



**INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
&  
COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION  
BROADBAND**

**BE-CAT3 GRANT PROGRAM**

## 1.0 Introduction

Beaufort County Government has been working to bring high-speed internet to rural areas but has faced challenges due to geography, topography, and rural distance. Since 2020, County staff, with support from County Council and the State of South Carolina, have dedicated resources to bring access to high-speed internet to previously unserved areas. Beaufort County has identified defined three categories of unserved areas in Beaufort County:

- **CATEGORY 1** – no existing broadband infrastructure in the area.
- **CATEGORY 2** – “unserved pockets” in areas where broadband infrastructure exists but has not been extended due to area not meeting cable provider’s density requirements
- **CATEGORY 3** – long driveways or private roads where the cost of extending to the home is a barrier for service.

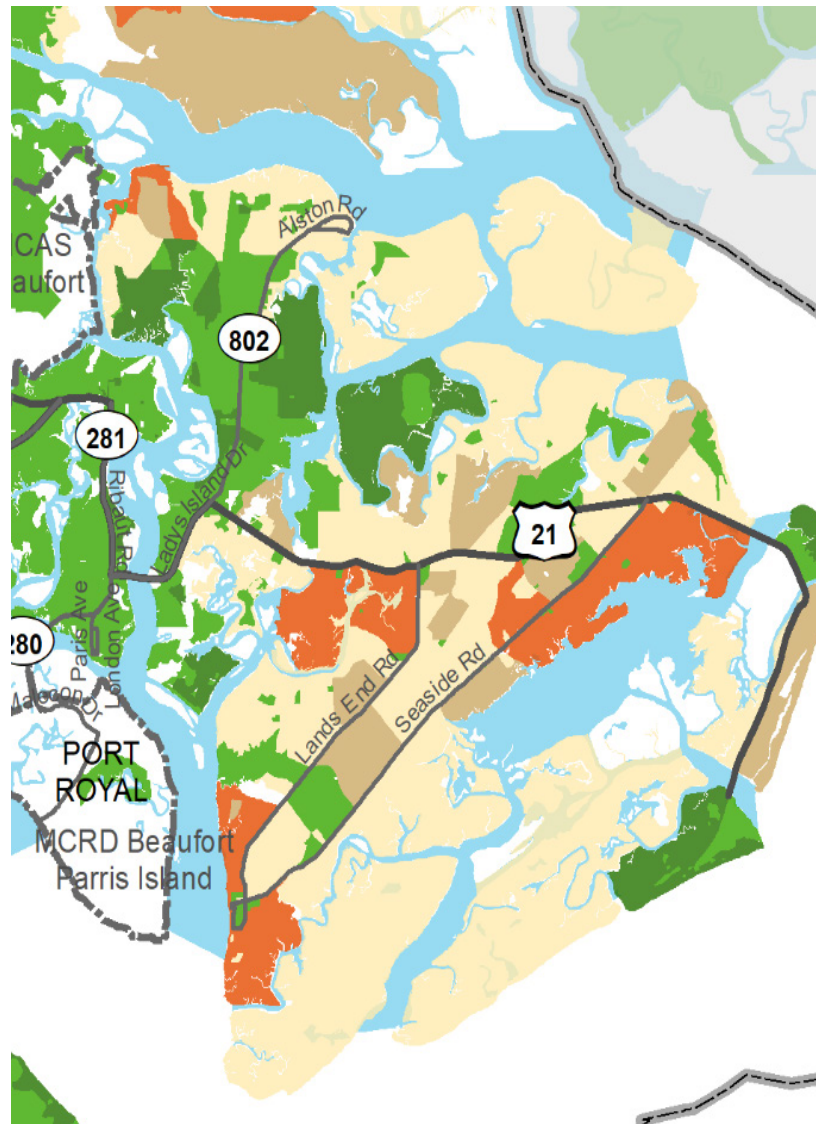
Beaufort County took several actions to help providers address the needs related to CATEGORY 1 and 2. They collaborated with local ISPs, contacted the SC Office of Regulatory Staff (ORS), and wrote letters of support for ISP grant applications. Additionally, Beaufort County added the ORS ‘I Need Internet’ and ‘I Need Better Internet’ web page links on the Beaufort County official website, which allowed citizens to report their broadband needs to the state, and issued awareness press releases. Some examples of the work done are shown below.

- In 2020 Hargray received 700K to build out areas in Beaufort County.  
[Lady’s Island, Cane Gibbs \(PDF\)](#)  
[Lady’s Island, Coosaw \(PDF\)](#)  
[Okatie, Hwy 170 \(PDF\)](#)  
[Port Royal, St. Helena Island \(PDF\)](#)

Additional provider funded builds:

Seashell Dr (Saint Helena)  
Ashton Dr (Saint Helena)  
Bufflehead Ln (Bluffton)  
Lost Oaks Dr (Bluffton)  
Old Haig Point Rd (Daufuskie)  
Seabrook

- In 2021 Hargray received 131,098.00 towards broadband build-outs in Beaufort County. ([link](#))
- Grant support letters:  
[USDA GRANT \(Hargray\)](#)  
[SFRF GRANT \(PRTC\)](#)  
[SFRF GRANT \(Comcast\)](#)



2023 Broadband Coverage Areas of need from SC ORS.

In 2023, South Carolina changed their maps to finally show an accurate depiction of the areas of need in Beaufort County.

