



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Botetourt County
Program Title: BOCO & Lumos - A Public/Private Broadband Partnership
Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Tiffany Bradbury
Title: Director of Communications
Department: Communications
Telephone: (540)293-1251 Website: www.botetourtva.gov
Email: TBradbury@botetourtva.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Gary Larrowe
Title: County Administrator
Signature: *Gary Larrowe*



Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Awards Application 2023 Botetourt County Invites Residents on the Broadband Journey with Lumos

Executive Summary:

Botetourt County is a rural county located in southwestern Virginia. The county is 548 square miles and is home to approximately 33,500 residents. Botetourt County and Lumos are submitting a 2023 VACO Award in the category of Customer Service for our Public/Private Partnership that is making Universal Broadband Coverage for our residents, businesses, and visitors a reality.

Throughout the process, stakeholder engagement and customer service have been a major focus.

In 2017, Botetourt leadership identified a need for improved broadband connectivity for communities throughout the County. We commissioned a local third-party survey to examine the issue in greater detail. The study found that about 70% of homes in Botetourt had high-speed broadband access, leaving 30% of our homes without coverage. The county continued to work on providing broadband access over the next few years and then the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, which showed the country that access to virtual learning, telework, telemedicine, and telehealth was imperative. Reliable internet coverage wasn't just a luxury anymore but a true necessity just like electricity or water.

Botetourt County teamed up with Lumos to secure grant funding from the Virginia

Telecommunications Initiative grants to provide this service to our community. Universal

broadband coverage means that all residents and businesses have access to reliable internet

service with speeds that meet or exceed the federal definition of 25/3 service. Our latest grant



with Lumos (2022) will allow delivery of Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) broadband connectivity to the remaining 1,901 addresses in Botetourt County. Lumos is also planning additional expansion projects targeting universal fiber coverage in the area. Botetourt County received \$3,084,796 in VATI grant funding. The estimated total project cost for the final VATI project will be approximately \$7.9 million. The \$3,084,796 in VATI grant funding will be matched with approximately \$4,824,937 from Botetourt County and Lumos, of which \$2,602,514 will be from Botetourt recovery act funds. This VATI grant follows two previous successful projects and a Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development-funded CARES expansion project in Botetourt serving a total of approximately 1,500 addresses and culminates the County's and Lumos' work to deliver broadband connectivity to every residence and business.

Background and Program:

In 2017, Botetourt County leadership identified a need for improved broadband connectivity for communities throughout the County. They commissioned a local third-party citizen and business survey to examine the issue in greater detail. The study found that about 70% of homes in Botetourt had high-speed broadband access.

To act on the findings of this report, Botetourt County formed a Citizens Broadband Advisory Board. Led by the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, Dr. Mac Scothorn, and appointed by the Board, the Broadband Commission was the first such commission in the Roanoke Valley to bring together local government leaders and interested citizens together to tackle broadband



deployment in a locality. Comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds, Botetourt County has used this commission to commit to study, track, prioritize, and take continuous action on local broadband challenges.

One of their first strategic actions was to plan an in-person Botetourt Broadband Summit. The event was held in September 2018 and allowed the community to host subject matter experts from across the country. The goal was to envision solutions to help Botetourt address the local connectivity challenges and the unique geographic and topographic obstacles that stand between the current status and reliable, affordable, high-speed access for every local resident and business.

While Botetourt County does not directly build or operate telecommunications infrastructure, the local government has prioritized this issue and allocated significant resources and staff time to this issue. County staff and the citizen advisory board worked closely with existing service providers like Lumos as well as recruiting new internet service providers to the area. Local leaders continue to track and incentivize development in areas that need coverage the most.

In 2019, the county commissioned a strategic plan focused on improving internet access, speed, and reliability county-wide. This report has helped guide strategic decisions, grant applications, and county efforts ever since.



As the modern landscape continued to shift, and the 2020 pandemic forced citizens to rely on at-home learning, remote work arrangements, telemedicine, and more, equal access to reliable, high-speed internet became even more imperative.

Working together with private industry and public-private organizations, the county took a number of significant steps to advance connectivity. Working together, the community and our internet providers, like Lumos, have made great strides and have been widely recognized for our data-driven approach to addressing one of the largest rural challenges of our time. Botetourt County officials aren't sitting back waiting for solutions; we worked hard to bring technological advancements to the residents of Botetourt County as quickly as possible.

The County leveraged approximately \$3 million in federal CARES Act funding to help deploy broadband to the community, and county leaders and the Broadband Commission engaged state and federal officials in order to determine the best approach to using this money in a meaningful way for broadband deployment.

