

# Project Information

**Company:** SkyRider Communications LLC dba ArkLaNet

## Project Description

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### General Info

**Project #:** 216

**Project Name:** The Sky's the Limit in Northeast Louisiana - Caldwell Parish

**Total Project Cost:** 3,827,603.45

**Total project cost per prospective broadband recipient:** 6,476.49

**Infrastructure cost per prospective broadband recipient:** 6,476.49

**Number of households to be served:** 489

**Number of businesses to be served:** 21

**GUMBO cost per prospective broadband recipient:** 5,181.19

**Number of GUMBO households to be served:** 489

**Number of GUMBO businesses to be served:** 21

**General Location/Parishes:** Caldwell

**Base Speed (Minimum Download/Upload):** 100:20

**Supported Scalability Speeds (Minimum Download/Upload):** 1000:50

### Qualifications and Experience:

Provide the following details:

- Number of years the applicant has provided internet services;
  - A history of the number of households and consumers, by year of service, to which the applicant has provided broadband internet access, as well as the current number of households to which broadband internet access (at least 25:3 Mbps) is offered;
  - The number of completed internet service infrastructure projects funded, in part, through federal or state grant programs, prior to the date of application submittal;
  - Whether the applicant has ever participated in an internet service infrastructure project funded, in part, through federal or state grant programs, and if so, for each project, the nature and impact of the project, the role of the applicant, the total cost of the project, and the dollar amount of federal or state grant funding;
  - The number of penalties paid by the applicant, a subsidiary or affiliate of the applicant, or the holding company of the applicant, relative to internet service infrastructure projects funded, in part, through federal or state grant programs, prior to the date of application submittal; and
  - The number of times the applicant, a subsidiary or affiliate of the applicant, or the holding company of the applicant has ever been a defendant in any federal or state criminal proceeding or civil litigation as a result of its participation in an internet service infrastructure project funded, in part, through federal or state grant programs, prior to the date of application submittal
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SkyRider Communications LLC (“SkyRider”) was incorporated in May 2001 with a mission to provide broadband internet service to schools and libraries located in rural, underserved areas. Since then SkyRider has expanded its mission to also provide services to local governments, businesses of all sizes, banks, and other entities needing high bandwidth capabilities to compete in the modern economy. Over time SkyRider has built wireless and fiber optic networks in Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, and Oklahoma, and has provided internet services for more than 20 years in the southeast region. A listing of all Louisiana cities served by SkyRider is provided as an attachment titled “City Coverage Listing”. SkyRider is licensed in Louisiana as a Competitive Local Exchange Carrier (CLEC) and general contractor (evidence of this license is provided as an attachment titled “Louisiana Public Service Commission - SkyRider CLEC Designation”), and is also certified by Louisiana Economic Development as a Small and Emerging Business Enterprise (a certificate is provided as an attachment titled “LED Certificate - Small and Emerging Business Enterprise”). Additionally, SkyRider has been designated by the Universal Service Administrative Co. as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) which allows the company to participate in the Emergency Broadband Benefit program. In the early 2000’s, SkyRider’s first customers were Cameron Parish libraries, Terrebonne Parish libraries, and Lafourche Parish schools. At the time, the only available internet service was copper-based so these entities were limited by the slow connection speed. SkyRider’s network buildout provided these entities with higher speeds, but since then, SkyRider has more fully transitioned into building fiber optic networks due to the quality, higher capacity, and relatively low maintenance over time. In March 2021, SkyRider purchased a WISP from Uniti Fiber which has since expanded its service area and increased its number of active customers. This network consists of 78 towers of which 54 of them utilize fiber optic cables. Through the company’s residential arm called ArkLaNet, SkyRider has more than 380 residential customers receiving broadband internet services to their homes, and the company is subscribing and connecting new customers every day. As of December 2021, SkyRider provides internet services to more than 300 schools, libraries, businesses, and government entities. Below is a condensed history of the number of households and consumers, by year of service, that SkyRider has provided broadband internet service with an offering of at least 25:3 Mbps. Active Date, Average Capacity, Active Customers (non-residential): 2007 | 500 Mbps | 3 2008 | 1 Gbps | 5 2009 | 100 Mbps | 1 2010 | 500 Mbps | 1 2011 | 500 Mbps | 1 2012 | 1 Gbps | 4 2013 | 500 Mbps | 5 2014 | 500 Mbps | 7 2015 | 500 Mbps | 20 2016 | 500 Mbps | 28 2017 | 500 Mbps | 12 2018 | 500 Mbps | 16 2019 | 1 Gbps | 21 2020 | 1 Gbps | 38 2021 | 2 Gbps | 37 Active Date, Average Capacity, Active Customers (residential): 2021 | 2 Gbps | 380 SkyRider has not participated in nor completed any internet service infrastructure projects funded, in part, through federal or state grant programs prior to the date of application submission to the Louisiana Office of Broadband Development and Connectivity. SkyRider has independently financed all of its broadband infrastructure projects and network acquisitions since its incorporation in 2001. SkyRider Communications LLC dba ArkLaNet nor any subsidiary, affiliate, or holding company thereof has ever paid penalties relative to internet service infrastructure projects funded, in part, through federal or state grant programs, prior to the date of application submission to the Louisiana Office of Broadband Development and Connectivity. SkyRider Communications LLC dba ArkLaNet nor any subsidiary, affiliate, or holding company thereof has ever been a defendant in any federal or state criminal proceeding or civil litigation as a result of its participation in an internet service infrastructure project funded through federal or state grant programs prior to the date of this application submission to the Louisiana Office of Broadband Development and Connectivity.

