioritized obtaining broadband for schools, students, and families in the County. This project naturally coincided with economic development efforts focused on addressing Apache County’s significant economic issues. Apache County has a poverty rate more than three times the national average and more than double the state average.<sup>1</sup> With two coal-fired power plants in the region closing in the next decade, there is an urgent need to address these economic issues.

---

<sup>1</sup> Economic Research Service, Poverty Rates, <https://data.ers.usda.gov/reports.aspx?ID=17826>

Superintendent Whiting has worked with other County officials and leadership from both power plants to find solutions to diversify and sustain the economy. “Broadband has been the number one priority here in Apache County since I took office and I want to personally thank Celeste Robertson, the County Attorney’s Office Chief Deputy, along with County Manager Ryan Patterson, for their time spent discussing economic issues and making decisions on how to move forward as the power plants possibly phase into closure,” said Joy Whiting. “This \$9.7 million dollar grant means a lifeline that economic stability rests on. We appreciate the support from SRP and TEP to help us assess the anticipated value and economic considerations. We have more work ahead of us, but we are super excited about Apache County’s future due to the high speed internet and broadband available in Apache County.”

Superintendent Whiting said the project became possible in 2021, thanks to “Governor Doug Ducey’s visionary leadership in announcing a \$100 million commitment to expand high-speed broadband to underserved areas of the state – one of the single largest broadband investments in state history.” The Funding comes from the American Rescue Plan Act. The Arizona Broadband Development Grant Program (ABDG) will enable local communities to construct or improve broadband infrastructure. The historic investment will build on the progress of recent years and strengthen communities’ capacity and competitiveness for economic growth. The ABDG is intended to bridge the digital divide and enhance the connectivity for Arizona’s citizens, businesses, healthcare institutions, government establishments, and education sector.<sup>2</sup>

Work on the broadband project will begin as soon as possible. The grant stipulates it must be completed within three years, but Apache County’s partner, Commnet, has planned ahead and will be able to implement the project in phases. Commnet will begin the first phase immediately and the overall deployment timeline will be shortened given the extensive middle mile network Commnet already owns and operates in Apache County. The project at completion is expected to connect more than 11,000 residents and

---

<sup>2</sup> Arizona Commerce Authority, <https://www.azcommerce.com/broadband/arizona-broadband-development-grant-program/>

4,100 homes across the County. Additional information regarding the grant announcement can be found at the following link:

<https://www.azcommerce.com/news-events/news/2022/7/arizona-commerce-authority-announces-100-million-in-broadband-grants/>.