SCHOOLS, NONPROFITS CAN APPLY

Data center community action grants program to benefit DeKalb County

Scott Anderson file photo – sanderson@shawmedia.com An aerial view of the Facebook's DeKalb data center site shows the progress of the 500-acre project July 26 in DeKalb. Facebook's parent company, Meta, announced earlier this year that the data center expanded into three buildings, bringing with it a community investment that totals more than $1 billion.

BY MEGANN HORSTEAD MHORSTEAD@SHAWMEDIA.COM

DeKALB – Meta, the parent company of Facebook, has announced the inaugural launch of a data center community action grants program for communities in DeKalb County.

Applications will be accepted now through Oct. 21, with awards expected to be announced and disbursed in spring 2023.

The initiative provides a way for Meta to give back to communities where the company operates a data center.

Matt Sexton, community development manager for Meta, said that with the DeKalb data center expected to come on line next year, it made sense for Meta to launch the Data Center Community Action Grants program.

Schools and nonprofit groups are among those eligible to apply for the grants.

Sexton said those interested are encouraged to submit grant applications featuring projects that highlight critical community needs by putting the power of technology to use for community benefit, connect people online or off, and improve local science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

A grant review committee will be composed of DeKalb Data Center employees and tasked with judging the merits of each application.

Sexton said the grant awards will vary in value anywhere from $5,000 up to $50,000 based on the project that's pitched in the application. Generally, Meta has between 10 and 20 awards to offer in a given cycle, he said.

"Obviously, there's varying ranges of kind of impact and lives touched and different kinds of parameters that will ultimately determine individual grant's competitiveness," Sexton said. "That site team will independently and then collectively rank them all. Those, like I said, will be announced and the awards disbursed in the spring of 2023."

When asked what makes for a successful grant application, Sexton said there's a lot for eligible applicants to take into consideration.

"I think obviously when a program or a proposal can hit more than just one of the three primary criteria, that's always good," Sexton said.

"Obviously, impacting local youth makes for a really strong one with all of the schools and nonprofit groups towards different ages of youth across the county. Projects that speak to the kind of individual nature and given the vitality of the DeKalb County community. There are so many great nuances and unique flairs that make any of those communities such a great place to raise a family. That's a big part of the reason why we chose DeKalb County to build our data center."

Sexton emphasized that Meta is looking to make an annual commitment to this program in DeKalb County.

"This won't be the one time this will be in the community," he said.

"This is the first time. If awards aren't selected for any given reason this time, it would give those groups an opportunity to refine and look toward submitting next year."