## Financial Background:

- Provide five years of financial statements, pro forma statements, or financial audits to ensure financial and organizational strength regarding the ability of the applicant to successfully meet the terms of the grant requirements and the ability to meet the potential repayment of grant funds. If the applicant has been in business for less than five years, provide documentation for the number of years in business
- Indicate whether the applicant, a subsidiary or affiliate of the applicant, or the holding company of the applicant has ever filed for bankruptcy

SkyRider Communications LLC dba ArkLaNet nor any subsidiary, affiliate, or holding company thereof has ever filed for bankruptcy. All financial statements remain strictly confidential for the purposes of the GUMBO Grant application.

## Partnerships:

Provide the identity of any partners or affiliates if the applicant is proposing a project for which the applicant affirms that a formalized agreement or letter of support exists between the provider and one or more unaffiliated partners where the partner is one of the following:

- a separate private provider of broadband service, requiring a formalized agreement; or
- a nonprofit or not-for-profit, or a for-profit subsidiary of either, and the applicant is:
  - being allowed access and use of the partner's infrastructure, on special terms and conditions designed to facilitate the provision of broadband services in unserved areas, requiring a formalized agreement;
  - utilizing a matching financial and/or in-kind contribution provided by one or more partners, requiring a formalized agreement; or
  - a parish, municipality, or school board, or any instrumentality thereof, may qualify as a nonprofit for the purposes of the GUMBO grant program. Letters of support by a parish, municipality, or school board, or any instrumentality thereof, supporting an application may be submitted as part of an application. A letter of support does not require a formalized agreement.
- Provide a brief narrative explaining how the partnership or affiliation will facilitate deployment and reduce cost per prospective broadband recipient. For applications or project areas where the nonprofit or not-for-profit partner provides only matching financial support, that information can be documented in the budget section within the relevant application or project area.

In support of SkyRider's GUMBO Grant application, four letters were submitted by the following public entities: Caldwell Parish Police Jury, Caldwell Parish School District, Caldwell Parish Library, Caldwell Parish Industrial Development Board. These letters of support are provided as attachments. Additionally, SkyRider has leveraged its existing partnership with Etheridge Pipeline & Conduit LLC (EPC), an underground utility construction and maintenance company, to estimate the pricing for the network buildout proposed by this GUMBO Grant application. If awarded funding, EPC will be the selected subcontractor for constructing key components of the broadband network in Caldwell Parish. This partnership reduces the cost per prospective broadband recipient by capitalizing on the specific experience and unique skill sets of SkyRider and EPC, respectively. SkyRider and EPC have partnered on hundreds of projects together, which provides the basis for SkyRider to subcontract a portion of the work (i.e. duct and handholes installation) that EPC can more effectively and efficiently complete in accordance with the project timeline. EPC is certified by the Louisiana Economic Development Board for the Hudson Initiative and their Certification ID is 23330. For verification, the Certified Small Entrepreneur (Hudson Initiative) Vendor List published by the Louisiana Procurement and Contract Network (LaPAC) is provided as an attachment. Moreover, EPC is a strategic partner for SkyRider due to their ongoing partnership with Louisiana Delta Community College (LDCC). This public-private partnership aligns with SkyRider's GUMBO Grant workforce strategy (see section on Local Workforce) because EPC has also partnered with LDCC to develop a program that trains students for careers in broadband infrastructure installation. This new program begins its first session in January 2022 for a duration of six to eight weeks, and LDCC will leverage their mobile trailer equipped with heavy machinery simulators to bring the program anywhere in Northeast Louisiana. Not only will this meet the needs of SkyRider and EPC, but the program will also benefit other internet service providers seeking to expand their underground networks in the future and will provide high quality jobs to area residents.

For work being performed by Hudson Initiative or Veterans Initiative qualified applicants or contractors, provide documentation and/or a formalized agreement.

EPC is certified by the Louisiana Economic Development Board for the Hudson Initiative and their Certification ID is 23330. For verification, the Certified Small Entrepreneur (Hudson Initiative) Vendor List published by the Louisiana Procurement and Contract Network (LaPAC) is provided as an attachment titled "Certified Small Entrepreneur (Hudson Initiative) Vendor List". Additionally, an executed subcontractor agreement between SkyRider and EPC is provided as an attachment titled "Subcontractor Agreement | Etheridge Pipeline & Conduit LLC".

## Project Area

### Assessment of the Current Level of Broadband Access in the Proposed Deployment Area

Describe the current level of service within the area and provide the data source or methodology used to capture this information. Raw data may be submitted as part of the assessment. If data is available to support differences between advertised and transmission speeds, applicants may also submit applications for areas where transmission speeds are less than 25:3 Mbps.