The County saw big strides when teaming up with LUMOS for VATI Grants. In January 2021, Governor Northam announced that Botetourt County and Lumos Networks were the recipients of another local VATI Grant from Virginia's Department of House and Community Development. The competitive grant provided \$1,364,337 for building a 59-mile fiber broadband network service extension to 548 unserved addresses including 30 businesses east of the Town of Fincastle and



west/southwest of the Town of Buchanan including the Lithia, Springwood, and Wheatland communities of Botetourt County.

In June of 2022, the County provided partial matching funds to support the project and helped ensure some of the least connected areas of the County would start having access to broadband. The VATI2 project with Lumos is slated to wrap in the Spring of 2024.

Botetourt County and Lumos Fiber also took a proactive approach by launching a community engagement initiative. The county has been documenting our broadband journey by developing a webpage (www.botetourtva.gov/broadband) as well as producing an infographic video to educate the public about the complexity when it comes to installing fiber. In April 2023, the county and Lumos Fiber also welcomed Senator Mark Warner along with other elected officials, community partners, and stakeholders to kick off the VATI2 project. You can check out all of our broadband journey videos on our [YouTube channel](#).

Persons and Organizations Involved:

In 2017, Botetourt County leadership identified a need for improved broadband connectivity for communities throughout the County. They commissioned a local third-party citizen and business survey to examine the issue in greater detail. The study found that about 70% of homes in Botetourt had high-speed broadband access. Botetourt County then formed a Citizens Broadband Advisory Board to help steer the project in our community. Throughout the process of achieving



universal broadband coverage in the community, Botetourt County also worked with local internet service providers. The largest partnership was with Lumos Fiber and the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Department of Housing and Community Development on the VATI1 and VATI2 grants. Both of these grants are allowing the county to achieve universal broadband coverage by the Spring of 2024. The county also had a very engaged Board of Supervisors and county administration to help steer the project.

Expected Outcomes and Results:

Because of the public/private partnership between Botetourt County and Lumos Fiber, our residents, businesses and visitors will have access to universal broadband coverage by the Spring of 2024. This necessary utility will allow our community to work from home, utilize telehealth and telemedicine services and have access to virtual education opportunities. This necessary utility will change the lives of our community members.

The County and Lumos take a personal approach in responding to citizen inquiries and questions. In the last year, more than 70 inquiries have been personally answered. "I got so excited to hear these words," said one resident. Lumos and Botetourt County realize we are changing people's lives with our work and we value the input we regularly receive from stakeholders.

Beneficiaries of the Program:

Reliable internet coverage is an essential utility, and our community is reaping the benefits of

COUNTY ADMINISTRATION
botetourtva.gov

57 S. Center Drive, Suite 200
Daleville, VA 24083

P: (540) 928-2006
F: (540) 473-8225



having universal broadband coverage. Lumos has been a partner in Botetourt County for over 100 years and over the last seven years, our relationship has blossomed, benefitting our community.

Hear more from Lumos about the partnership by [clicking here](#).

We were even able to capture stories from our community about how having broadband has changed their lives.

[Michelle's Story](#) [Candace's Story](#)

Botetourt County and Lumos have also been able to share some information about the public/private partnership with our community during Senator Warner's visit to the county in April 2023. That is when we kicked off the VATI2 Broadband project. Hear how this partnership is changing lives by [clicking here](#). You can also hear what Senator Mark Warner and Dr. Tamarah Holmes have to say about the project and how it will benefit our communities [here](#). Also, Delegate Terry Austin and County Administrator Gary Larrowe [tell how this public/private broadband project is changing lives](#). By the Spring of 2024, our county will have achieved universal broadband coverage.

Replication:

It is imperative for communities to partner with state organizations and local internet providers like Lumos Fiber when embarking on a project like this. The Commonwealth of Virginia has earmarked VATI grant funding to make universal broadband a reality across the entire state. According to the

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Governor's office, Virginia will be one of the first states to achieve universal broadband coverage by the Spring of 2024. Find out more about our Botetourt County Broadband Journey and our timeline by [clicking here](#).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Botetourt County is so fortunate and pleased to have been able to partner with Lumos Fiber to make universal broadband coverage a reality in our community. Lumos Fiber has gone above and beyond to keep our citizens informed and to make sure that this necessary utility is in place for our community to benefit from. We are looking forward to having a BIG celebration next year when the project is complete! Follow our Botetourt Broadband journey at www.botetourtva.gov/broadband and check out our [YouTube Playlist](#) to learn more.