In an effort to address CATEGORY 3 needs, the County has developed a local grant program, BE-CAT3. The County's BE-CAT3 Grant Program, has been developed to address the Category 3 properties identified above. Funding the broadband construction to homes that have long driveways or connected to private roads is a unique opportunity for residents of the county. Funding will come from [ARPA SLFRF](#) funds. The County will closely monitor the program and may need to make changes or updates to the requirements documented within the program. The County reserves the right to update the dates, funding, criteria, and any other item within this document due to the unique nature of the program.

## 2.0 Definitions

**BROADBAND** refers to high-speed internet with a download speed of at least 25 megabits per second (Mbps) and an upload speed of at least 3 Mbps, according to the Federal Communications Commission's definition.

**SERVICE DROP** is the final stage of fiber/cable installation, typically along a driveway or a private road, which connects the home to the network. The ISP determines the appropriate construction method and route for the Service Drop, and residents are not allowed to choose the method or route of installation.

**INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER (ISP)** is a company that provides access to the internet. In Beaufort County, there are three ISPs: Comcast Xfinity, Brightspeed/Centurylink, and CableOne/Hargray.

**BE-CAT3** - Broadband Everywhere: Category 3 Grant Program aims to provide broadband internet access to areas that lack it.

## 3.0 Program Guidelines

The Beaufort County Government has established the private road/long driveway - Category 3 Grant Program (BE-CAT3) to provide financial assistance to Category 3 residents. The program aims to fund the construction of a Service Drop, which will connect a home at the end of a long, private driveway or private road to the existing broadband network that runs along a primary road.

To be eligible for BE-CAT3 funding, residents must lack access to broadband service, and their service location must not have existing high-speed internet service from one of the County's current ISPs, including but not limited to: PRTC, Comcast Xfinity, Brightspeed/Centurylink, Spectrum, and CableOne/Hargray.

Moreover, to be eligible for BE-CAT3, an ISP must have a network that runs on the primary road to which the private road or long driveway connects. The ISP must also be able to provide service to the location and be willing to partner with the County on this initiative. The resident must be willing to sign up for service once the connection is established.



Funding awarded through BE-CAT3 will be based on several factors, including the ISP's ability to provide service, the length of the private road or long driveway, and the cost estimate for the Service Drop. Any Service Drops funded through BE-CAT3 must be completed on or before December 30, 2024.

The BE-CAT3 program will expire on December 30, 2024 or when funding dedicated to the program has been depleted.



### **3.1 HERE ARE THE STEPS TO OBTAIN BE-CAT3 FUNDING:**

1) Residents must apply for BE-Cat3 on the Beaufort County Government website ([www.BeaufortCountySC.gov](http://www.BeaufortCountySC.gov) - [link](#))

2) The County will forward the resident's information to the appropriate ISP(s).

3) The ISP will contact the County to verify that:

a. Their network infrastructure passes within a reasonable distance to the resident's home.

b. A Service Drop and build-out can be constructed to the resident's home.

c. Provide a cost estimate for the construction. Note that ISPs are private, independent, and for-profit companies. The County has no input or control over the quotes provided by the ISPs.

4) Once the County and the ISP have determined that all the criteria in step 3 have been met, the resident will work directly with the ISP to install the necessary infrastructure to provide broadband. Each ISP has a unique process to obtain service utilizing BE-CAT3, and the resident will need to work directly with the ISP to obtain service.

5) The resident will pay their portion of the cost directly to the ISP, and the ISP will bill the County for its portion of the cost.

6) The maximum amount the County will contribute for any Service Drop is \$15,000.

The resident is responsible for paying the remaining balance of the service drop charge. The resident's contribution will be due based on the ISP's unique billing procedures and terms and conditions.

### **3.2 BE-CAT3 FUNDING FORMULA**

1) The County's funded amount cannot exceed the total cost of the Service Drop.

2) The County will pay 90% of the cost of the Service Drop. The County's 90% portion cannot exceed \$15,000.

3) The resident is responsible for paying 10% of the cost of the service drop.

### **3.3 SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND EXCEPTIONS**

1) In order for the ISP to install the Service Drop, the resident may need to grant an easement that allows the ISP to use a portion of their land for construction or maintenance purposes. It's important to note that the homeowner

### **3.4 GRANT APPLICATIONS**

- 1) Grant applications will be selected by the BE-CAT3 grant award committee.
- 2) The BE-CAT3 grant program will cease when allocated funding has been depleted.
- 3) Grant application awards will be based on a number of criteria, such as build out feasibility, surrounding area impact, and provider future expansion.

**For questions about the BE-CAT3 program, please email [information.technology@beaufortcountysc.gov](mailto:information.technology@beaufortcountysc.gov)**