National Telecommunications and Infrastructure Association, Ooklah, and Federal Communications Commission 477 data was referenced to identify unserved areas or areas without access to broadband internet with speeds of 25:3 Mbps. Maps of the project service areas have been attached demonstrating the proposed fiber deployments, identified unserved potential customers, and existing Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) reservation areas. Further, we have carefully mapped existing service providers to ensure the identified potential residential and business customers are not served by an existing internet service provider. Delta Regional Authority (DRA) parish-level speed test data was referenced to supplement federal data sources. Since raw speed test data cannot be exported directly from the DRA website, parish-level speed test map has been attached for reference. Some key insights from Caldwell Parish speed test data include: 336 unique speed test locations were collected Of the 336 unique locations, 260 identified having 'no service' Of the 15 unique providers identified, four are mobile carriers Of the 15 unique providers identified, only six provide service speeds greater than 25:3 Mbps Of the 15 unique providers identified, only two provide service speeds of at least 100:20 Mbps Finally, SkyRider collaborated with Technology for Rural America (TFRA) during the latter months of 2021 to initiate a broadband survey for Caldwell Parish to assess needs, challenges, and opportunities for broadband infrastructure deployment and improved services to area residents and businesses. As of December 21, 2021, the Caldwell Parish Survey had received 451 responses. The survey will collect responses beyond the submission deadline of the GUMBO Grant application to inform SkyRider as the company continues to construct broadband infrastructure and provide telecommunications services to the Northeast Louisiana region. Some key insights from the Caldwell Parish survey include: 21.5% of respondents said they had no internet service provider available 21.1% of respondents said they had not purchased internet service from any providers When asked about their satisfaction with their current internet service – 52 individuals said their service is "too slow" 41 individuals said they have frequent "service interruptions" 37 individuals said they have issues with the "price" of their internet service 30 individuals said they are "not receiving [the] speed [they] paid for" 104 school age children said they either – Have no internet service available; or Have not purchased internet service; or Only have access to satellite service; or Only have mobile wireless service. 93% of individuals responded "yes" when asked if they would like to have higher service speed(s) at a comparable price 100% of individuals responded "yes" when asked if Caldwell Parish should prioritize bringing higher service speeds to the area

### Services

Provide a description of service options to be provided:

Service Name	Upload/download speed	Date of 1st Availability	Data Cap	# of recipients	Price
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CaldwellParishNorth	20:100Mbps	05/22	N/A	158	79.00
CaldwellParishNorth	20:200Mbps	05/22	N/A	158	99.00
CaldwellParishNorth	30:300Mbps	05/22	N/A	158	129.00
CaldwellParishNorth	30:500Mbps	05/22	N/A	158	149.00
CaldwellParishNorth	50Mbps:1Gbps	05/22	N/A	158	199.00
CaldwellParishSouth	20:100Mbps	05/22	N/A	412	79.00
CaldwellParishSouth	20:200Mbps	05/22	N/A	412	99.00
CaldwellParishSouth	30:300Mbps	05/22	N/A	412	129.00
CaldwellParishSouth	30:500Mbps	05/22	N/A	412	149.00
CaldwellParishSouth	50Mbps:1Gbps	05/22	N/A	412	199.00

## Marketing

Provide documentation for applicant engagement to connect consumers with community education forums, multimedia advertising, and marketing programs.

Crafting a plan to connect potential and/or existing customers to SkyRider's new and expanded services (reach and offering) will be an integral part of its success. Therefore, SkyRider's marketing plan consists of four interconnected components outlined below. Education Forums SkyRider will take a targeted approach to partner with a variety of local stakeholders and organizations to host community education forums, including but not limited to: - Local Government / Public Bodies including Caldwell Parish Police Jury, Caldwell Parish Library, and North Delta Planning & Development District. - Major Employers / Industries including agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, retail, hospitality, industrial boards, economic development organizations, etc. - Businesses (for-profit and nonprofit) including small businesses, chambers of commerce, nonprofit organizations, etc. - Faith-based Organizations including churches, YMCA, Habitat for Humanity of Ouachita, etc. - Education Providers including school districts, K-12 schools, universities, community colleges, trade schools, etc. Dedicated forums will allow participants to address their specific needs and concerns, related to the following. - Service: general availability, offerings, speed, and reliability - Cost: pricing, savings - Value: benefits, customer service, use (ex. e-commerce, education, etc.) "On the Ground" Community Outreach In addition to community education forums, SkyRider has identified a dedicated cohort of knowledgeable project champions who will work "on the ground" to form and strengthen relationships with potential customers, distribute printed informational materials such as brochures to households and businesses, and be available to answer any broadband or internet-related questions. This team includes various community members such as SkyRider employees, existing customers, business owners, librarians, higher education representatives, faith-based leaders, high school and college students, local government employees, and real estate professionals, among others. The Sky's the Limit with SkyRider A coordinated marketing initiative, "The Sky's the Limit with SkyRider," (see attachment titled "Sky's the Limit Logo") will garner community interest and excitement. A fun play on words, the goal and messaging of the initiative aims to highlight the possibilities for all—with new and improved high-speed internet capabilities. Possible messages include, but are not limited to: - With SkyRider, you have the option to go to work or school from the comfort of your home (or anywhere) without fears of disconnection. - SkyRider gives you the ability to see your physician two towns over via a telehealth visit. - SkyRider can help you expand your small business by allowing you to sell your products or services through a secure online store. - Improve your processes and become a leader in agricultural innovation by taking advantage of SkyRider's fast speed and unlimited access. - As a first-year college student, fast speed and a reliable connection will allow you to connect with your family across the country (literally and figuratively). - With SkyRider, you don't have to sacrifice speed or quality for a fair price. You can have it all! Furthermore, the messaging of this initiative will be distributed using the following tactics. Community Buzz Small promotional items that community members can display or distribute will go a long way in bolstering awareness and support. Examples include: - Fun, graphical yard signs in a show of support ("In this home, we connect to the internet with SkyRider") - Drink coasters to be distributed to local restaurants and bars - Stickers with various sayings

