

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**COMMUNITY INTERNET GRANT APPLICATION
PROCESS BEGINS JUNE 1**

LINCOLN – The first application process for the Nebraska Internet Enhancement Fund (NIEF) begins June 1, the Commission ruled as it approved plans submitted by an advisory board.

The fund, which combines seed money from the Nebraska Legislature with proceeds from governmental agencies and political subdivisions that lease dark fiber optic lines, will accept pre-applications from June 1 through August 15. By September 1, all pre-applicants will be notified whether they are eligible to submit a full application. Full applications will then be due by November 15.

The NIEF Advisory Board will then evaluate applications and make its recommendations for funding to the Commission with January 2005 being the anticipated date for announcement of the awards.

Grants will be awarded for counties and municipalities to make improvements to Internet and telecommunications services such as broadband. The Commission is required by state law to consider high-cost factors such as population scarcity and remote location. The NIEF was created by the 2001 Legislature.

Fourth District Commissioner Rod Johnson of Sutton, the Commission's representative on the NIEF Advisory Board, said, "The pre-application process is designed to help possible applicants save funds by determining whether they qualify for a grant prior to investing in writing a full grant application."

"The Commission's staff and advisory board have done a good job of laying out the parameters of the application process," Johnson said. "We're trying to help in the advancement of Internet services to everyone across the state."