



# Broadband Q & A

There are currently grant funding opportunities to expand rural broadband access both through the state of Washington and Federally. Okanogan County Electric Cooperative (OCEC) is studying a potential investment into new fiber optic infrastructure to provide high-speed (starting at 100mb download and 100mb upload) fiber broadband network in our electric service territory. As part of this study OCEC is sending an electronic survey to our member-owners covering various internetservice-related topics specific to our electric service territory.

## **1. Why is OCEC asking members to respond to a survey?**

a. OCEC is a member-owned not for profit electric cooperative driven by the seven cooperative principles and owned by those we serve. From time-to-time, OCEC has utilized member surveys to get direct feedback from our member-owners on important topics. For example, prior to developing Okanogan County Energy, Inc. (OCEI), our propane subsidiary, we surveyed the member-owners to ensure entry into that business was supported and, more importantly, is needed and of value to you. We are once again looking to hear our memberowner's voices to inform us about your thoughts on building a fiber broadband network to expand fast, reliable, and affordable internet access in our electric service territory.

## **2. Is OCEC going to build a fiber broadband network?**

a. We have not decided whether or not to build a fiber broadband network. This survey's results will serve as part of a package of due diligence which, alongside a thorough business case, will help inform the OCEC board who will ultimately make that decision.

## **3. Why would OCEC consider building a new fiber broadband network?**

a. First and foremost, OCEC would consider this project based on member-owner interest. The Methow Valley Broadband Action Team, working with TwispWorks, has been studying an expansion of fiber broadband into the upper Methow Valley for a period and part of that study included some community meetings and a survey. While not exclusively focused on the OCEC service territory, there was general enthusiasm and interest in fiber broadband expansion. We are hopeful this survey will expand on that effort and provide us with focused feedback. Second, there has been recent passage of federal legislation focused on rural fiber broadband expansion into underserved areas. We understand that there is likely to be historic amounts of grant funding available for entities like OCEC to apply for and potentially offset some of the investment necessary to successfully construct a new network. With the potential for fast-moving grant application processes coming up, performing the necessary due diligence now is a prudent step towards assessing the viability for OCEC to enter this business.

## **4. If OCEC builds this network will my electric rates go up?**

a. OCEC is very sensitive to any potential rate impacts or increased business risk entry into the fiber broadband business may have on our electric member-owners. As with the entry into the propane business, the goal would be to have little to no impact on OCEC rates. The business case being developed will look at different scenarios to assess any potential electric rate impacts. In addition, the business case will study any opportunities for OCEC's operations to become more efficient with such a network as well, including advanced metering, outage management systems, and increased visibility into our distribution wires through software and communication technologies. These efficiencies may create long-term cost savings benefiting from a new fiber broadband network.

## **5. How can I stay informed on this topic?**

a. We encourage our member-owners to stay engaged on this topic (and other topics!) by reading through our newsletters, checking OCEC's website for updates and board meeting materials, or participation in OCEC board meetings which are open to our member-owners.