that demonstrate impact can be displayed in retail windows Testimonials Customer testimonials will highlight the initiative, with particular focus given to the speed, reliability, and customer service of SkyRider Communications. Several satisfied customers from various industries have already provided testimonials that can be used for this purpose. As more people connect, SkyRider will solicit new testimonials to be cycled as part of the marketing initiative. Workshops / Events The Community Outreach team will host a series of workshops for residents who may want additional training or support in navigating a connected life. Based on need and specific requests, topics will likely include basic digital literacy, e-commerce, online education, internet security and safety, social media, online banking, and specific program education (ex. Office 365). Strategic Sponsorships As part of an ongoing effort to increase brand and service awareness, SkyRider will identify sponsorship opportunities for community events such as festivals, school programs (ex. athletics), faith-based related events, or regional meetings/conferences. The sponsorship opportunity could be monetary or in-kind by providing free internet services for the event and its attendees. When possible, SkyRider will have representatives onsite to educate and connect with potential customers. Parish-Specific Marketing Programs Caldwell Parish has developed their own logo specific to their parish-wide broadband initiative, which SkyRider will coordinate with in the promotion of the overall GUMBO Grant project. The logo is in the attachment titled "Connect Caldwell Logo". Multimedia Advertising As part of the "Sky's the Limit" initiative, SkyRider will execute a multi-faceted advertising approach to reach a broad audience. Television advertisements Advertisements will leverage the same messaging described above but will take a more intimate approach to tell the story about someone's situation and how SkyRider is able to meet their needs through expanded and improved internet service. Ads will range anywhere from 15-30 seconds and air on local television channels one to three times a week. Additionally, SkyRider will run two to three different ad creatives at the same time, but will ensure that the creative is changed quarterly to keep the messaging fresh and top-of-mind. SkyRider will also consider the time of year when creating advertisements to keep them timely (i.e. a small business focus around the holiday season or online school opportunities around the start of the school year). Picture a single mother enrolled in college classes for the first time in her life. One of her children becomes sick and she becomes a full-time caretaker while trying to finish her last semester so she can earn her associate's degree. With the power and capability of SkyRider, this mother is not only able to care for her sick child but is also able to remain digitally connected so she can complete her schoolwork online, graduate with her degree, and be employed in a higher quality career to care for her family – despite the circumstances. Newspaper placements Newspaper advertisements will be straightforward and highlight the speed, price, and reliability of SkyRider's internet services. Ads will be placed in local newspapers and feature bold type and graphics to grab the attention of readers. Social media advertising Social media advertising offers the most flexibility of the three, with greater control over ad creative, budget, and target audience. SkyRider advertisements on social media will specifically target current and potential customers in their service region of Caldwell Parish. Ads will feature quote testimonials with fun, bold type and be tailored to target parents, educators, small businesses, and students, etc. In addition, SkyRider will develop short videos that feature real customers' experiences or informational tidbits about service and security. Advertisements will be monitored for performance to determine if/when adjustments should be made to budget, frequency, or target audiences.

## **Adoption**

Provide documentation that shows low-income household service offerings, digital equity or literacy support, or programs or partnerships to provide these services. The applicant should also indicate current participation in, or plans to, accept the federal Lifeline subsidy.

