ATTACHMENT C: Project Narrative

Overview: The City of Safford, population 10,129 per the 2020 US Census, is located in Graham County and is the county seat. Safford boasts a historic downtown that hosts over 12 community events and parades each year. Tourism is an important revenue source for the city. Safford has an active Downtown Association who have implemented many improvements in downtown Safford and are very supportive of this request (please see attached letter of support).

Per the 2020 Census, just over 20% of the population of Safford is below the poverty level with a median household income of $50,255. The Safford School District qualifies as a Title 1, meaning the schools have a high percentage of low-income students. The demographics of Safford are 48.7% White, 47% Hispanic, and 3.4% Black.

The Census shows 75.6% of the population has broadband Internet and 89.4% have a computer. **This means an estimated 2,471 Safford residents do not have broadband.** The Safford City – Graham County library has over 115 unduplicated people a day visit the library to access the Internet, further illustrating the need for broadband in Safford.

This request would allow Safford to offer free broadband internet access to everyone in downtown Safford and at all Safford public parks, **improving access to broadband for an estimated 2,000 unduplicated residents.**

1. *Project Description and Timeline*

Safford is applying under the ABDG-Rural priority area and meets all eligibility requirements.

As requested, a detailed description of the infrastructure improvements for which funding will support follows:

- **The nature of the improvements**

This request will install fiber optic cable, access points and other equipment required to provide broadband Internet in downtown Safford and at all Safford public parks including Glen Meadows, Firth, La Tierra, and El Paso Park (to be developed). Safford is collaborating with Valley Telecom Group, the local provider, for this project. Valley Telecom has provided quotes for the project and is working closely with Safford for the project's development.

- **How the proposed project addresses the broadband needs of the area(s) that it serves**

The proposed project will address the broadband needs of low-income residents in Safford as well as support businesses in downtown Safford by offering Internet access at no cost. Residents and visitors will be able to access the Internet in downtown Safford and all Safford public parks. Based on those currently accessing the library Internet, the number of low-income residents in Safford, and visitors to Downtown Safford, we estimate this project will increase access to the Internet for at least 6,000 unduplicated households, and of those, 2,000 will be low-income residents of Safford.

Currently there are 117 businesses in downtown Safford, with 780 employees in the downtown area alone. The number and type of businesses in Downtown Safford that will benefit include: the Main Street Café, Kempton Auto Body, Gila Valley Made, Trendz salon, Remax Realty, Trophies and Tees, Graham County Rehabilitation Thrift Store, and Genevive's, Rustic Lace salon. Anchor institutions supported are the City of Safford City Hall, the Graham County Health Department administration, and Caring Connections mental health services.

- **Number of community anchor institutions served –** Three
- **Number of households served –** 6,000 (estimated)
- **Number of businesses served -** 117
- **Total population served:** The proposed improvements will benefit residents of Safford, Thatcher, and rural Graham County, as populations from all these areas regularly visit downtown Safford and enjoy the many parades and events hosted each year. The 2020 US Census shows the total population of Graham County (which includes Safford and Thatcher) is 38,533.
- **The anticipated economic development benefit achieved by construction of such improvements**

The positive economic impact of this project for Safford will be supported by free access to the Internet in the entire downtown area. A post by ADIPSYS "Benefits of free public Wi-Fi for businesses found: 65% of restaurants stated free access increased their sales, and 64% of consumers choose a restaurant if they do not have to pay for connection, according to studies by Accenture and Better Ad Network. Offering free access is perceived by your customers as an invitation and even a guarantee of quality, especially if the service is efficient and Wi-Fi is performant enough (which means a good browsing speed). Another asset to consider is that free Wi-Fi helps with engagement, which is essential to build a customer base. By facilitating access to your services, you encourage that engagement. One of the most interesting benefits of free Wi-Fi is that it encourages visitors to stay longer in your establishment, which means they will take longer to discover and enjoy your products and services. Additionally, a Wi-Fi portal will allow you to redirect Internet users to a rating system (such as Google reviews or websites like Yelp). It is ideal for gaining visibility quickly on the web and in your city. You can automate the collection of reviews that way without having to send a separate request for testimonies. To summarize, offering free Wi-Fi is like opening a door for new customers and allowing them to discover you with pleasure and ease. It is also an opportunity to engage them immediately and use that momentum to grow your business.[1]

Safford hosts an average of 12 community events and parades annually and has already received applications to host 13 events during 2022 in downtown Safford. These are an important draw for tourists to our city and support the many businesses downtown. As many as 5,000 people attend each parade.

[1] https://www.adipsys.com/en/benefits-of-free-public-wifi/

The Southeast Arizona Economic Development Group shows the following data: In 2020, visits to Roper Lake State Park in Graham County were up 21.7%. According to research by Dean Runyan Associates for Arizona Office of Tourism, Graham and Greenlee County's combined travel industry (including business and leisure travel) generated [redacted] in direct spending in 2020, down 43% from 2019. Graham and Greenlee County's travel industry supported 822 jobs (down 19.1%) between the two counties with earnings of [redacted] according to the study.[2]

Offering free Internet during Safford parades and events will be another way to bring tourists into Safford and recover from the negative impacts of the pandemic. We anticipate all 117 businesses in Downtown Safford will benefit from being able to offer free Internet at their businesses.

- **Total miles of fiber to be installed** -16,000 feet or 3.03 miles
- **Location of new fiber -** Underground
- **Stated commitment to operate and maintain the network for a minimum of five (5) years upon completion of the improvements**

The City of Safford is committed to provide increased Internet access to our residents and visitors and commits to operating and maintaining the network for a minimum of five years upon completion of the proposed project.