SkyRider assessed the project service area using a digital inclusion dashboard developed by civic data platform mySidewalk for Caldwell Parish (<https://reports.mysidewalk.com/b3657b9f98>). This report is provided as an attachment titled "Digital Inclusion Report - Caldwell Parish". As an internet service provider, SkyRider is deeply interested in identifying any barriers to connectivity that may exist for customers in its current service area and those who live beyond the footprint. Beyond the lack of infrastructure, it is evident that socioeconomic backgrounds play a huge role in determining whether or not a household or business is digitally connected in an economically meaningful way. SkyRider aims to close the digital divide in the proposed project service area by first understanding the barriers and challenges posed to the target population. Primarily based on data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Federal Communications Commission, the digital inclusion reports revealed the following key insights about the project service area which is one of the main components influencing SkyRider's broadband infrastructure deployment strategy. Caldwell Parish - 33.6% of total households have no internet access - 28.1% of total households are without a computer - 20.9% of Black or African American households are without a computer - 64.9% of Hispanic or Latino households are without a computer - 21% of White households are without a computer - 24.8% of total households have only cellular internet - 13.4% of total households have only smartphone device(s) - 871 households are below the poverty line - 9.4% of low income households are designated severely cost burdened - 33 Mbps is the average advertised download speed - 297 children under 18 live in a household without a computer - 261 children under age five live below the poverty line In consideration of these figures, SkyRider has developed strategic partnerships with public libraries, school districts, and faith-based organizations to promote broadband internet service that currently exists and new services that will potentially be offered as a result of the GUMBO Grant Program. Digital Literacy SkyRider has partnered with a public library in the project service area, Caldwell Parish Library, to facilitate and/or teach digital literacy classes and digital skills training to people of all ages. In June 2021, the State Library of Louisiana received more than \$3 million through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to disburse sub-grants to public libraries throughout the state. The aforementioned library received \$47,064 to expand digital network access, purchase internet accessible devices, and address digital inclusion by providing technical support services to citizens, particularly in support of education, health, and workforce development needs. SkyRider will coordinate its ongoing promotional efforts to connect digitally underserved and underserved individuals with broadband internet service by also promoting the new and/or expanded services offered by the parishes' public library. Digital literacy services at this public library includes, but is not limited to, the following: computer access (on-site), WiFi (on-site), laptops (for checkout), web browsing (including basic research), Microsoft Office 365 training, Windows OS training, job application assistance, online billing assistance, online banking assistance, new technology training (ex. tablets, smartphones, laptops), social media training, online education, mobile outreach units, and more. Additionally, this library will also promote the self-guided digital literacy modules through DigitalLearn.org for individuals who want to increase their digital literacy skills at their own pace. SkyRider has also partnered with Caldwell Parish School District to not only promote the new broadband internet services that will potentially be offered as a result of the GUMBO Grant Program, but also to coordinate the broader digital literacy efforts with educators so they can promote these services to parents and students who might benefit from better quality connectivity and improved digital literacy skills.

**Affordability for Low-Income Households** By leveraging and promoting the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program, SkyRider's residential service offerings will range from \$49/month for 100:20 Mbps to \$69/month for 200:20 Mbps for all eligible households (Note: these services offerings incorporate the \$30 EBB subsidy for low income households as defined by the Federal Communications Commission).

**Affordability for Education and Healthcare** Currently, SkyRider participates in the E-Rate program to help rural schools, libraries, and healthcare facilities obtain affordable broadband, and will continue to do so under the GUMBO Grant program. Additionally, SkyRider will accept the federal Lifeline subsidy to expand its reach in Northeast Louisiana by assisting eligible low-income subscribers with obtaining affordable broadband internet service.

## Community Support

Evidence of support for the project from citizens, local government, businesses, and institutions in the community, including letters of correspondence from citizens, local government, businesses, and institutions in the community that supports the project

In support of this application, nine (9) residents, businesses, and other organizations wrote and submitted letters of support which not only demonstrates the desire for broadband and related services in the project service area, but more importantly, the urgent demand expressed by local government, small businesses, parents and students, educators, and remote workers who need to be connected to the modern economy. Letters of support were submitted by the following entities: Caldwell Parish Police Jury Caldwell Parish School District Caldwell Parish Library Caldwell Parish Industrial Development Board Additionally, SkyRider collaborated with Technology for Rural America (TFRA) during the latter months of 2021 to initiate a broadband survey for Caldwell Parish to assess needs, challenges, and opportunities for broadband infrastructure deployment and improved services to area residents and businesses. As of December 21, 2021, the Caldwell Parish Survey had received 451 responses. This survey will collect responses beyond the submission deadline of the GUMBO Grant application to inform SkyRider as the company continues to construct broadband infrastructure and provide telecommunications services to the Northeast Louisiana region. Some key insights from the Caldwell Parish survey include: 21.5% of respondents said they had no internet service provider available 21.1% of respondents said they had not purchased internet service from any providers When asked about their satisfaction with their current internet service – 52 individuals said their service is “too slow” 41 individuals said they have frequent “service interruptions” 37 individuals said they have issues with the “price” of their internet service 30 individuals said they are “not receiving [the] speed [they] paid for” 104 school age children said they either – Have no internet service available; or Have not purchased internet service; or Only have access to satellite service; or Only have mobile wireless service. 93% of individuals responded “yes” when asked if they would like to have higher service speed(s) at a comparable price 100% of individuals responded “yes” when asked if Caldwell Parish should prioritize bringing higher service speeds to the area Combined, the letters of support and survey results are indicative of the desire and need for broadband infrastructure in the project service area, and also demonstrates the willingness of area residents, local government, and businesses to collaborate on a parish-wide initiative to connect households and employers so that the region may have the opportunity to experience more economic prosperity now and in the years to come. Additional information regarding the broadband survey results is detailed in the attachment titled “Caldwell Parish | Survey Results”. Letters of support are also provided as attachments.

## Local Workforce

Documentation of a workforce plan prioritizing the hiring of local, Louisiana resident workers, to include a signed letter of intent with a post-secondary educational institution that is a member of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, containing an obligation upon the applicant, and contractors or subcontractors of the applicant, to put forth a good-faith effort to hire, when possible, recent graduates of broadband-related programs.

SkyRider has developed a comprehensive workforce strategy that prioritizes the hiring of local, Louisiana resident workers including contractors and subcontractors of SkyRider. For all broadband-related projects completed in Louisiana, SkyRider has consistently committed to hiring local talent to support the economies of the communities where they operate, deploy infrastructure, and provide telecommunications service(s). SkyRider has developed numerous partnerships over the years with organizations supporting the workforce development ecosystem throughout their project service areas. For the purpose of the proposed GUMBO Grant project, SkyRider’s strategic workforce development partners include Louisiana Delta Community College (LDCC), Workforce Development Board 83, and AmeriCrew. SkyRider has executed a letter of intent with LDCC to formalize their partnership to not only hire recent graduates of broadband-related programs, but to also support LDCC in building a pipeline of



highly qualified workers in the telecommunications industry. The letter of intent is provided as an attachment titled “Letter of Intent - SkyRider + LDCC (executed)”. SkyRider will assist LDCC with program and/or curriculum development, on-the-job training, apprenticeships and/or internships, mentorship programs, and other employer engagement opportunities. Furthermore, SkyRider’s letter of intent demonstrates an obligation to support LDCC in their pursuit of a grant through the U.S. Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) Good Jobs Challenge. In anticipation of the GUMBO Grant Program, LDCC’s EDA grant application proposes to develop and/or expand five industry-driven programs including courses for trenchless utility installation technicians, heavy equipment operators, commercial vehicle operators, certified line workers, and gas utilities technicians. An overview of relevant LDCC courses is provided as an attachment titled “LDCC Course Descriptions”. SkyRider’s letter of intent is indicative of the strong partnership between SkyRider and LDCC, and further demonstrates the company’s commitment to helping train and hire Louisianians seeking employment in the telecommunications industry. Additionally, this letter of intent demonstrates a commitment from LDCC to assist SkyRider with training for new entrants, dislocated workers, and/or incumbent workers and outreach and recruitment of local workers. SkyRider is also partnering with Workforce Development Board 83 to leverage their career services offered to job seekers, dislocated workers, and incumbent workers throughout Northeast Louisiana. These services include worker outreach and recruitment - especially for specific populations such as veterans and minorities, wraparound services for trainees and workers, training-related incentives and tax credits, and most importantly, job placement. LDCC and Workforce Development Board 83 also work closely together to ensure training programs are informed by high-growth industries throughout the region, and to align programmatic offerings with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined Regional Plan for Northeast Louisiana and relevant Federal and state funding opportunities. Workforce Development Board 83 has numerous locations in the Northeast Louisiana region, including areas that will be impacted by this GUMBO Grant application. In anticipation of the GUMBO Grant Program and the potential to expand the workforce at SkyRider, the company has prioritized hiring individuals from historically marginalized groups to the extent possible. The project service area for the GUMBO Grant includes Caldwell Parish which has a relatively high veteran population (4.91%) according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey from 2015-2019. To better meet the needs of this specific population, SkyRider has developed a partnership with an organization called AmeriCrew to train and place local veterans into high quality jobs in the telecommunications industry. AmeriCrew leverages its partnerships nationwide to recruit and assist veterans with obtaining industry certifications and/or college credits so they can gain the experience and professional development they need to sustain high quality careers. Veterans are then placed in jobs that help build our nation’s critical infrastructure such as fiber, 5G and wireless, and clean energy. A letter of intent executed by AmeriCrew is provided as an attachment titled “Letter of Intent - AmeriCrew (executed)”. Ultimately, SkyRider has built a multi-faceted consortium of partners to not only assist them with workforce development and job placement for local job seekers and workers as part of the GUMBO Grant project, but to also catalyze a broader effort to leverage their organizations’ programming and expertise to build a robust pipeline of telecommunications workers throughout the region.

## Technical Report

### Reporting Requirements

Explain in technical detail the technologies to be used in the proposed project and the broadband transmission speeds offered to prospective broadband recipients as a result of the project. If it would be impracticable, because of geography, topography, or excessive cost to design a broadband infrastructure project that would deliver 100:100 Mbps, the applicant must provide an explanation. Transmission speeds of 100:20 Mbps are the minimum allowable under this grant program.

SkyRider Communications is designing and engineering a solution to provide broadband service to unserved homes and businesses and underserved homes in the service region. Using a combination of underground, wired Gigabit Passive Optical Network (GPON) and XGS-PON, all homes and businesses inside the proposed project service areas will have the availability of service speeds up to 1 Gbps via Fiber to the Home. Service speeds of 100:20 Mbps, 200:20 Mbps, 300:30Mbps, 500:30 Mbps, and 1 Gbps:50 Mbps will be available. Customers needing additional service capacity will have dedicated options of up to 10:10 Gbps using Active Ethernet. SkyRider has engineered their systems to have 2-3 distribution nodes per parish.