- **The party or parties that will perform the infrastructure construction –** Valley Telecom Group
- **The intended uses of the ABDG Rural/Urban funds in respect to the construction or planning**

Safford is working closely with Valley Telecom Group for the proposed project and has obtained quotes (see attached) for all costs as follows:

Broadband Downtown:

[redacted]

Fiber Optic cable install:

[redacted]

[2] https://saeconomics.com/graham-county#6a68b430-cdeb-4589-91d1-17f6139701ea

[redacted]

- **The specific information required under Section 1.4 (to the extent relevant)**

The proposed project in Safford supports ABDG Rural priority area and will support Section 1.4 by a) Providing broadband to an un- and/or underserved area (Safford downtown and public parks); and b) Increase speeds to 100/100 at no cost to those visiting Safford public parks and downtown.

- **A timeline for completion of the infrastructure improvements**

The proposed project is "shovel ready" and will proceed as soon as contracting is complete for Arizona Commerce Broadband award. The water line modifications Safford will be completing will dig trenches that can be used for the fiber optic installation, reducing costs. Safford employees are working closely with the Downtown Alliance and do not anticipate any issues with permissions required to install access points at several locations throughout downtown.

Fiber optic conduit installation will begin by March 2022, the cable will be installed in August, with estimated completion by November 2022, providing free broadband at the existing Safford public parks.

Downtown broadband access installation will begin by August 2022, with completion by April 2023, providing broadband access to all businesses and visitors to downtown Safford.

Whenever possible the projects will be completed sooner, however the ongoing supply chain issues may result in a longer completion timeframe. This timeline will complete both projects in 12 months, well below the required 24-month timeframe for the Arizona Broadband Development grant. Please see the attached Gantt chart for additional detail.

The description should also describe the amount of the cash "match" contribution to be provided, including:

- The timing of such match – The required cash match will be provided by the City of Safford and will be available after July 1, 2022 (next fiscal year).
- The intended uses of the match – To be used for the [redacted] Valley Telecom labor costs for the Downtown Safford installation of access points and other equipment.
- The commitment is in writing and binding in all circumstances – Please see attached letter of commitment from Safford City Manager.

[redacted]

[redacted]

The City of Safford has the staff to properly implement and manage the proposed project in a timely manner. The City has four well-qualified staff in the finance department who, in 2020, received recognition for excellence in financial reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association. Sam Napier, Safford Technology Officer, has over 20 years' experience in his position. See his resume in the attachments for his qualifications.

This section must also explain the circumstances as to why, in the absence of ABDG-Rural/Urban funding, the proposed project would not proceed within the same time frame or would not otherwise be as effective in advancing the objectives of the Program.
As a rural city, the revenue Safford is able to generate is limited. The negative economic impacts of the pandemic and reduction in tourism have further reduced revenue. Safford is contributing both cash and in-kind to the project and is committed to improving Internet access for our residents and visitors. However, without the ABDG Rural funds the project implementation would be significantly delayed.

2. *Project Description and Timeline – Development*

Include a detailed description of **relevant future development** that is intended to be benefited by the proposed infrastructure improvements, including, as applicable, a Gantt chart timeline for such development.

Future development - This request will support El Paso Park, to be developed by the City of Safford. Broadband access will be provided at no cost at the new park, benefitting local residents who do not have Internet access.

The fiber optic installation will be included in current water line projects, replacing old water lines throughout Safford. The trenches dug for the water line will be used for the fiber optic cable, reducing costs for the fiber optic cable installation. Please see attached Gantt chart for the timeline.

- **The nature and scope of the project**: El Paso Park is being built, and Internet access will be included, to benefit all Safford residents.
- **Type of technology to be utilized** – Fiber optic cable for broadband.
- **Type of construction to be undertaken** - Underground
- **Qualifications of the vendors/contractors** – Valley Telecom will complete the installation, they are well-qualified and the local provider, and have served this area since 2005, or 17 years. Please see attached company information for more detail.
- **Engineering analysis** – This has been completed as part of larger Safford improvements, including the water line replacement and the creation of El Paso Park. Additionally, Valley Telecom engineers have created an engineering layout for downtown access points.

- **Project approach and background** – The water line improvements and creation of El Paso Park are both in process, the park plan has been completed. The water lines are being replaced to allow for reclaimed water use at the Safford public parks. El Paso Park will include a playground, dog park and a basketball court. The City and other funders are supporting the El Paso Park project, with construction beginning on the Park in August 2022 and completion of the entire park anticipated by October 2023 or sooner.
- **Population to be served** – All Safford residents and visitors, estimated 15,000 people.
- **Number of households served** – Estimate 15,000
- **Number of anchor institutions served** - NA
- **Number of businesses served** – NA
- **Ways in which the project will improve redundancy and reliability**, if any – NA

3. *Other Project Outcomes* (optional)

The proposed project will add broadband Internet access to all of Downtown Safford, benefitting 117 businesses and three anchor institutions. It will support economic benefit for businesses and enhance the visitor experience for those visiting Downtown Safford. Safford events are very popular, with an average of 5,000 attendees at each event or parade.

The project will also add over three miles of fiber optic cable, allowing for free broadband Internet access at all Safford public parks, benefiting all 10,129 Safford residents, including an estimated 2,000 low-income residents who do not currently have Internet access.

The Safford project supports the Arizona Broadband Development Grant priorities to accelerate broadband infrastructure, strengthening economic growth and economic conditions in rural Arizona. The proposed project will be able to be quickly implemented and will provide a big impact for this rural city at a low cost.

Historic Downtown Safford

Type	Project	Applicant	GEOID
Rural	City of Safford improved access to b	Safford & Valley Telecom	04009961300
Rural	City of Safford improved access to b	Safford & Valley Telecom	04009961400