Explain the scalability of the broadband infrastructure to be deployed to meet future bandwidth needs.

SkyRider's initial deployment will be based on GPON technology with the option and ability to be overlaid with XGSPON and NGPON. SkyRider is also allocating strands to extend the network to reach more customers in the near future. If the customer needs additional capacity, SkyRider networks are designed to provide speeds up to 1 Gbps. For future scalability, electronics can be changed out (at no cost to the customer) to provide speeds up to 10 Gbps.

Provide a proposed construction timeline and duration of the deployment project period. The deployment project period is the time from award of the grant agreement to the time that service is available to the targeted prospective broadband recipients under the grant. Describe estimated timeline, deployment roll-out and number of end-users to be served in each phase (10 percent, 35 percent, 60 percent, 85 percent, 100 percent).

SkyRider intends to contract the bulk of the new infrastructure placement with Etheridge Pipeline & Conduit (EPC). Based in West Monroe, LA, EPC is certified by the Hudson Initiative. SkyRider, along with our contractors, have a total estimated construction timeline of approximately 3.7 months to complete the proposed project, if supplies can be received in a timely manner. The first customers should start receiving service in two months. The deployment project period is as follows: 10% .3 months 28 active 35% 1.2 months 100 active 60% 2.2 months 171 active 85% 3.1 months 242 active 100% 3.7 months 285 active Active customers are based on a 50% uptake rate of identified unserved customers (570) in all proposed project service areas.

**Wired Infrastructure**

**Fixed Wireless**

## Wired Infrastructure Deployment Reporting Requirements

Describe the general design of the project and deployment plan and include the following:

- Explanation of the existing networks and equipment to be used for the project. If assets are owned by another entity, explain how they will be used for this project and, if applicable, provide a copy of the agreement between the applicant and the owner.
- Total number of miles of project infrastructure deployment, and the number of miles of project infrastructure deployment accounted for by preexisting infrastructure
- Detailed explanation of how the new or upgraded infrastructure will serve the prospective broadband recipients. In the case of the installation or upgrade of a specific site infrastructure, such as a point of presence or fiber hut (fiber), pedestal (cable), or a remote exchange/DSLAM (DSL), the applicant must include:
  - The number of prospective broadband recipients that will be served by that site infrastructure
  - The distance from the specific site infrastructure such as a POP, pedestal, or DSLAM to the end user(s) and the expected broadband speed that will be effectively delivered
- Detailed description of the design work needed for deployment, such as, but not limited to,

pole work, acquiring or updating easements, and/or property acquisition.

The proposed new fiber network in Caldwell Parish will be connected to SkyRider's existing 10 Gbps fiber transport to SkyRider's facilities at 201 Hall Street, Monroe LA at the head end. At that facility SkyRider connects to ATT, Conterra, Lumen, Uniti and Windstream. SkyRider has redundant Internet connectivity. As a backup SkyRider also has fiber connectivity with Uniti Fiber from Columbia to SkyRider's head-end located at 107 Circle Drive, West Monroe, LA. Each head end has battery backup and a backup generator on site. In Caldwell Parish-South, SkyRider has approximately 12 miles of existing underground fiber on or near the US Highway 165 corridor. This existing network will serve as the backbone for the transport of the proposed network expansion. SkyRider will need to build an additional 177, 503 feet (33.61 miles) of fiber to service 412 potential unserved customers. The average distance between unserved customers is 431 feet (0.08 miles). Of these 412 potential customers, seven are businesses. The estimated construction time is 1.9 months. SkyRider will be using Adtran equipment for their electronics. Adtran was chosen because, although state of the art, they are a proven US based manufacturer and have the specced equipment available. This will be a GPON network designed to provide speeds up to 1 Gbps, if the customer needs additional capacity. For future scalability, electronics can be changed out (at no cost to the customer) to provide speeds up to 10 Gbps. The network has been engineered with a maximum distance of 13 miles from the Point of Presence (PoP) (Distribution Node) to the customer locations. At these distances, SkyRider will be able to guarantee every customer receives maximum offered bandwidths. In Caldwell Parish-North, SkyRider currently has multiple RF Microwave Links and are actively deploying wireless connectivity solutions throughout the service area. While SkyRider does not have existing fiber infrastructure in the proposed service area, SkyRider will be leveraging assets from partner companies for transport into the area that will connect to our existing network on the South side of the Ouachita River. SkyRider is in negotiations with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development to install a bridge attachment on the Hwy 165 bridge. SkyRider is also negotiating with Entergy for an alternative aerial crossing North of the Hwy 165 bridge. SkyRider intends on placing 167,087 feet (31.65 miles) of fiber to service 158 potential unserved customers. The average distance between unserved customers is 1058 feet (0.20 miles). Of these 158 potential customers, fourteen are businesses. The estimated construction time is 1.8 months. Adtran equipment will be utilized for the electronics. This will be a GPON network designed to provide speeds up to 1 Gbps, if the customer needs additional capacity. For future scalability, electronics can be changed out (at no cost to the customer) to provide speeds up to 10 Gbps. The network has been engineered with a maximum distance of 13 miles from the Point of Presence (PoP) (Distribution Node) to the customer locations. At these distances, SkyRider will be able to guarantee every customer receives maximum offered bandwidths. SkyRider has identified locations for network nodes and expects property acquisitions/leases agreements to require no more than 3 months to have in place. Most of the technical engineering has been completed. SkyRider is waiting on approval to start requesting permits and easements to begin installation. Once awarded, SkyRider will move into final engineering with their in-house design team. SkyRider's outside plant engineer will require approximately 30 days to complete the drawings required for the permitting process. Once railroad crossings are identified, applications will be made with a turnaround time of approximately 45 days. State highway permits will be submitted with an anticipated turnaround time of 14 days. Regarding business continuity and disaster recovery, SkyRider is accustomed to managing mission critical infrastructure. All SkyRider circuits are monitored 24/7 with automated alert features. SkyRider's goal is to know there is a problem before the customer does. SkyRider has weathered multiple hurricanes, snowstorms, ice storms, tornados and straight line winds. SkyRider has learned the big difference maker in a catastrophe is redundant connectivity. This understanding is why all SkyRider networks are designed with redundancy from the start. So whenever possible, SkyRider has two ways in and out to a market. SkyRider's network will be underground which also greatly benefits resiliency. SkyRider's fiber network is listed with Louisiana One Call. In most cases, SkyRider's fiber lines are listed with USIC, which is a large company that does line locates when someone places a ticket with Louisiana One Call. Contractors are used where possible, but, in the case of an emergency and a contractor is unavailable, SkyRider's in-house crews are available for network recovery.

## **Wired Assets**

Existing Network	Existing Equipment	New/Upgraded Infrastructure	Installation Type	Num of Recipients	Avg Distance in Miles Between Prospective Recipients	Expected Speed
Caldwell Parish - South	Fiber		wired, underground	6	0.000	10 Gbps
Caldwell Parish - North	Fiber		Wired, underground	0	0.000	

## Budget

### Budget

The project budget should reflect all eligible project costs to be funded through the GUMBO Grant Program. Additionally, the project budget should include the minimum provider funding match of at least 20%, any local government funding match from a parish, municipality, and/or school board, or any instrumentality thereof, and the requested GUMBO Grant Program funding.

SkyRider's total project budget is \$3,827,603.45, which includes a \$765,520.69 (or 20%) cash match from the provider. The total funding request from the GUMBO Grant Program is \$3,062,082.76. The total project budget is also broken down into two subregions as follows: Caldwell Parish - North: \$1,783,081.15 Electronics - \$126,191 Fiber - \$174,857.20 Labor - \$1,276,667.35 Permitting/Installation/Design - Do not expect any permitting fees. Installation and design will be done in house. Land/Civil - Private funds will be utilized if lots are purchased to house equipment. Additional Materials (Pedestals, Drop Cable, Splitters, Conduit, and Handholes) - \$188,725.60 Caldwell Parish - South: \$2,044,522.30 Electronics - \$130,861 Fiber - \$185,756.20 Labor - \$1,432,753.30 Permitting/Installation/Design - Do not expect any permitting fees. Installation and design will be done in house. Land/Civil - Private funds will be utilized if lots are purchased to house equipment. Additional Materials (Pedestals, Drop Cable, Splitters, Conduit, and Handholes) - \$278,511.80 SkyRider has also allocated \$65,560 for additional IPV public IP addresses. SkyRider's funding request through the GUMBO Grant Program is to cover the cost of fiber installation including underground duct placement with handholds, marker poles, grounding, pedestals, and splicing as well as placing fiber in the conduit, splitters, and electronics to light the fiber. SkyRider will build underground fiber to all available households with no connection fee charged to the customer, with an assumption of 50% uptake rate of identified unserved customers in all proposed project service areas. Additionally, SkyRider will place electronics in customer homes at no additional fee which will enable the company to provide fiber-to-the-home services to the project service area. SkyRider has developed a business model to pay for all operating and billing, payroll, network system maintenance, and transport costs using monthly revenue from telecommunications service offerings. Additional information regarding the total project budget and eligible costs is detailed in the attachment titled "Budget / Financial Model - Caldwell Parish".

### Proof of Funding Availability

Provide a signed letter of funding availability from each source of funds committed for the project. If loan or other grant funds are pledged, a loan/grant commitment letter from each source of funds must be included. Should an applicant be an awardee of Universal Service, Connect American Phase II, Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, or other federal or non-federal funds for the deployment of broadband service, the applicant shall attest as to whether or not the applicant's GUMBO application and associated project's buildout is dependent upon such awarded funds.

In December 2021, Homeland Federal Savings Bank of West Monroe, Louisiana executed a loan agreement with SkyRider Communications LLC dba ArkLaNet in the amount of \$2,000,000. SkyRider has committed these funds towards its cash match for the GUMBO Grant Program. The letter of commitment from Homeland Bank is in the attachment titled "Letter of Commitment - Homeland Bank".